

Tips for students on artifact choice and reflection

The basic process

Each year you are being asked to choose artifacts (these could be assignments completed in courses, projects that you have done on internship, op-ed pieces you've published in a local newspaper, and so on) that provide evidence for your progress towards achieving the four program outcomes Luther Seminary has identified for the MDiv program.

Some artifacts are recommended to be included in your portfolio. These are: (1) any assignments specified as "recommended for portfolio use" within a Signature course, (2) your internship final report, (3) your CPE final report, and (4) any candidacy essays that are required in your specific candidacy process.

Others are artifacts that you will choose to reflect upon as evidence of your progress towards the program outcomes. There is no set "number" of required artifacts, but rather we are asking that you choose appropriate artifacts to document your progress on each competency within the four program outcomes.

In addition to including these artifacts in your portfolio, you need to write a short reflection for each program outcome. These reflections should include at least the following:

- where the artifact came from (if a class assignment, in which class; if an artifact from a con ed site, what was the site; if some other context, name the context)
- where you stand currently in relation to specific competencies (individual elements) of the program outcomes
- how the artifact(s) you've chosen provide(s) evidence for your assertion of progress
- which competencies of a given outcome you are continuing to work on
- how you plan in the upcoming year to make progress in that outcome

Such plans may include specific courses you will take to meet degree requirements, but they may also include specific workshops, conversations, or other learning opportunities which seem appropriate.

You may choose to use artifacts such as a candidacy essay as evidence in your reflections, other artifacts that you have included from other courses or settings, or a combination of both. We urge you to choose pieces that you have already completed in other settings, so as to be as efficient as possible.

Once you have completed these reflections you will share them with your cohort mentor in a meeting in which the two of you discuss your progress and reflect upon

your future plans for learning. After that meeting you may choose to edit your reflections, and once you have finalized them they become a part of your portfolio which you submit for review.

There are three times during the MDiv degree when you are asked to submit your portfolio for a progress (or summative) review: during April of the year in which you will complete 10, 17 and 25 credits. For MA degrees there are two submission points, during April of the year in which you will complete 10 and 17 credits.

At these points you are asked to submit your portfolio in April for a progress review. These progress reviews are completed by small groups of faculty, staff and other professionals.

For the MDIV degree, after the 10 credit and 17 credit review the team will give you a “go ahead,” a caution (which requires that you meet again with your cohort mentor to discuss any challenges raised), or a “progress stop” which requires action from the academic dean prior to your continuing in the program. At the 25 credit point the review team will either mark your progress as sufficient for graduation, or ask for additional review by the academic dean and your cohort mentor.

For MA degrees, after the 10 credit review the team will give you a “go ahead,” a caution (which requires that you meet again with your cohort mentor to discuss any challenges raised), or a “progress stop” which requires action from the academic dean prior to your continuing in the program. At the 17 credit point the review team will either mark your progress as sufficient for graduation, or ask for additional review by the academic dean and your cohort mentor.

Choosing artifacts

Each year – defined here as April to April – you are asked to reflect through intentional writing upon the program outcomes for your degree. Much of this work will be done in conjunction with your cohort from the Learning Leader process, through such opportunities as cohort retreats, cohort workshop days, and other reflection moments. You can reflect on a program outcome at any point, but you must have reflected on all of them by April of each year.

Each time that you do this reflecting you should begin by considering the program outcomes self evaluation worksheet for your degree program, which includes the outcomes themselves and a sliding scale of achievement for each outcome competency. Where are you on this sheet? Is a competency completely unfamiliar to you at this point? Perhaps this is a growing edge for you, a competency that you’re clearly working on but have not yet grown comfortable with? Or perhaps you feel that you are relatively strong in this area, or even fully competent. Once you’ve marked where you think you are, brainstorm the artifacts which might document elements of this competency.

Each course that you take at Luther will have at least one assignment within it which has been designated as a “potential artifact” choice. That means that the assignment has been structured to have an explicit connection to one or more of the four program outcomes, and some subset of those outcomes’ competencies. These artifacts are a good place to begin from, but you do not need to limit yourself to them. There might be other assignments you’ve completed which document well your progress. Or perhaps there is something you have done in another setting – a sermon you’ve offered, an op-ed piece you’ve written, a letter of affirmation you’ve received from someone, and so on – which provides good evidence.

If you choose to use an assignment from a class, you can feel free to edit it following the feedback you have received from your professor. You might submit a paper, for instance, in a class, receive feedback on it, edit it accordingly, and then submit it as evidence in reflection on a program outcome.

In later years you can refer back to your previous reflections, both by way of comparison to your current progress as well as simply to note if you have already achieved certain competencies.

Writing a reflection

Your reflection on a degree program outcome needs to include the context for the artifact, where you stand currently in relation to specific elements of the program outcome, how the artifact(s) you’ve chosen provide evidence for your assertion of progress, which elements of a given outcome you are continuing to work on, and how you plan in the upcoming year to make progress in that outcome.

A reflection will typically be between 300 and 450 words.

As an example from the MDIV program, perhaps you choose a sermon that you’ve given. MDIV program outcome B -- “Graduates, together with the communities they lead, will read the Scriptures faithfully, critically, and imaginatively” -- is one outcome for which you might match that sermon. In your reflection you might note that you believe that your sermon provides evidence that you are relatively strong on competencies (1b)¹ (4b)² (5b)³ and (6b)⁴. You might reflect that your sermon itself demonstrates this strength in competencies (1b) (4b) and (6b), and that your

¹ (1b) is “You will deepen your knowledge of the Scriptures and be confident in your capacity to engage richly with their witness.”

² (4b) is “You will discern God’s life-guiding law and God’s life-giving promises for you, for others, and for God’s beloved creation.”

³ (5b) is “You will be able to use a variety critical tools in order to read the Scriptures in all of their complexity and promise. Deep engagement with the Bible raises hard questions about God, life, death, meaning, ambiguity, identity, community, and about the Bible itself. “

⁴ (6b) is “You will learn to be critical of too-easy answers and naive readings, recognizing the sometimes narrow perspectives that each of us brings to the text. The stories and characters of the Bible will help you see yourself, your neighbor, and your world differently.”

exegetical work in preparation for the sermon demonstrates (5b). Further, you note that you have been surprised by how your sermon was received in a congregation, which has prompted you to want to work more intensively on (2b)⁵ and (7b)⁶, which at this point you define as a “growing edge” for yourself.

Another example from the MDIV degree might be an essay that you’ve written in your history signature course. Here you might discuss how it illustrates your grasp of (2b) and (3b)⁷, as well as (1c)⁸ and (3c)⁹. Then you might go on to discuss how this historical exploration has helped you to feel, tangibly, how important competency (2a)¹⁰ is, even though at this stage of your progress through the program you feel ill prepared to name such opportunities. You might ask for help from your cohort mentor in suggesting ways to do so.

An example from the CML MA degree program might involve your reflection on program outcome C: “CML graduates will have a critical understanding of leadership and the development of one’s own gifts for leadership in particular ministry contexts.” At the end of your first year you might note that you feel that this is very definitely a growing edge, because you are only just beginning to articulate your understanding of leadership. You might write that you have started working with a spiritual director to discern more fully your baptismal calling, and that you believe (3c)¹¹ is perhaps the only competency from this outcome with which you can claim much familiarity, given what you’ve explored in the first half of the Learning Leader course process. Here you could point to your individual profiles from the StrengthsFinder and the IDI. You might suggest that you are searching for more opportunities to explore this outcome at Luther, and seek advice from your cohort mentor. This kind of honesty might well display (4c).¹²

⁵ (MDIV2b) is “You will understand the ways the Scriptures have been interpreted over the centuries and in various contexts, trusting that Christ is present in diverse contexts. This includes knowledge of ways Scripture has served as the church’s norm and knowledge of interpretations that the ecumenical church has both commended and rejected.”

⁶ (MDIV 7b) is “You will discover new readings from diverse communities that enrich your imagination. You will learn how to enter a biblical passage with imagination so that the passage helps you reimagine life and faith in light of God’s word.”

⁷ (MDIV 3b) is “You will understand the significance of the ecumenical creeds and the confessions of the church for the ongoing interpretation of the Scriptures in changing contexts.”

⁸ (MDIV 1c) is “You will understand the Christian tradition’s witness to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and be able to think critically about that witness.”

⁹ (MDIV 3c) is “You will engage multiple voices from within the diverse traditions of the church and the wider culture as you teach, preach, and think about God.”

¹⁰ (MDIV 2a) is “With new urgency you will recognize the Holy Spirit’s new opportunities for mission here in ever more diverse North American contexts.”

¹¹ (MA/CML 3c) is “You will discern your own gifts in relationship to others in the body of Christ.”

¹² (MA/CML 4c) is “These communities will experience you as a differentiated leader who encourages, equips, and empowers others for ministry.”

As you can see by these examples, you could choose an artifact (or more than one) to illustrate your work with a specific outcome, or you could choose an artifact and discuss it in relation to more than one program outcome, or you could reflect upon processes in which you have been engaged by offering an anecdote from them. In each case the more direct and honest you can be in assessing your progress, the more effective the portfolio process will be.

As you prepare to submit your portfolio to the review team, please make sure that you go through and check that you've commented on each competency within the four outcomes (even if all you've noted is that you're unfamiliar with it). Please also make sure that each reflection you write has a parenthesis at the end of it which lists the specific outcome competencies addressed in that reflection (this will simplify the review team's task).

When you have written your reflection(s) you can sit down with your cohort mentor and talk with her/him about how they perceive your progress in the program. At that point your mentor might choose to use the portfolio evaluation rubric as an example of how they would approach your portfolio at the review stage.¹³

¹³ See the appropriate degree portfolio evaluation rubric.