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A Guide for Developing Quality Assessments in Brightspace:

The key to better student engagement and improved academic outcomes

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When you listen to educators, there is little doubt that teaching has profoundly changed in recent years. Gone are the days when teachers and professors were only required to be content experts and the onus of learning was solely the responsibility of the student. In the last era, final exams or standardized tests were often the only assessment provided by educators and the de facto measure of a students' success in the course.

Today, our educators are expected to provide a teaching experience of a much higher caliber. They are now also accountable for positive student outcomes—such as course completion, passing grades, graduation rates, etc.—and are expected to provide deeper levels of engagement with the material for their students. In this era, teachers are not only responsible for disseminating the information, but also for ensuring the

students are learning and understanding the content, too. To be successful in the current teaching environment, educators must adapt by creating meaningful assessments for students in order to measure the success of their teaching along the way.

Our educators care deeply about the success of their students. However, many are not trained to develop quality assessment programs which truly reflect a student's individual learning which, in turn, maximizes their success. In an ideal world, a teacher or professor would sit down with each student and have in-depth conversations on a recurring basis about the course content that is being taught to determine what each student has learned and where there are gaps in understanding. However, that approach is clearly not feasible because it is not scalable across an entire class. Educators must instead rely on assessments.

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There are typically two types of assessments in an educator's toolbox. The first is the formative assessment which evaluates each student's learning along the way (i.e. "What were the concepts covered in chapter 12?"). The second type is the summative assessment which is usually given as a midterm test or final exam the end of the course to reflect the entirety of the curriculum. Formative assessments are particularly important for educators to get a pulse on their teaching efficacy because they provide an ongoing measure of each student's learning. In addition, these formative assessments provide early identification of students who may be struggling to master specific concepts. If a student performs poorly in a formative assessment, it provides an opportunity for the educator to offer additional support early in the process in order to have a positive impact on the summative assessment or the student's ultimate outcome. However,

it is important to note that less than stellar results from assessments are not necessarily a signal that students are not learning. In some cases, the language used or material presented in the assessment may be confusing to students or the overall assessment is poorly structured. So, although students have retained the required knowledge, the assessment is not designed properly to allow for them to demonstrate their learning back to the educator.

Creating a quality assessment program that reflects the learning of each student is no easy task. The most successful formative assessments are aligned with the unique class content and the individual teaching style of the educator. In addition, effective assessments are not static, but are frequently refined and evolve over time so they become the best possible measurement of every student's learning in the class.

Best Practices for Developing Assessments:

As educators consider how to develop quality assessment programs to maximize student success, here are best practices from experts in education:

USE ASSESSMENTS TO DRIVE THE CURRICULUM

Educators should start with the summative assessment in mind, asking themselves: "What are the essential aspects I want students to demonstrate they have learned at the end of the course?" Then, educators can break this down into components which can serve as the foundation for the formative assessments along the way. When educators start with the assessments, they can be most effective by reverse engineering the curriculum to align with the learning that is expected from the students.

ASSESS REGULARLY AND INTERVENE EARLY

Today's educators can benefit from providing more frequent and concise formative assessments on a recurring basis. This approach allows them to gauge individual student's knowledge and provide intervention sooner by identifying those students who may need help. In addition, frequent assessments also provide feedback about the effectiveness of the teaching by highlighting areas where the broader class may need additional instruction or practice to master concepts.

Reflection Rubric

Graded By Emily Valens

Criteria	Expert 4 points	Accomplished 3 points	Capable 2 points	
Quality of Writing	• Piece was written in an extraordinary style and voice • Very informative and well-organized ✓	• Piece was written in an interesting style and voice • Somewhat informative and organized	• Piece had little style or voice • Gives some new information but poorly organized	

Feedback

Very well done! You really took the feedback that we discussed in your last assignment and implemented it in this piece. Amazing improvement!

| Grammar, Usage & Mechanics
Add Feedback | Virtually no spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors ✓ | Few spelling and punctuation errors, minor grammatical errors | A number of spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors | So pur gra tha wit |

Total	8 / 8

Overall Score

Close

FOCUS ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Assessments today can engage students at a much deeper level than a standard multiple-choice quiz. Educators can explore a whole host of new assessment formats which allow students to interact more creatively with course material and demonstrate their learning at a deeper level. Video content and gamification are two popular tools that have been shown to increase student engagement with their coursework.

FOSTER DEEPER LEARNING RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

Research shows that an ongoing, two-way dialogue with students can positively impact academic outcomes. Students respond when their teachers and professors provide regular feedback on their work and comments which are personalized for their own learning experience. The challenge for educators is finding the time to provide individualized learning experiences for each student in the class.

CONTINUALLY IMPROVE ASSESSMENTS

Educators should seek feedback from students as guidance for modifying or enhancing their assessments over time. Self-reporting from students can be an invaluable measure of the effectiveness of assessments for educators who may see better results by asking a question in a different manner or using another assessment format to measure their students' learning.
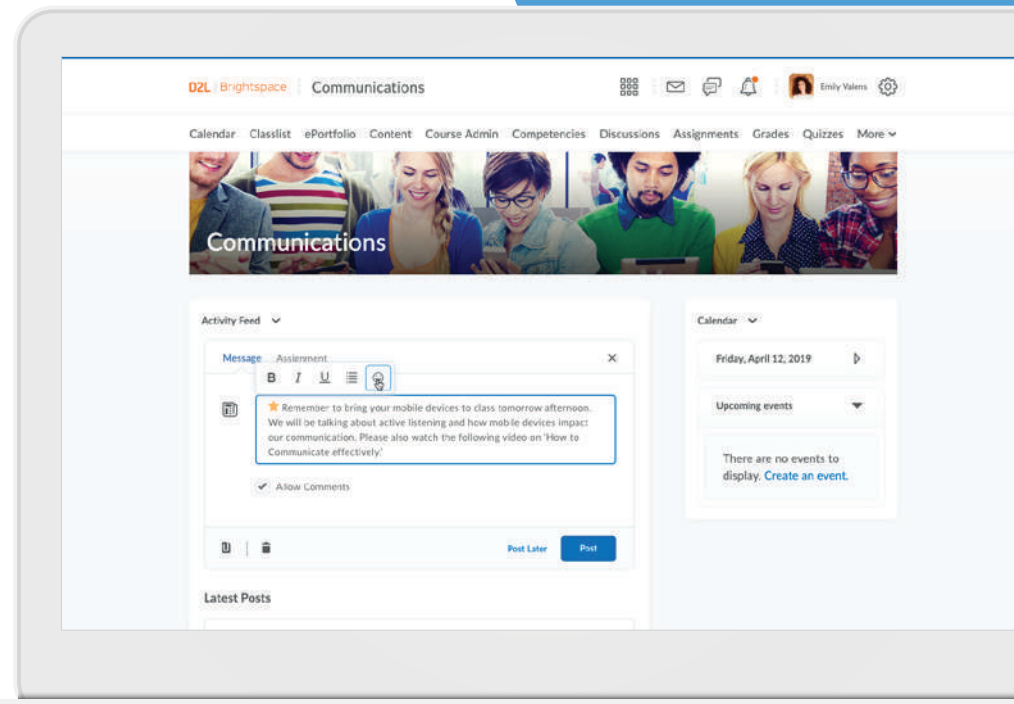
Innovative Assessment Tools from Brightspace:

D2L has a long history of delivering next generation education technologies and a proven track record helping educators create more powerful assessment programs. D2L's Brightspace platform allows instructors to easily provide students with these modern assessments by:

PROVIDING INDIVIDUALIZED FEEDBACK AND ANNOTATIONS

Instructors can now provide more meaningful feedback for students within specific areas of an assessment. Using the Annotation tool in Brightspace, an instructor's feedback appears directly in the relevant portion of the assessment just as it would on paper, making the comments much more impactful than using a feedback box. In addition, instructors can choose a highlighter, pen - or even include video or audio comments - to provide the right feedback for each student exactly where it is needed most.
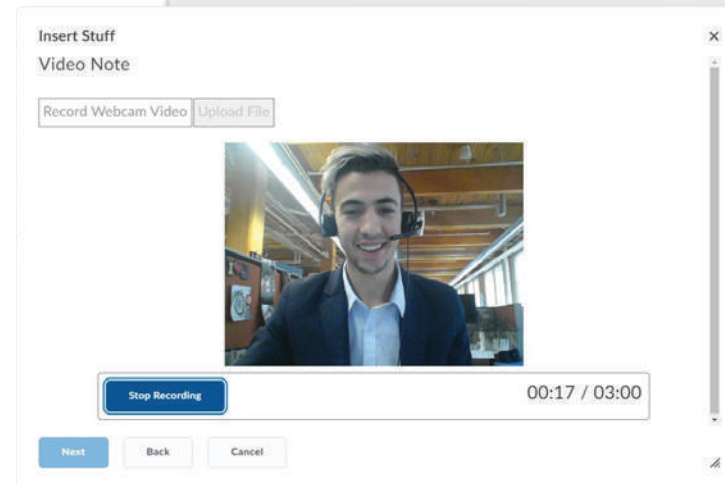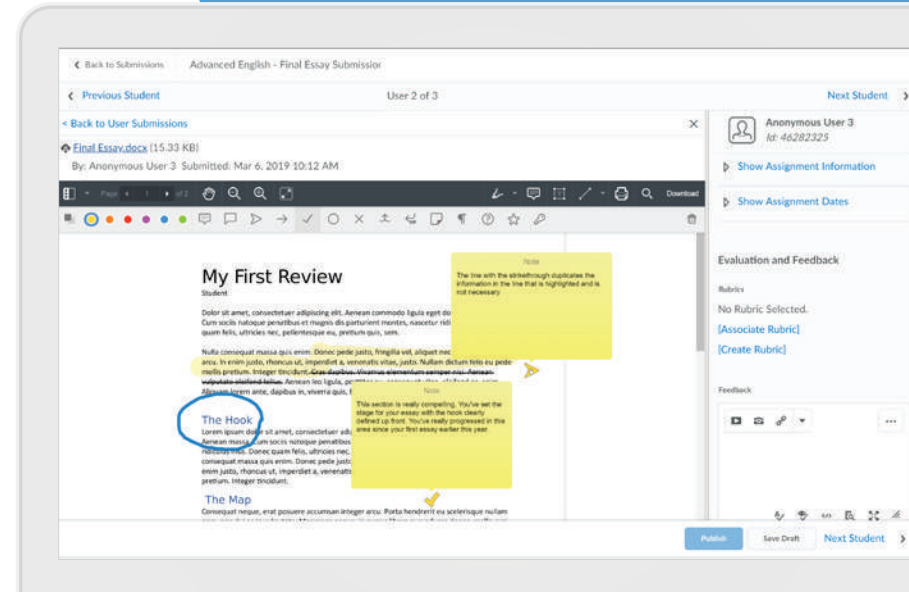
STREAMLINING QUIZ CREATION AND EDITING

Now, the process for developing quizzes for assessing students' learning has been simplified. With Brightspace, instructors can quickly create or import questions, shuffle questions, label mandatory and bonus questions, then appoint the appropriate points to each question and a total tally. The quiz creation feature also makes it easy for instructors to review their quiz and make appropriate adjustments.

PROVIDING FEEDBACK FOR VIDEO ASSESSMENTS

Video assessments provide students with experiential learning opportunities by applying their knowledge in another real-world medium. Brightspace addresses the challenges of evaluating video assignments by providing instructors with a variety of methods for offering specialized feedback including video comments, video rubrics and video grading, so each student receives personalized and relevant feedback.
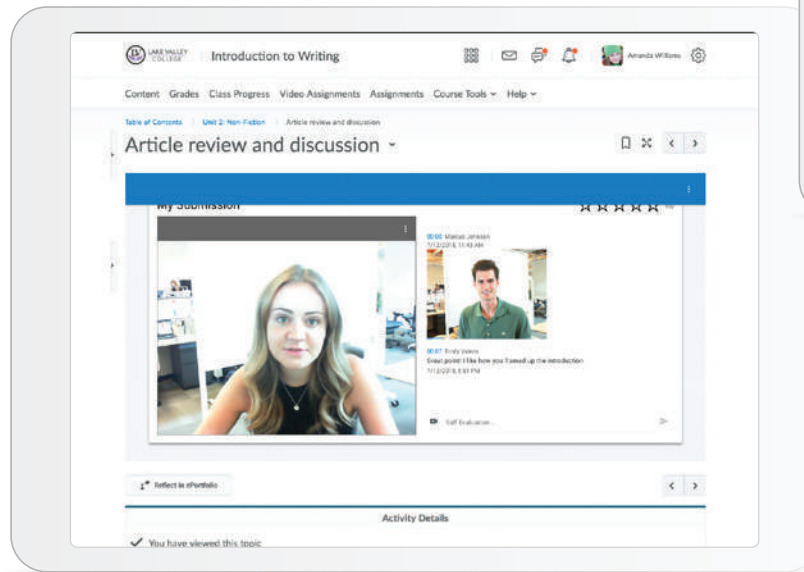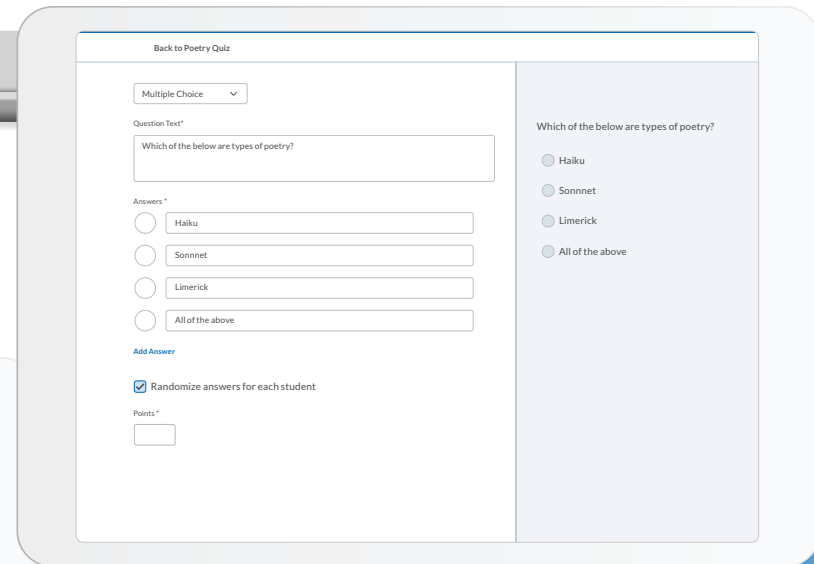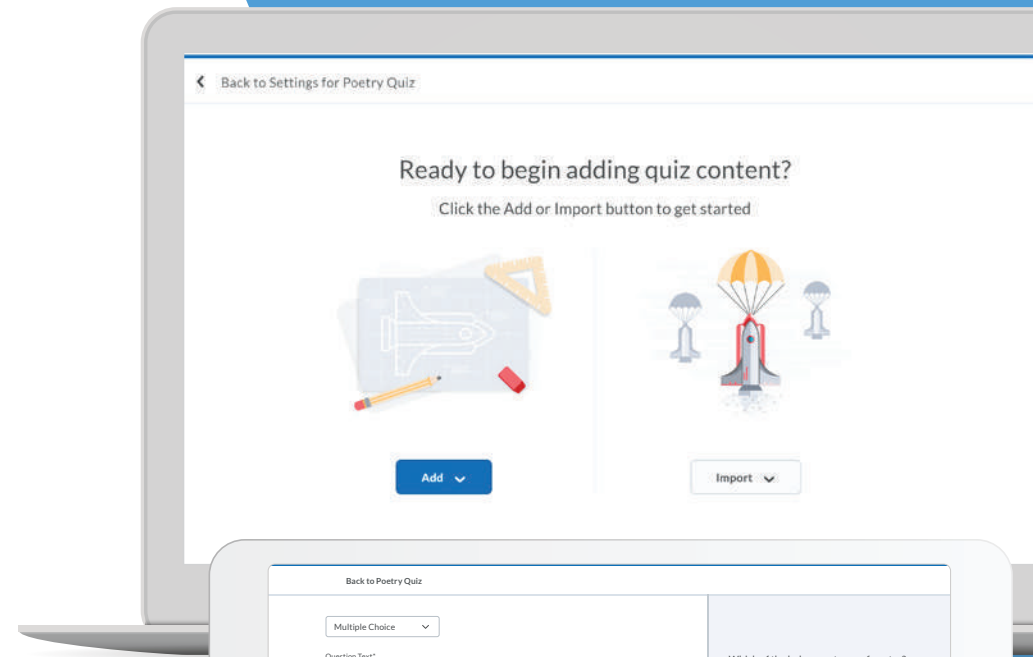
EASILY CREATING RUBRICS FOR STUDENTS

Rubrics are recognized as a great way to provide feedback to students because they visually show exactly which elements of an assessment were completed and where a student can improve. Brightspace offers instructors rubric templates to easily create rubrics for evaluation which, in turn, clearly show each student how their assessment was graded.

PROVIDING EVALUATIONS IN LESS TIME

Instructors can quickly locate various assessments across multiple courses to identify the assessments that should be prioritized using Quick Eval. Brightspace provides instructors with a central view of all their assessments in the queue, along with intuitive filters to help instructors sort and prioritize the assessments that require the most immediate evaluation.
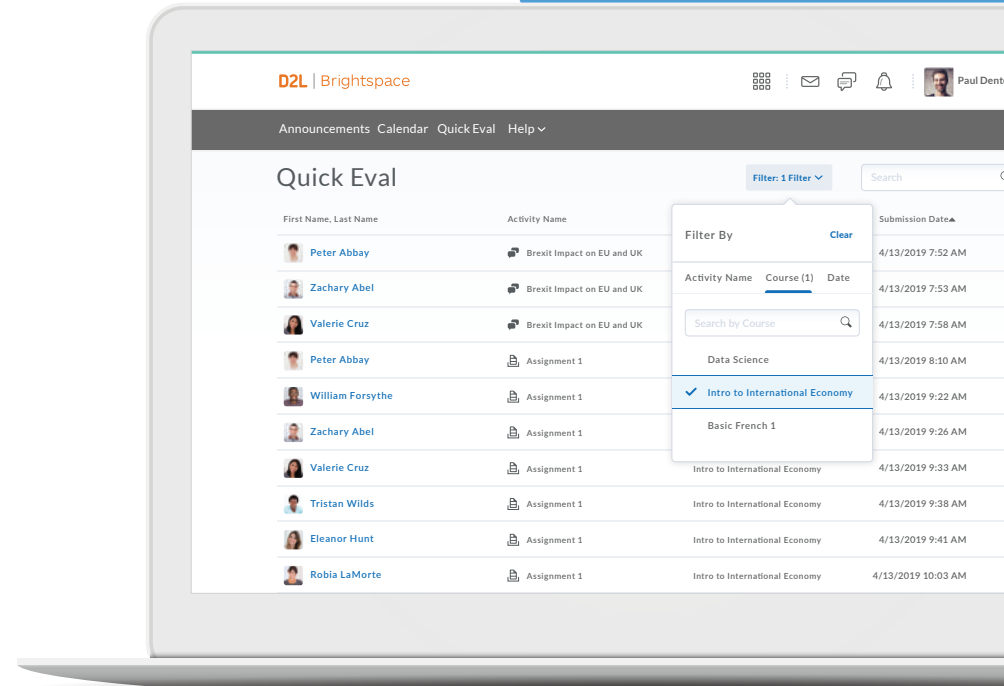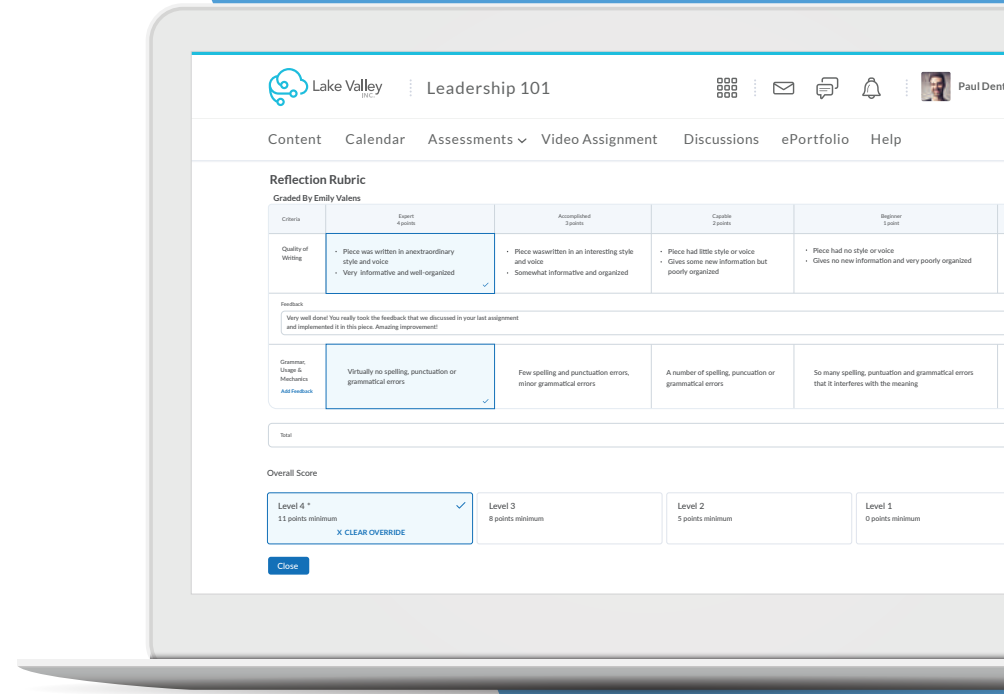
ASSESSING INDIVIDUALS IN GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

Working within a team can prepare students for the future by creating a real-world scenario, but these assignments have traditionally been hard to assess. Brightspace allows instructors to build work areas so students can work as a team while also allowing instructors to either grade individually or as a group. More specifically, instructors can assign unique tasks to each student and can also grade individual students on certain aspects of their contribution to the broader group.

MAKING IT EASY FOR STUDENTS TO SHARE THEIR WORK VIRTUALLY

The ability to share accomplishments boost both student confidence and engagement. Brightspace makes it easy for students to demonstrate their accomplishments to their instructors through the Portfolio app.
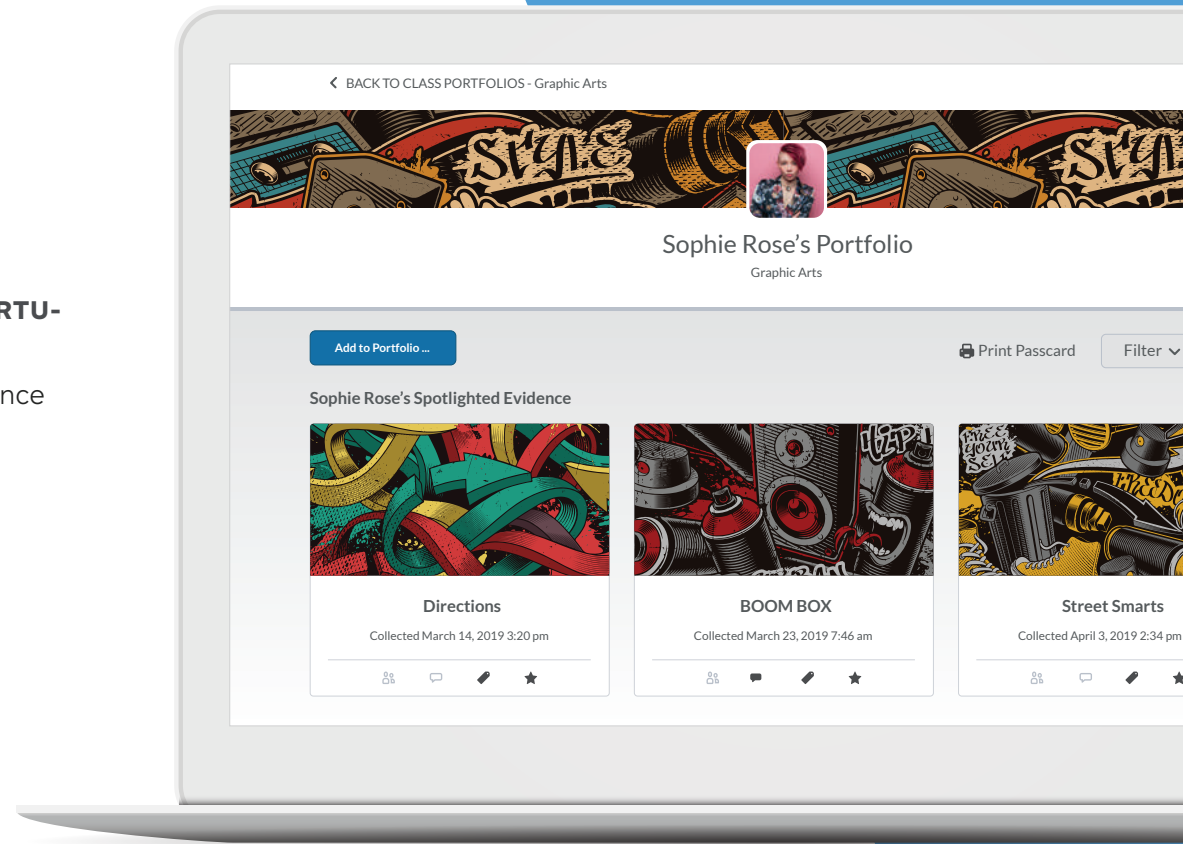
Bibliography

Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for Faculty by Cross and Angelo (1988) is a classic resource for post-secondary educators that is always worth checking out.
https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED317097.pdf

VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) is a campus-based assessment approach developed and led by AAC&U. VALUE rubrics provide needed tools to assess students' own authentic work, produced across students' diverse learning pathways, fields of study and institutions, to determine whether and how well students are meeting graduation level achievement in learning outcomes that both employers and faculty consider essential.
https://www.aacu.org/value

10 Assessment Design Tips for Increasing Online Student Retention, Satisfaction and Learning by Bernard Bull (2014) offers a set of suggestions for enhancing the assessment design to help jump-start your thinking about designing or re-imagining the assessment plan in your online courses.
http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/10-assessment-design-tips-increasing-retention-satisfaction-student-learning-online-courses/?campaign=FF140203article#sthash.GAYkXAMH.dpuf

The Case for Authentic Assessment from Grant Wiggins (1990) makes a clear case around the value of making assessments authentic as possible. Well worth your time.
https://scholarworks.umass.edu/pare/vol2/iss1/2/

Documenting and Assessing Learning in Informal and Media-Rich Environments by Jay Lemke, Robert Lecusay, Michael Cole and Vera Michalchik 2015) offers an extensive review of the literature on learning assessment in informal settings, expert discussion of key issues, and a new model for good assessment practice.
https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/documenting-and-assessing-learning-informal-and-media-rich-environments

The Assessment Handbook produced by Assessment, Credit and Qualifications at The Open University provides numerous examples of policies and practices around assessing student work. Well worth reviewing.
https://help.open.ac.uk/documents/policies/assessment-handbook/files/12/assessment-handbook-after290912.pdf

Assessing Online Learning edited by Patricia Comeaux (2004) asks "Can online assessment support a constructivist, student-centered learning model?" Comeaux and the authors included in this text believe so and offer a multidisciplinary, comprehensive approach and strategies to try for yourself.
https://www.amazon.com/Assessing-Online-Learning-Patricia-Comeaux/dp/1882982770/

56 different ways to gather evidence of student achievement is a Google doc curated by David Wees that gives you lots of topics and examples to consider.
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1nzhdnyMQmio5lNT75ITB45rHyLISHEEHZlHTWJRqLmQ/pub?slide=id.p