



Athabasca University

Prior Learning Assessment
and Recognition (PLAR)

A handbook for preparing portfolios

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Introduction and overview

This handbook offers a step-by-step **introduction** to portfolio development for students wanting to acquire credit for their prior experiential learning toward an Athabasca University certificate or undergraduate degree. Please be aware that this handbook **does not replace** the detailed and personalized guidance and feedback which your mentor will provide.

Athabasca University grants university credits for prior and experiential learning through the prior learning assessment and recognition process (PLAR). The number of credits available varies depending on the program selected. Learners who pursue PLAR option will have any credits granted through the process noted on their university transcripts as **PLAR assessed credits**.

[The Centre for Learning Accreditation \(CLA\)](#) is responsible for PLAR and is the best source of information on PLAR.

Credits may also be gained through **transfer credit** from other institutions or through **challenge for credit**. Make note that transfer credit assessment must be completed before PLAR assessment can occur. The [transfer credit section](#) of AU's website contains further information about these options. [Program advisors](#) are the best source of information about your program.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) is a process through which you can be awarded credit for university-level learning related to the Athabasca University program you are working toward. PLAR awards credit for **knowing**, not for **doing**. PLAR assessments **do not** reflect the number of years that you spent on a job, the number of workshops you attended, the level of position you attained, your age, or your level of effort.

PLAR is not for everyone. It is one of several ways to obtain credit at Athabasca University. The theory that PLAR is based on recognizes that, as a mature learner, you bring a wealth of knowledge to your university studies. Your PLAR-awarded credit, however, must be relevant to and fit in with the credential that you are seeking at AU. **PLAR is also a learning process**, as learners who pursue this option will develop their understanding of portfolio development over time by working through numerous resources and mentor guidance.

While this handbook provides information on how to extract your learning from the experiences that have contributed to your learning, you are required to [contact the Centre for Learning Accreditation to confirm PLAR potential / suitability](#) and develop your front-end pieces before moving forward with PLAR. A mentor must be assigned before proceeding with learning statement development.

Visit the [PLAR website](#) for further information and read the manual below in full.

Why PLAR?

By engaging in the PLAR process, you may:

- Save university study time by getting credit for learning you have already acquired. Why study something you already know? What you have learned counts.
- Save money. It may cost less to have your prior learning assessed and recognized than it does to take an AU course. PLAR requires a one-time flat fee.
- Gain insight into your own life. Developing a PLAR portfolio is a powerful learning tool that can help you:
 - Review, reflect upon, and understand your experiences.
 - Clarify your learning and career goals.
 - Explain your skills and knowledge clearly in job applications and interviews.
 - Gain insight about which university courses to take.
 - Develop insight into yourself as a learner, a person, and a community member through self-reflection.

How transfer credit relates to PLAR

Transfer credit is AU academic credit granted for courses or programs you completed at other accredited post-secondary institutions. To find out whether a course or program may be transferable to your AU program, visit the [transfer credit tool](#).

To apply for transfer credit, you must request an official transcript from the originating institution and arrange to have it sent directly from that institution to AU.

In some cases, prior studies may be considered too out-of-date (or stale-dated) to qualify for transfer credit. For example, a science or computing science course taken many years ago could be judged out-of-date unless the applicant has remained active in the relevant field since graduation. Those who have remained active may obtain transfer credit if they can prove active status for previous learning.

All transfer of credit to AU must be completed **before** applying for PLAR.

How challenge for credit relates to PLAR

You can also consider the challenge for credit option as a means of obtaining credit at AU. This option is available only if you have specific knowledge matching the content of a specific AU course.

The maximum number of credits that you can challenge is the total number of credits required for your program *minus* the number of residency credits required for that program. Please see the [Challenge for Credit Policy](#) for complete details.

The portfolio / e-Portfolio

A portfolio is a collection of materials prepared to document and validate a request for recognition for previously acquired experiential learning. Portfolios can take several forms. Each form contains the same parts.

1. The preferred format for a portfolio uses [e-Portfolio](#), which is a web-based virtual portfolio building site.
2. Our [sample student e-Portfolios](#) showcase completed portfolios.
3. Alternative submission routes (whether paper and/or technology-enhanced) must be negotiated with your mentor.

Portfolio material tells the assessors **who you are** (attitudes and behaviours) and verifies **what you know** (knowledge) and **what you can do** (skills).

A portfolio will contain the following parts:

- a table of contents (for organizational use only)
- a cover and/or a title page (optional)
- a declaration page
- a résumé
- a copy of your AU program plan
- a short autobiographical essay (a personal narrative)
- a critical reflection (optional)
- an overview of your prior learning, demonstrated through **written learning statements**
- support material to document or verify the learning you claim to have



Learning statements form the heart of the portfolio.

They are statements written by you, *following a prescribed format*, to identify the **learning** that you have. An introduction to learning statement development is given later in this handbook.

To verify the information you present, you must include **documents that affirm or showcase your learning**. This must include letters of attestation, as well as other representations of your work such as reports, e-mails, videos, presentations, other media, newspaper articles, etc. Your mentor will advise you of the suitability of your documentation. (**Note:** It is important that you adhere to your mentor's advice and not include previously un-discussed documentation in your final submission.)

The **time required to prepare a portfolio** depends on numerous factors, such as:

- The current length of our 'mentor assignment' queue (waitlist).
- How busy you are with work, school, and home.
- How dedicated you are to completing the portfolio once mentoring services are available.
- How much material you have to collect to verify your claims.
- How quickly your supporters provide letters of attestation or other materials.

It will take **at least twelve months** to develop a portfolio once mentoring begins. You should allow an **additional three to four months** from the date your portfolio is finalized for assessors to complete their assessment of it.

Before you start

Before our PLAR potential / suitability discussions can begin, you must ensure that you are **enrolled in an undergraduate program at AU** and have taken the necessary steps to **obtain any transfer credit** for which you are eligible. Follow the steps listed below to work through the preparation for PLAR process. The instructions are designed for someone totally new to AU, so depending on your experience at the university, you may be able to skip some steps.



1. Access the [Athabasca University calendar](#).
2. [Apply](#) to your chosen undergraduate program.
3. If you have post-secondary course credits, some of them may be transferable through the transfer credit option. For complete information visit [Transfer Credit Services](#). (Note: some of the short courses you have taken, if not transferable, may provide material for your portfolio as verification of your abilities.)
4. If you are applying for transfer credit, contact the institutions where you completed the course(s) and request that transcripts of your grades be forwarded directly to the Office of the Registrar, Athabasca University, 1 University Drive, Athabasca, AB T9S 3A3.
5. The PLAR application fee is not accepted until mentoring has begun. Your mentor will confirm when it is appropriate to submit your PLAR application. Any fees submitted prior to mentor confirmation will be refunded.
6. Check the [tuition and fee schedule](#) in the calendar to determine the current fees for the General Application, Transfer Credit Evaluation, and PLAR.

Developing a portfolio

Preparing a portfolio for assessment is a part of your larger learning strategy. There are many decisions to make prior to and during the portfolio development process.

Step 1: Initial PLAR discussions with CLA

Before you begin the PLAR process, discussions with our department will focus on **how** you will put your portfolio together and the value PLAR may offer within your program. CLA will help you determine PLAR suitability and confirm the portfolio approach required for your program.

To begin this conversation, we will require a current PDF copy of your **DegreeWorks worksheet** and your **resume**.

A) Obtain a DegreeWorks worksheet

The CLA staff will require a current copy of your DegreeWorks worksheet to begin our PLAR suitability discussions. This will enable CLA to confirm if PLAR is a good fit in your current program and remaining degree or pre-admission requirements. It will also enable us to make recommendations for courses that can be taken while waiting for PLAR mentoring with minimal impact on potential PLAR credits.



You can access DegreeWorks in the [MyAU portal](#):

- DegreeWorks is located in the “Manage My Program” section.
- Click the “Save as PDF” button to obtain a current colour copy of your worksheet.
- Assign a file name such as “YOUR NAME ID DegreeWorks”. We require this document to be saved as a PDF file type, and not CGI.

NOTE: If you were admitted to your current program prior to Sept 2010, then DegreeWorks will not be available. In this case, please contact your [program advisor](#) to obtain a current program planner.

B) Writing a résumé

Your portfolio must include an **up-to-date résumé**. CLA will also require a copy of this resume to begin our PLAR discussions.



Your résumé helps the assessors trace your education and career history and may help to put some of your learning claims into context. Designing an effective résumé is another way to help the assessors and mentors understand your learning history.

- Ensure it is factual, concise and well laid out.
- Present information within each section in reverse-chronological order (i.e.: your most recent accomplishments should be stated first.) Use bullet points to list job duties, using succinct phrasing.
- List **all** previous employment, volunteer, and educational background.
- Do not include references.

There are many acceptable résumé styles, however, the resume for PLAR will be different from a resume for employment and will need to adhere to [CLA formatting requirements](#).

You can view **examples of résumés** that align to CLA requirements at the following links:

- [Resume example 1](#)
- [Resume example 2](#)

C) Contact CLA department directly

E-mail plarinquiries@athabascau.ca to submit your DegreeWorks worksheet and résumé and begin PLAR potential/suitability discussions.



CLA's PLAR process requires you to work with a PLAR mentor. You will meet with a mentor **after** your front-end pieces have been developed (see steps 3 & 4), submitted, and your case makes its way through our **'mentor assignment' queue**. A learning contract will outline the PLAR process and aid in the negotiation of a timeline with a mentor.

See a copy of the learning contract in [Appendix D](#).

While it will be some time before you can begin working with a mentor, the PLAR suitability discussions can occur without delay once your résumé and DegreeWorks worksheet arrive.



Step 2: Planning the collection and selection of support materials

Support materials (documentation) play an important part in the portfolio. As you consider what learning you will bring forward for assessment, keep in mind you will need to provide support for your claims of “knowing.” Think about this as you begin the process of self-reflection while you prepare your portfolio, following the guidance your mentor provides.

Recall, select, and/or collect documents and other materials

Begin by thinking about documents or other material (*e.g., videos, reports, plans, strategies, newspaper articles*) that verify your learning from any of the sources below:

- participation in an event in which you showed leadership skills
- participation in an event in which you showed writing or other communication skills
- participation in volunteer work that required particular skills
- paid work (full or part time)
- a credit course not awarded transfer credit
- a non-credit course
- a workshop
- a certification or commendation

You will need to **collect the documents you plan to use in your portfolio** to ensure you have access to the necessary supports.

With the assistance of your mentor, you will choose your final set of documents to showcase carefully, as there are practical limits to the amount that can be included in your portfolio.

You might find the checklist on the following pages useful.



Checklist for gathering materials

Paid work (full or part time)

- Do my employers have job descriptions for the positions I occupied?
- Do my employers have files describing the nature of my work and the time I spent doing this work?
- Did anyone evaluate my performance?
- Did I ever receive official commendations for my work?
- Do I have newspaper or magazine clippings that mention my ability?
- Do I have documents that can help prove my competence such as emails, templates, or spreadsheets?
- Do I have finished products that prove my ability to do something, such as reports or presentations?
- Do I have employers, supervisors and/or clients who would be willing to provide letters of attestation when the time comes? **(required)***

Unpaid work (volunteer work, homemaking, etc.)

- Do the volunteer organizations I worked for have job descriptions for the positions I held?
- Do organizations have descriptions of my work and time I spent doing this work?
- Did anyone evaluate my performance?
- Do I have others within the organization such as my supervisor or colleagues that would be willing to provide letters of attestation when the time comes? (required)*
- Did I ever receive official commendations for my work?
- Do I have newspaper or magazine clippings that mention my ability?

Leisure, travel, and sports activities

- Do I have awards or any other form of commendation for my leisure or travel activities (e.g., vacationing in another country to learn more about specific areas of interest)?
- Did I ever keep a travel journal that reflects my learning?
- Do I have awards, medals, or letters of congratulations for my contribution to recreational or extracurricular activities?

*** A minimum of two Letters of Attestation are required.**

Life marker events

- Did anything happen to me personally that sparked my interest in my field of study?
- Do I have documentary proof of the events that had a significant impact on my life? For example, do I have some special awards, medals, honours, or certificates connected to my activities?

Non-credit courses

Reference to non-credit courses will only be made if you have built this learning up to a university level through your work experience. Related documentation may include:

- Confirmation of completed courses, workshops, or training.
- Work product that showcases university level learning gained after applying those skills within the workplace.
- Letters of attestation affirming an advanced application of any learned skills or knowledge.

The materials you gather as supporting documentation will give you an idea of the **range of learning** you hold.

With this understanding, you will be ready to start work on the first **written parts** of your portfolio.



Step 3: How to write an autobiographical essay

The purpose of the autobiographical essay is for you to tell the assessors, in your own voice, about your **learning history** and your **development as a university learner**. This short summary of your life story begins your portfolio.

Important tips:

- Six to eight pages, double spaced.
- Explain the following:
 - how you got to be who you are now (attitudes and behaviour).
 - what things you did to gain what you know now (knowledge).
 - what you can do (skills).
- Illustrate how you and your abilities are connected to your current work and educational pursuits and what you envision for the future.

The following steps provide one way to assist you in constructing your autobiography. These are just suggestions. You **do not** have to do it this way, but you may find the process below useful for self-reflection.

A) Drawing a lifeline and its use.

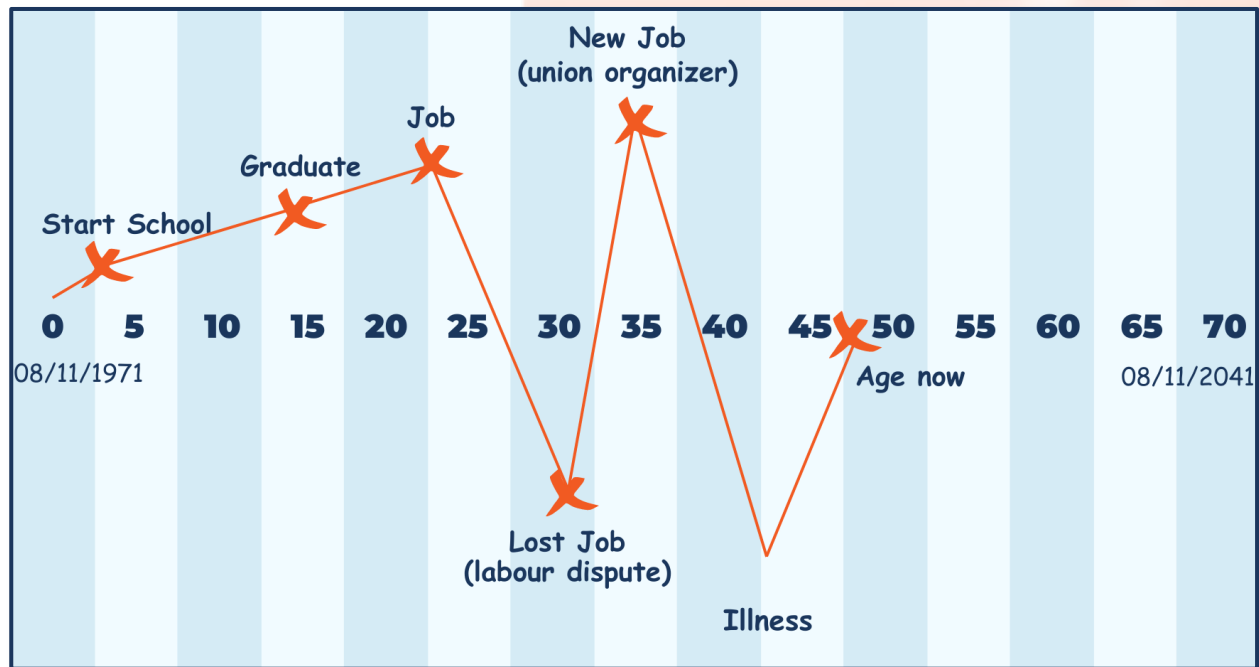
A lifeline drawing helps you remember important events in your life like your birth, your school entrance, your high school graduation, your first job and any other important highlights (either personal or work related; either large or small) that happened during your life up to the present time that influenced your present learning journey with Athabasca University. This resource will help you write your life story through the **Autobiography** (see [step 3](#)).

This exercise is for your personal reference only - you do not have to show it to anyone. The lifeline is not put in the portfolio but can help guide you by providing a visual picture of your life.

Assessors will want to know **why you sought out your specific knowledge**, and/or **why you were interested in gaining your specific skills**. They want to know how these relate to your present interest in getting a university credential. Pulling this information together by using a lifeline drawing might be helpful to you.



How do I draw a lifeline?



A sample lifeline

Marking important personal events on the lifeline shows you where you have been, where you are now, and where you are headed. Lifelines clarify who you are, so you can explain yourself in detail to others, whether it is an assessor or a job interviewer. You might be surprised at the events you turn up while working through this exercise!

B) Marking personal events

Judge and mark the important ("critical") events that happened in your life in this way:

- If a **positive** event happened to you, mark your "X" **above** the appropriate year on the lifeline.
- If a **negative** event happened to you, mark your "X" **below** the appropriate year
- Where the mark is placed above or below the line determines the event's significance.
 - Marking the X very high or very low away from the line means the event was very significant to you.
 - Marking the "X" closer to the line means the event was not as significant to you.
- Connect the "X's" together to form a continuous line.

Some people like to use different colours to mean various things when making their lifeline. Whichever way you create your lifeline, make sure the line is erasable/editable as you may change your mind from time to time about the significance of events experienced, or you may remember a significant event and want to add it later.

Make note, assessors are looking for the autobiographical essay to show:

- **clarity**: understanding what you have to offer and what you needed at each stage of your life.
- **strategy**: the ability to communicate your value to those who want or need what you offer.
- **action**: the ability to move steadily forward to get what you need professionally or personally.

C) Think about your life as having three stages: past, present, and future.

The following offers detailed instructions on how to revisit your past, to reflect on your learning in the past, present, and future.

Looking into the past

It is important to look backward to understand the future. Our present ambitions and abilities often can be found in our childhood. Who we are may be found in our early family stories. Think back to identify events in your past that influenced who you are now such as what you believe, what is important to you, what you like or dislike.

Such events may be from your personal life, or from your physical, spiritual, emotional, or intellectual life. What acquired skills and preferences (those that you were born with or emerged early in life) surfaced in your early work experience?

What did you learn about yourself from major milestones or events? These might include:

- summers spent with grandparents
- a school award
- marital changes
- births and deaths of loved ones
- achievements in extra-curricular activities
- a personal best that others might not know about

Think of the usual **milestones** that mark the first 20 years of life.

For example, what did you learn about yourself in the way you approached learning to ride a bike? Did you struggle to keep at it until you could do it despite scraped knees? Did you fall and then ask the adults in your life to help you until you learned from this group accomplishment?

Example:

A scientist did not speak a word until he was two years old. His first words then came out in a whole sentence.

This method of observing, thinking, and rehearsing thoughts carefully before speaking is characteristic of his adult scientific behaviour: observe, collect data, analyze, and speak.



Remember, everything you draw from your past should be able to be related to your present learning and your future goals. The point is to record anything from your past that tells something about who you are now: significant events, interests, activities, concerns, hopes, qualities, characteristics.

What we are hoping for here is recognition of something like:

- *“Yes, this is me. I’ve been like this from day one!”*
- **- or -**
- *“Oh, I forgot I started being interested in that in my early teens.”*

Personal beliefs and values may centre around different things, such as:

- the importance of strong family, community, or social ties
- learning as a top priority
- pursuit of creativity or authenticity
- personal acceptance and growth
- an interest in human rights and racial, gender, or sexual equality issues
- the importance of identifying and pursuing ones needs in life
- the importance of navigating through tough times.



Use past events as tools for reflection. **Do not get bogged down in details from the past while preparing your autobiographical essay!** While some incidents will be critically important to your development, many are not. Those incidents that are presented as being important **must be linked to your present role and aspirations** for the future.

The optional “**Critical Incident**” essay of the portfolio can provide a good place for making sense of one critical incident from your past. See [Step 4](#) for directions on writing this piece by “Framing the Issue.”

Looking ahead to the future

It is hard to know where you are going if you do not have a picture of what you want. Include your **future education and career goals** toward the end of your essay.

Think about the life you anticipate in the next ten years and how it relates to your **career plans**. Think of some goals you have and the age by which you want to attain them. Keep in mind, you are not making commitments here, just outlining possibilities. You might also record any insights you have doing this exercise (e.g., I need time for union or social justice activities; writing; building savings; finding a dream home, etc.).

In summary

Use your list of talents and patterns of behaviour to begin writing your autobiographical essay. Keep it brief but explain how you became the kind of person you are now (attitudes and behaviour). Describe your interests and how these influenced you to **learn the skills** you have today (knowledge and skills). How did you decide to enter the kind of work you do now? Where do you want to go from here?

Remember to keep focused on the relationship of the past to the present to the future. Your past should be seen to inform your present position (in life, in work). Your current learning and desire to complete your portfolio serves as the bridge to the future.

The first page of your autobiography will summarize either your “early years” or “where you came from.” The remaining pages will explore your development as an adult, a worker, and a learner.

D) How personal should the autobiography be?

While details from your past will inspire your writing, the assessors **do not** need to know your life’s intimate details. **Do not** reveal anything more than you are comfortable with. If a past event, however unpleasant, is critically important to the life-path you took, provide a brief reference to that event or consider discussing it with the Critical Incident essay.

Important: Do not name people or provide **personal identifiers** of others in your story to adhere to CLA’s confidentiality requirements. This includes family members, friends, colleagues, mentors, etc.

At the same time, be assured that all portfolios are held in confidence and treated with security.



Sample autobiographical essay

My name is Stephanie Jones, and I was born in Small Town, MB in August 1971. I am the eldest and my brother is three years younger. The two towns where I have resided most of my life are Small Town and Middle Town, Manitoba.

I grew up in a northern Francophone family where the provider, my father, was susceptible to layoffs every year. I quickly learned about the powers of an employer and a union's visions. Unemployment insurance, as it was called back then, was a subject of discussion over many dinners. This way of life caused a great deal of stress for the family. I remember my mother limiting certain foods or extras such as outings to make ends meet.

As an adolescent, I was an active member of my high school's student council. Despite my future visions and good intentions to pursue post-secondary studies, many decisions and circumstances influenced my path. When I did not receive financial assistance to attend a post-secondary institution right after high school, I had to rethink my strategies. I was devastated that I could not pursue my dreams of obtaining the education I had always desired.

Another event, which shifted my life forever, was accepting a marriage proposal at a young age and marrying in 1988. I made it clear from the beginning that my education was very important to me and marriage would not stand in the way of my pursuing post-secondary studies or even completing high school. When I announced my engagement to my teachers, some were puzzled, others were against it and the most significant was the reaction of my guidance counsellor. He told me if I married prior to my graduation, I would receive significant financial support since married people were more likely to receive additional financial assistance than a single person. Nothing could have been further from the truth. When I was approved for a \$500 student loan, I was unable to take on my quest for post-secondary education. Given that I lived in a small town with no opportunity to attend a post-secondary institution locally, I had to relocate to engage in the pursuit of higher education. Needless to say, my dreams were crushed.

When he secured employment, it gave me the financial flexibility to pursue my dream of attaining higher education. In September 1992, I moved from Small Town with my one-year-old daughter to attend a college in Middle Town, Manitoba. One thing led to another and in February 1993, I had health complications which required me to be hospitalized during my exam session. Without the compassion of my teachers, I failed a course with no opportunity to retake the exam. Thinking nothing could be done to reverse this horrible failure, I felt I had no other choice but to quit my program (X-Ray technician). Having some money left over from my

student loans, I decided to take an aesthetics course and moved back to Small Town to open my own home-based business, Stephanie's Nails and Tanning, in March 1993. Since most of my work was from home, I also began working with day care again.

In March 1995, I had my second child and my eldest child began school. By March 1996, I secured part-time employment with the French Catholic elementary school that my daughter attended. In the same year, I attended instructors' training to teach adults firearms handling and hunting techniques. This was a seasonal self-employment opportunity which I continued until January 2003.

In 1998, the Manitoba Ministry of Education decided to amalgamate all school boards and as a result, workers decided to unionize. I subsequently became a member of the Manitoba Secondary School Teacher's Federation (MSSTF) and at my first Annual General Meeting (AGM); I was nominated and elected as a negotiator for Bargaining Unit (BU) 101, District A. Involvement with MSSTF brought new direction to my life and was a huge turning point for me. My life has continued to evolve in that direction over the last 12 years.

Since the signing of our first collective agreement in June 1999, I have worked and occupied various union positions at the local, district and provincial levels of the Federation. In 1999, I was elected to a two-year position on the Educational Support Staff Sector at the provincial level.

Since I was a part-time employee with the French Catholic School Board, I applied for a full-time position as an educational assistant with the French public secondary school in the fall of 1999. As the principal pointed out to me during the interview, I was chosen because I was the only person with qualifications in Small Town. As a result, I took a leave of absence from the Catholic board and retained all my rights. This proved to be a wise decision because in February 2000, the principal fired me a day before finishing the three-month probation period. I subsequently filed a grievance and just before the arbitrator heard my case, the board settled.

While an employee of the French Public School Board, I bid for a position on the executive of BU 102, District B. I was subsequently chosen as their communications officer. I occupied the post until the end of the school year because my case was ongoing; I remained an active member. At the AGM, members nominated me for the position of President. The secretariat liaison from the provincial office took time out of the meeting to talk to me and indicated I could not accept the nomination. The reasons were because of my grievance and that there were no guarantees my case would be won. I was being forced to decline the

nomination. It seemed my rights were taken from me and this gave me a bigger drive to become an advocate for the rights of workers. I was determined to educate myself about the laws which govern workers, employers, and unions.

During the grievance process, I found myself without employment and therefore, I returned to work for the French Catholic Board in a temporary position (50%) at an elementary school in Middle Town. I was a regular member of two bargaining units within MSSTF. By September of 2000, I was employed full time with the French Catholic School Board and my grievance was settled with the French Public School Board.

My involvement with the union has continued since occupying positions as workplace representative, area representative, chief negotiator, negotiating officer and communications officer for BU 102. I have been an active member on local committees such as finance, collective bargaining, grievance appeals, political action, constitution, anti-harassment and pay equity. As part of my duties on the BU executive, I participated on joint union-employer groups such as the education, policies and procedures, leadership framework steering, professional development organisation, United Way of Canada, and employee profile committees. At the district level, I have occupied posts as district secretary, delegate, and substitute to the Annual Meeting of the Provincial Assembly (AMPA), provincial councillor and member of the Northern Caucus committee.

This year has been an active one, since I applied twice for positions at the provincial office of MSSTF which took much of my time but educated me to the fact that I will never have a chance at such positions if I have no experience as President/Grievance officer. As such, in June, I was elected as Vice-president of my BU moving closer to the rank of President. Despite many members wanting me in the post of President, I did not feel this year was the right time. I strongly believe that in two years when the election occurs, I will have more background as well as being closer to completing my BA - Labour Studies degree at Athabasca University.

As I document all the labour activities which I have been involved in, I realize how much advocating for workers' rights is important to me. I have enjoyed seeing the membership grow since the amalgamation of the school boards and the ratification of our first collective agreement. As I progressed in my learning process of workers' rights, the members were also educated through the strong leadership of our executive. I am confident that continuing my education with Athabasca University is the best route for me. The members of MSSTF can only benefit from the knowledge I will acquire.

Step 4: Framing the issue: drafting a critical incident essay (optional)

As with anything, if you are to do a task well, you must understand the nature of the task. In the words of Mezirow,

“When adults are said to be reflective, they are being asked to think seriously, or contemplate a thought or action. As adults, our learning is the process of making meaning of life experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action” (1990).¹

PLAR, as a process, intends to guide you through **reflection of your life’s learning** so you can present that learning to assessors who have the expertise to assess **the relevance of your prior learning to your Athabasca University program**.

The essence of the PLAR portfolio requires critical reflection. As you critically reflect on your learning, you may opt to develop a critical incident essay by following these instructions. This is to be a short essay of around **500 words** (two pages, double-spaced in 12 pt. type).

The essay should **frame the issue** of your learning as it pertains to one critical incident. It should extract from all the other pieces of your portfolio the critical importance of your learning—to your understanding of your past, your present, your future and especially, **to your quest for credit toward your Athabasca University program**.



¹ Mezirow, J. How critical reflection triggers transformative learning. In J. Mezirow (Ed.), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood* (pp 1-18). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Explanation of critical incident learning

Christopher was making his first presentation at an international conference. In addition to being very nervous, he realized that he needed to make last-minute changes to his PowerPoint presentation. He arrived early at the presentation room, but another presenter was already there. When he was able to access the presentation computer on the podium, Christopher was embarrassed to have to make the necessary changes, but he did so, and the other presenter proofread on the big screen for him and helped him identify typos and spelling mistakes.

After the presentation, during questions, Christopher was terrified when some people asked him questions that he did not understand. To buy time, he asked them, in various ways, for clarification. As they talked further, they almost answered their own questions, and Christopher was able then to contribute further information from his own knowledge of the topic.

Christopher learned several important lessons from this experience—not concerning his topic but concerning human nature. He learned that:

- Most people are happy to help out.
- He should have faith in his own ability to succeed.
- People's questions are often designed to air their own views, not to question others' views.
- People often have their own answers and will share them if given a chance.

Christopher used his new knowledge in many ways. It motivated him to participate in other challenging professional situations. He became a polished presenter and was always able to draw the audience into his presentation because he opened the floor to allow them opportunities to speak. He never pretended to have all the answers and built opportunities for audience members to ask questions into his presentations. His demeanour in these situations was unassuming and open.

From this precarious start, Christopher went on to develop not only a superb set of communication and interpersonal skills but also a high degree of confidence in his public self. In later years, Christopher attributed his ultimate success as a politician to this learning.

According to Brookfield (1990), critical incidents are **situations or events that are vividly remembered and hold special significance for the writer.**² In other words, a critical incident is an important occasion that has created a memorable opportunity for learning.

Note: Learning about yourself is a step away from learning about a fact or a condition. It requires you to analyse and reflect upon the **foundation of your learning.**

How to write your own critical incident essay

Follow these few steps to develop this important part of your portfolio:

- From memory or from your lifeline (developed in Step 3 above), select one meaningful critical incident that you can further elaborate on.
- Describe the impact and effect of this incident on your growth as it relates to your learning and decision-making. Refer to the effects of this incident on subsequent life events.
- Ensure that you make connections between the event that you describe and your learning. For example, if the first job you ever held was in a drugstore when you were 17, and you learned a lot about interpersonal communication from your interactions with others during that time, make sure that you bring that learning forward and refer to how that learning stayed with you or contributed to future learning.



Important: Focus the essay on only **one** critical incident, tying that into your **current or future education or career** to keep the essay concise.

The true story on the following page provides an example.

² Brookfield, S.D. (1990). Using critical incidents to explore learners' assumptions. In J. Mezirow (Ed). *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood* (pp. 177-193). Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.

June's story – critical incident learning

When I was 24, I enrolled in an education program at university, planning to apply to graduate school to become a counselling psychologist. I wanted to work with children who were experiencing difficulty in their home lives.

One evening, when my husband and I were at his ball practice, he hit a fly ball out of the park, and it struck the windshield of a car, shattering it. The driver was not in the car, so we left a note explaining what had happened and giving our contact information for follow-up.

The owners of the car were very angry (although they had been parked in a no-parking zone, probably because of its proximity to the ball diamond) and threatened to sue my husband. As both my husband and I were attending school at the time, we were relatively poor and the thought of facing a legal battle terrified us.

I had a summer job working with legal documents at the local university, and I began to research this kind of issue. The more I looked into my rights and the situation we were in, the more knowledgeable I became.

Ultimately, I wrote a letter to the car owners, explaining the legal issues relevant to this incident. In the long run, after the incident was satisfactorily resolved, I changed my ambition and decided to become a lawyer. I applied to law school, got accepted and graduated with a law degree three years later.

Now, as a practicing lawyer, I try to put myself in the position of injured clients when they first arrive in my office. I remember the feelings of upset and helplessness I felt in thinking about being sued. I recognize that there are strong and not always reasonable emotions that arise in incidents of property damage. The broken windshield incident, although unpleasant and very stressful, ultimately led me in a whole new direction and provided me with the tools to succeed in my career.

The critical incident piece will **differ from the autobiographical essay** in these ways:

- It does not tell your entire life story.
- It does not need to be written chronologically.
- It will focus on connecting, analyzing, and interpreting your life's critical learning incident.
- It will present a high-level, directed view of one incident.
- It will pull together the past, present, and future.

How the assessors will use your critical incident essay

Your essay will help assessors understand how you draw meaning from your experience. Writing this piece gives **you** a chance to extract your most significant experience and to bring it forward in a concise and coherent way. It allows you to set the tone for how you want the assessors to consider you as a learner.

Why the critical incident essay is optional

Critical incident essays can be challenging. They are difficult to write because they require a lot of thought, organization, and may touch on a sensitive subject. They expand upon information briefly presented in other ways within the portfolio. Not everyone will choose to write such a piece. You will not be penalized for not writing one. The advantage this essay may offer is case specific and can be discussed with your mentor.

Taking the time to write such a piece can help you think deeply about your life and about how or why you became the person you are.



Step 5: Demonstrating your learning by writing learning statements

The **learning statements are the heart of the portfolio**. Assessors consider these learning claims to determine the breadth and depth of the knowledge you are demonstrating.

To create learning statements, you will first re-examine your experiential learning as identified in [Step 2](#). You will organize those experiences into clusters that match up with **prescribed course outcomes or program criteria**.

You will then develop learning statements that express your experiential learning using a prescribed statement format. Your statements will evolve over time throughout multiple draft stages. Within each draft stage, your mentor will provide resources and guidance to help you further your understanding of statement development and expand on your presentation.

Learning statement development forms the bulk of work required to complete a PLAR portfolio. This step requires careful reflection, consideration and will be a learning process in and of itself.

Be prepared to take time to construct strong learning statements that showcase your knowledge to your advantage. This will help you maximize your potential for gaining credit through the PLAR process.



Course-based versus Program-based portfolios

Learning statements are presented differently for **course-based** portfolios than for **program-based** portfolios. Our staff will affirm which kind of portfolio your program requires.

- For a **course-based portfolio**, you will use competency worksheet(s), as demonstrated in [Appendix A](#).
- For a **program-based portfolio**, you will use the learning summary worksheet specific to your program, as demonstrated in [Appendix B](#).

Your mentor will provide you with the template you will use to populate your statements.

Background: the importance of learning statements

The term “**prior learning**” with respect to our PLAR portfolio encompasses learning acquired informally, such as through work or life experiences. Prior learning is often referred to as **experiential learning**.

Experiential learning may be best defined as “*learning in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied.*” This direct contact differentiates experiential learning from “*learning in which the learner only reads about, or writes about, these realities but never comes in contact with them as part of the learning process.*” (Keeton, M. & Tate, P, 1978)³.

The phrase “**prior learning assessment**” conveys several ideas:

- It emphasizes that **learning, not experience**, is eligible to be assessed. One of the central tenets of prior learning assessment is that credit is awarded for learning only - not for the experience from which learning was derived.
- The process focuses on learning gained **outside and before** the student entered Athabasca University.
- It indicates that the learning must be expressed in such a way that it can be **assessed** or measured formally. Much of the portfolio development process will involve learning to express your prior learning in a particular way that makes it possible for others (faculty assessors) to evaluate the depth, breadth, and content of what you really know or know how to do.

Written assessments are widely used in educational settings. Examples include written tests, essays, and portfolios. Written assessments are particularly useful in evaluating skills and knowledge.

At Athabasca University, we believe that articulating what you know in a written form is an essential skill for success in both higher education and the professional realm. For this reason, our prior learning portfolio is a **written assessment process**.



³ Keeton, M., & Tate, P. (1978). Learning by Experience – What, Why, How. *New direction for experiential learning* (Vol. 1). London: Jossey-Bass.

Developing your learning statements

Once you identify the learning gained from your experience, you will translate this information into **learning statements** within your learning summary. Learning statements are clear, succinct, yet descriptive statements of your prior learning, articulated in precise language that describes your learning, skills, and competencies as they relate to specific educational objectives.

Learning can occur at various levels of complexity. For example, you may have some knowledge about economics. At a basic level, you may understand the law of supply and demand. At a more complex level, you may be able to discuss current economic trends and analyse the current economic picture in various countries.

Familiarize yourself with the **course learning outcomes** or **program criteria** that you will be required to address in your learning statements.

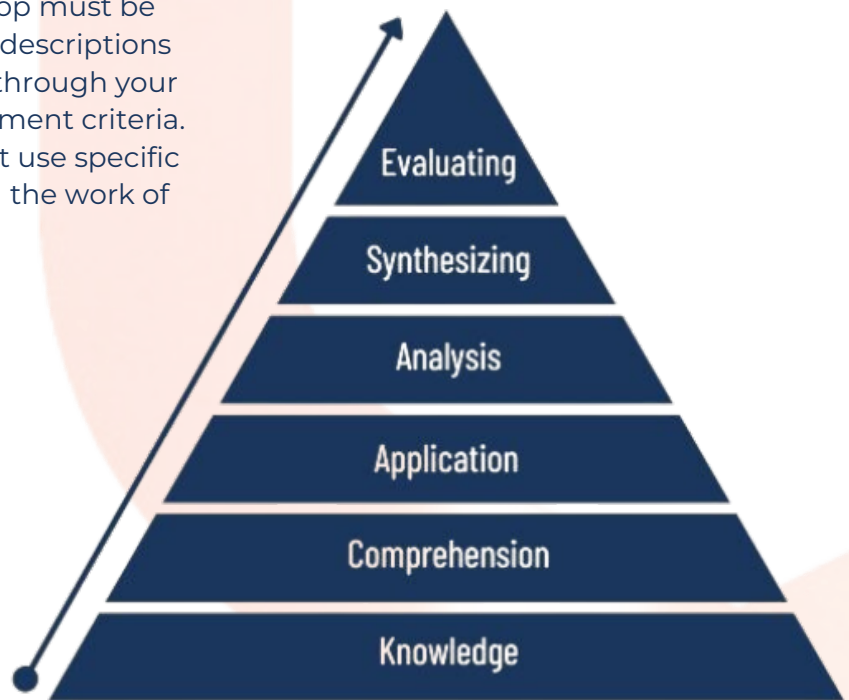
An example of a **course competency worksheet** is presented in [Appendix A](#) of this handbook. Within a course-based portfolio, you will address the prescribed learning outcomes for each course in individual worksheets.

An example of a **program assessment sheet** is presented in [Appendix C](#) of this handbook. For students in that example program, those criteria are guidelines for demonstrating your learning and the marking rubric for the assessment.

Bloom's taxonomy

The learning statements you develop must be descriptive, succinct, and accurate descriptions of directly related learning gained through your experience that address the assessment criteria. To describe your learning, you must use specific present-tense vocabulary based on the work of Benjamin Bloom.

In the 1950s, educator Benjamin Bloom developed a catalogue of various levels of learning. He published a taxonomy or classification of educational objectives, with six levels of intellectual behaviours. He also developed lists of words that describe one's depth of understanding for each level (Bloom, B.S.,1965)⁴.



⁴ Bloom, B.S. (1965). Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals. New York: McKay.

Bloom's Taxonomy Example

Bloom's taxonomy

This resource contains examples of verbs within Bloom's Taxonomy. As you work with your mentor, additional resources and guidance on verb selection will be provided.

Level 1 Knowledge (specifics, universals, abstractions)

Verbs: know, define, memorize, repeat, list, recall, name, relate

Level 2 Comprehension (translation, interpretation, extrapolation)

Verbs: restate, discuss, describe, explain, express, identify, locate, recognize, report, review

Level 3 Application

Verbs: apply, assemble, employ, illustrate, demonstrate, use, translate, practice, operate, schedule, shop

Level 4 Analysis (of elements, relationships, and organizational principles)

Verbs: distinguish, analyse, differentiate, appraise, calculate, relate, experiment, test, compare

Level 5 Synthesis (production of a plan or proposed set of operations, derivation of a set of abstract relations)

Verbs: compose, plan, propose, design, formulate, arrange, collect, construct, create, prepare, set up

Level 6 Evaluation (judgments of internal evidence and external criteria)

Verbs: judge, appraise, evaluate, rate, compare, value, revise, score, select, choose, assess, estimate, measure

As you examine the taxonomy, notice that verbs such as **name** and **know** in Level 1 describe what less sophisticated activities than **evaluate** or **judge** in Level 6. Identify the level you feel your learning aligns to and describe it accordingly.

Assessing the strength of your learning statements

The strongest learning statements satisfy **three criteria**:

1. They are stated in terms of **learning rather than of experience**. For example, if you write that you “*did business writing for 4 years,*” the readers of the portfolio could not judge what you learned from the experience.
2. They are **specific**. For example, if you write that you know *business writing principles*, your statement would distinguish your learning from learning in *other* areas, like staff supervision or editing, but it would not reveal to the readers of the portfolio **which principles you know**. Good learning statements in business writing enable the reader to distinguish your learning in that subject from knowledge of basic writing skills. From your learning statements, the reader should be able to judge, for example, whether you know **basic or advanced** business writing or whether you are a **specialist in a particular aspect** of communication such as proposal or policy writing.
3. They generalize **learning outside the context in which it was learned**. For example, you may know the personnel procedures of the company you work for. In the portfolio, you want to present this learning to the reader know whether your knowledge in this area is broad or general enough to be **useful in another company or industry**.

Example learning statements

Here are **three examples of specific, non-contextual, learning statements** for someone who wishes to express their learning in *business writing*:

- Arrange the key information points of a message by grouping them into similar themes within short paragraphs, so the flow and readability of the message is streamlined and the reader can absorb the information.
- Inspect message for consistent tone by ensuring it is not switching back and forth between formal and informal wording so the communication flows coherently.
- Create a goodwill message to staff by expressing appreciation for their efforts over the past year and affirming their good work so they feel valued and encouraged to continue their positive contributions to the team.



EXAMPLE

Exercise

Completing the following exercise will help you to understand learning statement requirements.

Note: these statements are early drafts for example purposes only. They will require further refinement to demonstrate learning at a more advanced level following the principles of statement development.

Exercise: developing effective learning statements

Read the following pairs of draft learning statements. From each pair, select the learning statement you think is stronger.

- 1. a.** Counselling both short- and long-term clients in an out-patient setting.
b. Differentiate between clients needing short- and long-term counselling to determine treatment plan.
- 2. a.** Demonstrate ability to fully utilize the computer keyboard using a variety of programs, i.e., Microsoft Word 2007; Excel; PowerPoint; Outlook 2007...
b. Knowledge of all the keys on a computer keyboard.
- 3. a.** Followed business trends through a two-year subscription to The Wall Street Journal.
b. Analyse business and market daily trends to determine their causes and how they affect the company's production and market performance.
- 4. a.** Can work with diesels as well as carbureted and fuel-injected engines.
b. Determine and apply appropriate functions of diesel, carbureted and fuel-injected engines within designed projects.





Exercise answers

- 1. Statement 'b'** gives a better sense of the purpose for the counselling and generalizes the person's knowledge. It reflects a skill that can be applied somewhere other than in an out-patient setting.
- 2. Statement 'a'** uses a Bloom's Taxonomy verb (demonstrate) to describe how the knowledge can be applied (the behaviour that shows the knowledge).
- 3. Statement 'b'** is stronger. The term "Followed" in statement 'a' describes experience, not learning.
- 4. Statement 'b'** is stronger. Statement 'a' does describe what is needed to "work with diesels," etc.

Sometimes, when a learning criterion or program goal is very factual or has the potential to be fact-laden, such as "*Interprets the evolution of the Human Services field from several viewpoints*", **your mentor** may suggest that you write a **supplemental narrative** to either replace or complement your learning statements.

The supplemental narrative is a mini essay where you explain your knowledge about the topic. It is written in essay format and needs to be concise, clear, and on-topic.

Its placement in the portfolio is important for assessors to easily find it and understand its role in demonstrating your learning.

- The title of your Supplemental Narrative must state what assessment (learning) criterion it is connected to.
- In the "Supporting Documentation" column of the competency worksheet or learning statement template, list "Supplemental Narrative" beside the affected statement and specify its location.
- The narrative should logically follow the learning statement that it is connected to. Mentors will guide you through placement of the content.

See [Appendix E](#) for an example of a supplemental narrative and its placement in a portfolio.

Step 6: Presenting documentation and verification of your learning

A key component to the PLAR process is presenting **documents that support your learning claims**.

If you **do not** have access to the necessary documentation per the support types noted below, Centre for Learning Accreditation **will not** be able to forward your portfolio for assessment.

Supporting documentation must include:

- A) Letters of attestation**, as well as other supporting documents broken down into:
- B) Primary source documentation**, and
- C) Secondary source documentation (optional).**

These are each described in more detail on the following pages.



A) Letters of attestation

Letters of attestation are letters you will seek from other people to verify your learning claims made in specific learning statements. The assessors rely heavily on these letters which must verify the learning described in the various learning statements you've assigned them. A letter of attestation is **not** a reference letter. When affirming your learning claims that you make in individual learning statements, attestors must also provide further details such as:

- mention you by your full name
- their relationship to you (e.g., employer; supervisor)
- their first-hand knowledge of the particular activity or knowledge that they are writing about
- their understanding of the duties, responsibilities, and tasks involved
- their assessment of your learning using qualifiers such as **average**, **above average**, or **exceptional**

Within their letters, attestors are also to:

- Inform CLA of their level of completed education.
- Provide examples whenever possible to illustrate the standards used to evaluate you and your performance, such as "performed at the same level as my other employees who possess a bachelor's degree".
- Place the cover letter on letter head, if possible.
- Provide assessment of your work. It is not a letter of recommendation; we are more interested in **verifying your learning** than predicting future performance.
- Sign the letter and send it directly to Centre for Learning Accreditation.

A **sample letter of attestation** is presented below.

A portfolio must include a minimum of **two** letters of attestation, without which it cannot be assessed. Submitting **three to five letters** of attestation is a good rule of thumb. Where able, it is important to have one attestor speak to several of your completed learning statements. Your mentor will advise you further on the number of letters that will benefit your portfolio. While fewer or underdeveloped letters make it difficult for assessors to get a good sense of others' opinion of your learning, **too many letters often lead to repetition and over-long portfolios.**



Sample letter of attestation

Company Letterhead

Date

Centre for Learning Accreditation
Athabasca University
plar@athabascau.ca

Attn: Learning Accreditation Director

I am pleased to write this Letter of Attestation for Bea Sweet. I have worked with her closely for eight years and know her work quality to be of the highest standard. The following is a list of learning statements provided to me by Bea and my comments on her related skills and knowledge. Please contact me if there is need for additional information or clarification on what has been written.

The attestor then outlined their extensive education and career accomplishments. In so doing, confirmed their unique ability to identify and support, or attest to, our student's experiential learning. While this information is key and required, we have opted to withhold it to safeguard the identities of both our student and the attestor.

In my current capacity for the last 8 years, I have served as the executive director of unspecified sub-entity (uSE2) which administers up to \$60,000,000 worth of mortgages for unspecified Association of Canada (uAOC) chapters from sea to sea. As the Dir of Finance for the uAOC, Bea has worked closely with me in supplying monthly financial statements. These have been both accurate and timely in their delivery. As well, Bea and I have worked on negotiating partnership agreements with businesses that are patronized by uAOC chapters and constituents. One of these partnership agreements was in search of a merchant service provider with the best service and transaction fees for donations from uAOC chapter members to their chapters. We polled all of the tier one banks across Canada. In order to do this, Bea managed an extensive spread sheet for each of the services providers. Through her work, we were able to quickly ascertain which bank best served our needs. Bea and I have just finished negotiating with a partner for mobile branded solutions for our chapters.

**The table below is for a course-based portfolio.
Tables used for program-based submissions will be slightly different.**

Learning statements (Student Provides)	Attestation (Attestor Provides)
ADMN 232 – Introduction to Management	
Create an analysis to evaluate and compare costs of various merchant service providers by comparing costs of the main banks, in order to negotiate a competitive rate for electronic donations to offer all uAOC chapters and partners.	In her role as the Dir of Finance for the unspecified Association of Canada, Bea worked with me in evaluating a variety of merchant service providers with the goal of selecting one to service our chapters for donations by constituents. In order to make an effective assessment of the six different providers, Bea formulated a comprehensive spread sheet with the different categories such as the various fees which each of the banks charged. By taking a complex issue and reducing it to the basic questions, Bea allowed us to quickly survey a multiplicity of possibilities and come up with the most advantageous option. Her research has been vindicated in the years following our decision as to which merchant service provider was the most desirable.
ADMN 233 – Writing in Organizations	
Create a logical communication piece ensuring all points are connected and relevant to the main topic being conveyed in order to relay the message in a coherent fashion.	Bea has excellent skills in formulating logical communication pieces. These pieces coherently and succinctly communicate the necessary information with the appropriate amount of necessary information.
FNCE 300 – Financial Economics	
Create a report to show management the current cash reserves by reporting the known cash inputs and outputs for the upcoming months to enable managers to make important investment decisions with surplus operational cash.	On a monthly basis, Bea formulates a summary of the cash inputs and outputs of three entities at The [unspecified] Association of Canada. These reports are formulated in a timely basis. Further, these reports are both easily understood and accurate which significantly help the three entities in making decisions.

<p>Manage the risk level management wishes to take on in the mortgage investment portfolio by establishing a set of policies and procedures to be followed outlining requirements of potential mortgagee such as: loan to value ratio; ratio of debt to cash; appraisals; and insurance requirements. These are all required when considering and entering into new mortgage contract agreements to ensure the assets of the organization are protected and at minimal risk.</p>	<p>Bea has a good knowledge of risk level management with regard to the mortgage investment portfolio. This portfolio which has risen to \$60,000,000 has not seen any losses for the myriad of investors who are largely members in uAOC chapters. This knowledge of risk level management allows her to make recommendations concerning the alteration of this policy.</p>
<p>Organize and prepare pertinent quarterly information relevant to performance of investments and areas of potential liquidity risk to enable management to quickly assess and take appropriate action where required.</p>	<p>This profitability report is provided in a timely basis each quarter. It clearly and succinctly projects liquidity risk which in turn allows decisions which are aimed at reducing this risk. The stability of the portfolio is partially a result of the accuracy of these profitability reports.</p>

In summary, I feel that I can speak to Bea Sweet's skills, knowledge, and work personality in a fair and objective manner. As evidenced by this letter, her work is of superb quality. Her positive contributions to the organization and her longstanding commitment to helping people achieve their potential make her an ideal employee.

Please contact me if you require any other information.

Sincerely,

John Smith

John Smith

B) Primary source documentation

Primary source documents are items you have **written, developed, or created either on your own or in collaboration with others**. Good documents to consider include emails, memos, manuals (sections from), strategic plans, PowerPoint presentations, brochures, newsletters, and more.

If your supporting documentation does not name you as author or contributor, it must be accompanied by a **statement of purpose (SOP)** form. Your mentor will provide further guidelines on this task where needed.

The following guidelines apply to submitting finished products with SOP forms:

- Any media item should be a short segment (three minutes or less) showing a particular learning or skill.
- The SOP form accompanying the product will include the date, the topic, and additional context outlining the alignment of the document to the criterion or outcome and specifying your role.
- You must be prepared to present the original product upon request.

Primary source documentation also includes reports, fiction or non-fiction writing, or anything else that you may have created, that demonstrates your learning according to the criteria you are addressing.

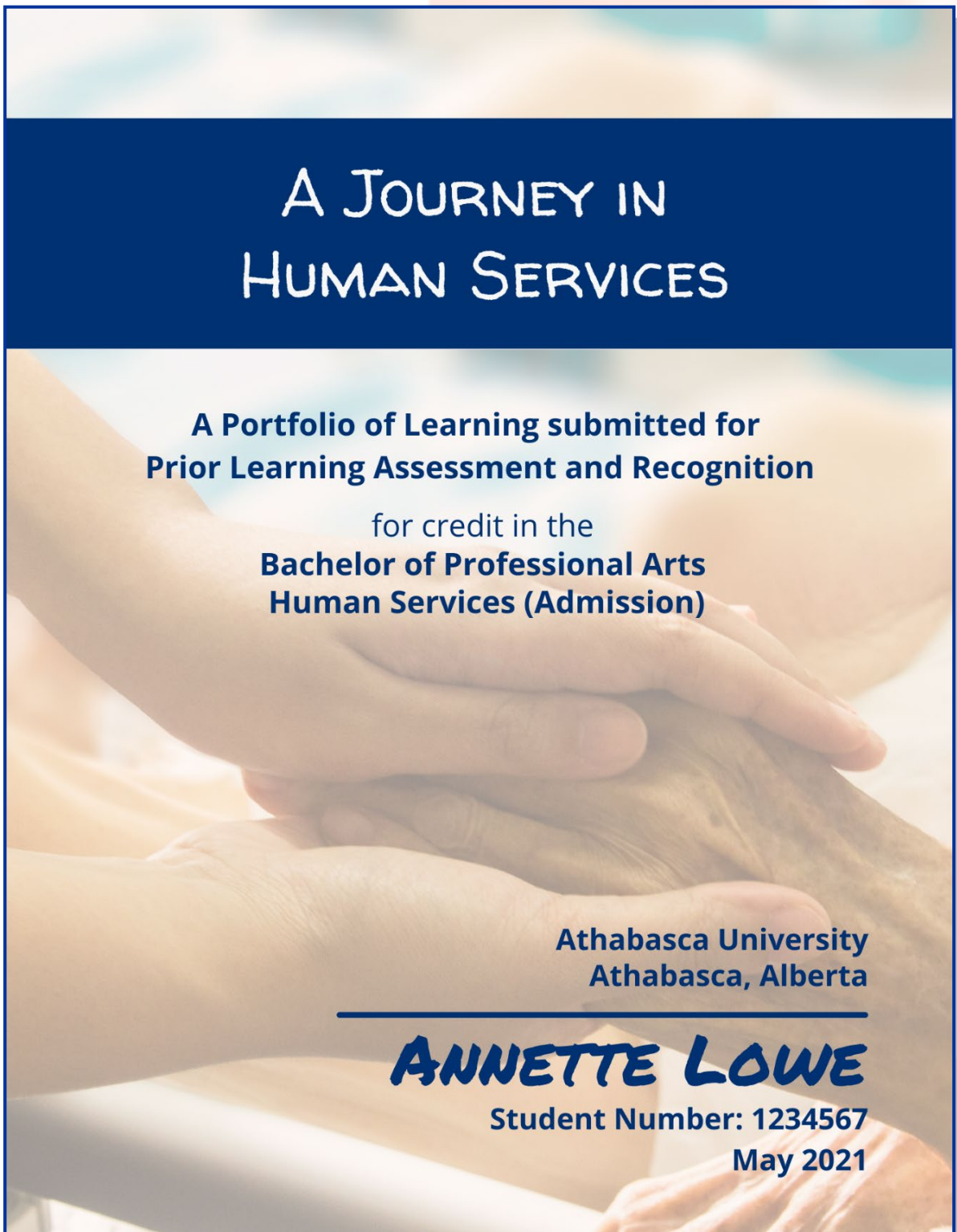
C) Secondary source documentation

Secondary source documents do not speak directly to your learning though they may hold an important role. Documents in this category can include certificates, manuals (sections from), performance evaluations, resource material, and more. They should be used sparingly. Your mentor will help you decide which of these to include.



Step 7: Creating a cover and declaration page

You may or may not choose to include a cover page. If you include one, it should be shaped similarly the sample shown below.



Sample cover page

Declaration Page

A declaration page is required. This is the last document you will create and add to your e-Portfolio contents. It will reflect the date your portfolio is submitted. A declaration page template is available for your use on our [PLAR documents and resources page](#).

Portfolio Declaration Page

Name: _____ Student ID: _____

Address: _____ Telephone: _____

Email: _____

**A submission for the awarding of credit through
Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)**

for: _____
(Name of your Program)

**Athabasca University
1 University Drive
Athabasca AB T9S 3A3**

I attest that the enclosed portfolio materials are correct and have been completed by myself. I attest that I am the person named in this application and in the portfolio materials unless otherwise signified.

Upon submission of this portfolio for assessment, I agree to make no changes, additions, or deletions to portfolio documents or organization during assessment and for a minimum of three months after receiving the assessment results.

Signature*: _____ Date: _____

*Typing your name is acceptable as a signature

Step 8: Assembling your portfolio

You have some flexibility in choosing how to assemble your portfolio, but you have only one chance to make a good impression on assessors who do not know you. How your material is presented is important. The pre-set structure of our e-Portfolio mirrors the most popular style of portfolio organization as it is described below. This is demonstrated in our [sample student e-Portfolios](#).

To help the assessors easily move through your contents, documents in your portfolio should be:

- double-spaced for easy reading (required for essay(s) only)
- checked for spelling, grammar, and punctuation (not applicable to supports)
- neat, clear, and concise
- organized in a logical, chronological way (i.e., most recent to earliest material)
- formatted in an organized and accessible way
- clearly labelled with tabs separating different documentation

Our primary portfolio submission type is the **e-Portfolio**. Alternative submission routes must be negotiated with your mentor.

Step 9: Creating the table of contents (TOC)

This is a tool you will create to guide you through referencing and naming your portfolio documents. Each document, starting with the resume, must have a “tab number” within the Table of Contents.

This tool will also help your mentor to review the documentation.

You will not be uploading your TOC to the e-Portfolio. The structure of the e-Portfolio itself acts as your TOC. However, a TOC must be developed and shared with your mentor during portfolio preparation. Do not adjust your TOC after it has been approved without further consulting your mentor.

A sample TOC for a program-based portfolio is presented on the following page.

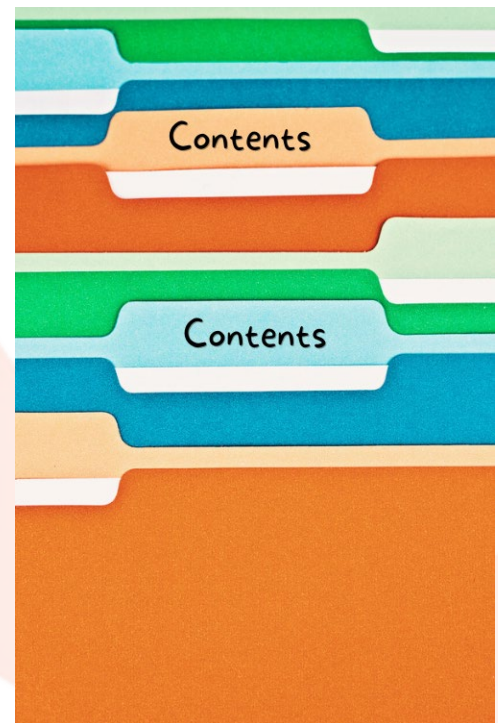


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Secondary Source Documents

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Capilano College WCB appeal course certificate Tab 18

Step 10: Reviewing and submitting your portfolio

Before submitting your portfolio, do a **final review of all documents** to ensure:

- spelling, grammar, and punctuation (except for supports)
- consistency of style
- sections are in order
- supporting documents are consistently named and tabbed throughout
- all documents named in your TOC are present and accounted for
- CLA confidentiality requirements are adhered to with necessary redactions applied
- you have signed the declaration page
- a recent copy of your DegreeWorks worksheet is included
- you have confirmation from your mentor that all contents are in order



e-Portfolio submission:

You will be asked to provide your mentor with your “secret url” to allow for final review and approval for submission.

***Alternative submission routes** must be negotiated with your mentor.

PLAR for post-secondary teaching experience

You may apply for PLAR for learning acquired through experience as a post-secondary teacher. This process, which differs from the usual portfolio-based PLAR process, is outlined in the [PLAR for post-secondary teaching form](#).

Note: This process is not applicable to most students. CLA staff will help to determine if this process meets your needs or if an alternative approach is needed.



Portfolio assessment

When your portfolio is submitted to AU's Centre for Learning Accreditation, it will be reviewed for completeness and then distributed to **the assessors**.

The assessors will then review and score your portfolio without consulting with one another. Where multiple assessors are involved, their average scores will become your final score. This final score will guide the assignment of eligible credits where applicable toward your program. More information on this scoring process is provided in [Appendix C](#) below.

When the assessors have completed their assessment, CLA will:

- Receive and compile the assessors' comments and your assigned scores in a letter stating the outcome of the PLAR process.
- Consult with the Office of the Registrar to confirm award placement which may include credits that are deemed extra to the program.
- Receive affirmation that PLAR credit has been applied to the student record as able.
- Send copies of the letter to you, the Registrar, the assessors, and the chair of your academic program.

Following completion of this process, you may appeal the outcome of the assessment. Contact Centre for Learning Accreditation's director at plar@athabascau.ca to enquire about the appeal procedure.



Sample assessor feedback

Review the following **sample comments from assessors** to gain an idea of the types of qualities assessors are looking for in a portfolio:

- The student demonstrated his client-centered approach and mastery of the delicate balance between advocacy for clients and upholding the legislation and agency's policies.
- The portfolio was clearly written and organized.
- This student is an excellent candidate for PLAR and for this degree. Clearly her extensive and varied experience in human services has generated vast learning in this field.
- I especially appreciated the supporting documentation section that used strongly descriptive titles to indicate what the "inventory of evidence" contained. Rather than being a "collection of stuff" it provided clear evidence of his learning.
- The student shows a steady progression from non-Human Resources (HR) related occupations into a HR professional at a long-term care center. Her portfolio demonstrates direct experience with a number of HR functions, including recruitment and selection, grievances and union-management relations, and performance management.
- While the student shows considerable work in the area of strategic planning within policing, missing from this was the application of current concerns facing police services that could have situated his learning within a broader framing. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement that began in 2014 as well as the introduction of procedural justice and police legitimacy research since the early 2000s—both continuing to have considerable influence on policing today—were not discussed or mentioned within the context of planning. These are central issues that go beyond policing and speak to criminal justice processes and policies more broadly that would have been great to have seen included (or any other broader factors that could be linked to the decision making and policies adopted by the police services he has worked for).
- The narrow occupational setting of this student's Human Resources (HR) experience – a single employer in the health care sector – does pose some limitations to learning assessment. While there is no doubt her experience has been rich and rewarding, the lack of diversity in her experiences detract from her learning as she cannot speak to how HR is practiced in other contexts (different sectors, non-union environment, etc.). While the scope of her responsibilities has increased over time, there continue to be important aspects of HR that her portfolio does not demonstrate, such as higher-level policy-setting or strategic planning. The portfolio is heavy with practical experience. This is important, without a doubt, but missing is reflection on how practice links with theory and consideration of how the two interact.

Hints from assessors to help you

Our assessors provide these suggestions about what makes a good portfolio:

- Learners need to ensure that they understand what it means to **demonstrate** and what counts as providing **sufficient evidence** to illustrate the learning that they have.
- Content within each section should be **new** and **relevant** to the issue at hand. Avoid the “tell-everything-hoping-something-sticks” approach.
- Applicants need to find a balance in their autobiographical essays between providing **relevant information** concerning their personal development and providing lengthy descriptions of events of questionable relevance. If applicants think such information is relevant, then they need to demonstrate **why**.



Program guidance from assessors

Here are samples of program completion and future educational suggestions which assessors have provided:

- This student would benefit from courses to broaden his view of the field. Having worked in one agency/service area so long has benefited his in-depth learning. Courses in human services-policy and theories could help broaden it.
- I would encourage the student to consider an independent research course that could allow him to explore an area of study in more depth.
- The student’s life experiences, formal study and employment provide her with insights of great value to her program learning goals. More broad-ranging social theory will provide a stronger foundation upon which to build her ideas about how meaning and direction can be planned for as her career advances.
- The student shows good evidence of professionalism and understanding of ethics. The required philosophy courses in her program should round out that understanding.
- The student is very good on the practical side and insightful on largely pragmatic grounds. Now, she should pursue a theory focus, which will lead toward deeper understanding of policy and the issues that drive it.

Appendix A

**Competency worksheet for course-based learning portfolios
(with sample completed worksheet)**



Using a similar template, you will identify the course outcomes to which you are writing and develop learning statements that align with the stated outcomes.

Competency worksheet for _____ (course title)			
Course learning outcomes	Learning statements	Origin of Learning	Supporting documentation
<p>Access the course learning outcomes from the CLA website and list the outcomes that you are applying learning to here.</p> <p>Hint: Gather as much information as possible about the content of the course. Start with the online course descriptions.</p>	<p>Learning statements form the core of the portfolio. The language and detail you use here will show the assessors what you know.</p> <p>Guidance on how to prepare effective statements will be provided once you are assigned to a mentor.</p>	<p>Include a brief location and time range of where the learning occurred. A location and date can be used more than once throughout your competency worksheets.</p>	<p>Name supporting documentation that provides evidence of the learning you have claimed. Use tabs and cross-referencing to make your supporting documentation easily accessible to the assessors.</p>

Sample:

Competency worksheet for ADMN 233: Writing in Organizations			
Course learning outcomes	Learning statements	Origin of learning	Supporting documentation
Apply a systematic process to plan, organize and revise business messages.	Determine the purpose of the message by defining what the reader needs to know and understand so the message will be delivered with clarity and completeness.	uAOC 200#-Present	TAB 7 Email to staff dated Jan /## re: uAS challenges
	Arrange the key information points of a message by grouping them into similar themes within short paragraphs to help the flow and readability of the message.	uAOC 200#-Present	TAB 7 Email to staff dated Jan /## re: uAS challenges
	Compose a concise message by sticking to the point being made and keeping it brief in order to bring the intent of the message to the forefront of the communication and to respect the reader's time to review the message.	uAOC 200#-Present	TAB 8 Email dated Sept /## to Kxxxx: Gift in Kind receipting

Appendix B

**Learning summary worksheet for program-based learning portfolios
(with sample completed worksheet)**



Using a similar template, you will identify the criteria to which you are writing and develop learning statements that aligns with the stated criteria.

Learning competency from Assessment Scoring Sheet			
Learning criteria (From program criteria table, 0-10)	Learning statements	Origin of learning	Supporting documentation
In this column you will organize your learning according to the different pre-determined outcomes of your program by selecting the outcomes that your learning can support.	<p>Learning statements form the core of the portfolio. The language and detail you use here will show the assessors what you know.</p> <p>Guidance on how to prepare effective statements will be provided once you are assigned to a mentor.</p>	Identify the place and time of the learning. Any location or date can be used more than once in your competency worksheets.	Name supporting documentation that provides evidence of the learning you have claimed. Use tabs and cross-referencing to make your supporting documentation easily accessible to the assessors.

Sample

Learning competency: Policy and policy development			
Learning criteria	Learning Statements	Origin of learning	Supporting documentation
Interprets policy and its context for its contribution to issues, decision-making, and the profession	Explore options for program development leading to greater independence by proposing income generating activities that fall within the parent organization's intrinsic capacity in order to identify solutions to aspects hindering growth while guiding our group in a direction beneficial to all stakeholders.	Yxxx Canada November 20## - Present	Tab 9 Letter to Yxxx Canada Board of Directors
	Provide quality patient care while exemplifying organizational values by framing my professional practice with protocol driven treatment that embodies the principles of empathy and compassion in order to improve confidence on behalf of patients and their families while supporting the advancement of the healthcare system as a whole.	Provincial Health Services April 20## - Present	Tab 8 Letter of Attestation: Lxxx Bxxx Tab 23 Letter for PHS Funding
	Exemplify organizational values by interpreting new initiatives, integrating new protocols and mentoring new employees in order to promote the advancement of the emergency medical services.	Provincial Health Services April 20## - Present	Tab 8 Letter of Attestation: Lxxx Bxxx Tab 23 Letter for PHS Funding

Appendix C

**Sample program assessment sheets
criteria for developing learning statements
(with notes)**



Athabasca University
 Centre for Learning Accreditation
Bachelor of Professional Arts - Governance, Law & Management
PLAR maximum - 30 program credits

Name of applicant: _____

Name of Assessor: _____

DIRECTIONS FOR ASSESSORS: For each factor in the left column, please enter the number which most nearly describes the applicant as shown by the material submitted in the column marked 'score'. Each score assumes all abilities of lower scores.

Please make every effort to score with a number. Only if there is no applicable material would you score "0" for "No opportunity to observe".

For Section A, below, the breadth of knowledge of the governance, law and management field includes theory of legal and social policy and knowledge on innovation and leadership in administration and management in public, voluntary, and non profit sectors. This interdisciplinary program also includes relevant theoretical backgrounds from history, politics, sociology, psychology and economics.

For Section B below, "the discipline" or "the field" refers to content described above.

Scoring Grid	0	1 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 6	7 - 8	9 - 10	SCORE
A. Demonstration of Content and Knowledge							
I. Breadth and depth of knowledge of program content, see above*	Not demonstrated	Acceptable level of knowledge related to the discipline. Shows basic understanding of program content*.	Demonstrates some specialization of disciplinary knowledge with evidence of reading and/or research beyond the basic level.	Demonstrates ability to apply disciplinary knowledge in real situations.	Demonstrates ability to hypothesize and/or apply complex models with discipline	Sophisticated level of knowledge permits critical assessment of subject matter and/or development of field, applicable principles or models.	
II. Understanding of theory/concepts related to program content, see above*	Not demonstrated	Acceptable level of familiarity with relevant theories, principles and concepts used in the field*.	Understands and can apply theories, principles and concepts to hypothetical situations.	Demonstrates ability to apply theories, principles and concepts to real world designs, purposes, or projects	Demonstrates ability to choose among appropriate theories and make appropriate decisions based on theory and principle.	Monitors and assesses developments, behaviours, and changes in the field based on theoretical understanding; develops theory where appropriate.	

Scoring Grid	0	1 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 6	7 - 8	9 - 10	SCORE
III. Policy and policy development	Not demonstrated	Understands and is aware of the role of policy and their importance to the field	Describes and distinguishes among policies relative to need	Demonstrates ability to use policy and/or policy frameworks as a professional tool .	Demonstrates thorough understanding of the role of policy and its contribution to issues, decision-making, and the profession	Interacts with others or spearheads policy implementation, development or change	
B. Essential Process and Application Skills							
IV. Critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making	Not demonstrated	Demonstrates awareness of essential elements of critical thinking and the need for problem-solving and decision-making	Demonstrates a grasp of the tools, mechanisms, and processes of critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making	Analyzes situations with some consistency and demonstrates growing confidence in applying thinking and decision-making tools	Exhibits ability to recognize dilemmas, ambiguity, and a range of problems; proposes a variety of solutions	Monitors and assesses developments, behaviours, and changes in the field based on theoretical understanding; develops theory where appropriate	
V. Communication skills/Capacity to disseminate knowledge	Not demonstrated	Writes in relation to the discipline in a clear, informed and constructive way	Uses disciplinary knowledge to express self competently in order to facilitate understanding	Demonstrates organized, sound, and systematic written work related to the discipline	Demonstrates consistently sound writing	Demonstrates ability to write persuasively about discipline-related matters, to synthesize thoughts, and to effectively disseminate knowledge within and about the field	
VI. Professionalism and ethical practice	Not demonstrated	Demonstrates sound understanding of appropriate discipline-related practice and ethics	Applies knowledge of professional environment and related organizational structures in a conscious and ethical manner	Demonstrates appropriate use of authority and knowledge of profession to achieve goals	Demonstrates grasp of appropriate ethical and policy considerations	Exhibits complex judgments based on professionalism and ethical understanding of field	
VII. Working independently and/or in teams	Not demonstrated	Demonstrates ability to complete tasks under supervision as a junior team member to to work independently with supervision	Demonstrates understanding of potential of working collaboratively and contributes to team success	Brings enthusiasm to team roles and/or works independently with limited supervision	Frequently and successfully acts on own initiative and/or contributes to team success by mentoring or acting in leadership role	Provides formal team leadership, assessment of team skills, team training, or exhibits ability to complete complex tasks autonomously with little supervision	

Scoring Grid	0	1 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 6	7 - 8	9 - 10	SCORE
VIII. Planning, organizing and executing projects	Not demonstrated	Demonstrates basic planning, organizing, management skills in response to problems/projects identified by others	Can identify need for problems/projects and plan or organize for them appropriately	Develops and/or implements effective planning procedures for most situations	Facilitates project organization through team participation and /or partial or shared leadership	Provides formal leadership for project plan or implementation and assumes responsibility for success, troubleshooting, and alternate plans	
IX. Leadership and supervisory ability	Not demonstrated	Ability to follow and/or give directions with supervision; will exercise or take limited responsibility	Takes responsibility for self and subordinates; seeks leadership opportunities and engages in training opportunities	Demonstrates leadership abilities and is committed to growing in leadership / supervisory potential	Is assigned to/creates leadership and mentorship roles; self-directs toward learning opportunities	Engages in organizational policy and vision-related activities; manages leadership responsibilities (recruitment, assessment, succession, resource management); initiates change; engages in high-level professional activities beyond the organization	
X. Self and professional development	Not demonstrated	Participates in some appropriate workshops and seminars; demonstrates familiarity with professional literature	Membership in professional organizations; broad familiarity with professional literature; established participation in professional development activities	Initiates self-development activities; understands place of professional in larger context	Is guided by long range learning and/or professional development goals; contributes to organization of professional development activities in the workplace / field organization	Assumes leadership role in profession; teaches, mentors or models professional activity within the field; works toward developing the profession within society	

Note: the total base score and percent score will automatically calculate. Please choose the appropriate credit award from the chart below:

Max - 30 credits
92 - 100% = 30 credits
82 - 91% = 27 credits
73 - 81% = 24 credits
64 - 72% = 21 credits
55 - 63% = 18 credits
46 - 54% = 15 credits
37 - 45 % = 12 credits
28 - 36% = 9 credits
19 - 27% = 6 credits
10 - 18% = 3 credits
0 - 9% = 0 credits

Total base score	0
Total possible score	100
Percent score	0%
Credit Award	

<--- See chart of credits <---

ASSESSORS PLEASE NOTE – Please take the time to fill in and submit the Assessors’ Response Sheet as well.

Your comments and recommendations are key to providing good advice to students and placing credits accurately on transcripts.

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (Alberta). All records and Personal Information (as defined in the Act) received, collected, created, used, disclosed and disposed of by Athabasca University as a result of this document are subject to the provisions of this Act.

Notes on the Assessment Scoring Sheet

This information is provided to help you understand the assessors' scoring process.

- The left-hand column of the sample scoring sheet lists the competency categories of the AU program.
- Assessors will independently review your submission for documentation (proof) of your learning claims.
- Assessors will assign numerical weight to your documented and verified prior learning against each listed competency category for the program. From left to right on the Assessment Scoring Sheet the boxes describe levels of learning within each competency categories.
- Assessors score your material 0 to 10 for each category. A score of 0 means the assessors found that the competency was “not demonstrated” through the material presented within your portfolio.
- If you submit no evidence of knowledge or skill aligned with a competency, the assessors must give you a score of 0. If, on the other hand, you submit evidence to show you have advanced and complex knowledge, skill and experience in a competency category, they will likely give you 9 or 10 points.
- A score of 1 usually means “limited experience” related to the program.” A score of 10 usually means “outstanding, exemplary, near perfection, unusually insightful”.
- When you prepare your portfolio material, you must demonstrate how your prior learning specifically proves you have knowledge or skill related to the competency in question. You may not get many university credits if you do not do this. Being able to tie your abilities, experience, and knowledge to the competency categories is essential.

Appendix D

Learning contract



Learning Contract

To assist you in the successful completion of your PLAR portfolio

What is a learning contract?

Learning contracts serve as an important tool in many types of learning experiences. Jointly negotiated by learner and provider (mentor, teacher, or facilitator), the learning contract provides a structure for the intended learning, including allusions to timeline, content, and process. Learning contracts should be signed off by both parties and amended, in the same way, as appropriate.

Learning contracts were popularized by Malcolm Knowles' work on adult learning and contribute to mature learners' ability to maintain self-direction in their learning. They give learners the opportunity to both think about and control their learning process, which the preparation of a PLAR portfolio is part of.

Because the portfolio is a "developmental" or "generative" document that will grow over time, the learning contract approach provides a useful framework and roadmap for its construction.

Why will a learning contract be useful to me now?

The PLAR portfolio is a detailed piece of work that will take you some time to prepare. We cannot predict how long it will take you as that depends on how much energy you devote to it and how much time you can spend working on it. Most learners approach the portfolio on a part-time basis while continuing with other life, work, and academic commitments. We feel that the learning contract can help serve as guideline for time management, thus ensuring successful completion and eventual assessment of prior learning knowledge toward your degree program at AU.

How does it work?

You and your CLA mentor will agree on terms for the completion of your portfolio in a collaborative manner. We will begin by sending you this learning contract that has been prepared for you outlining the different parts of the agreement that we can put forward. You will complete the form with the parts of the learning agreement that are under your control. Together, you and your mentor will agree that the learning contract contains the correct information. The completed learning contract will form the basis for your engagement with CLA as you work on your portfolio.

What if the learning contract needs to be changed?

Things change, plans change, life gets in the way. When it is clear to the learner or mentor that the contact needs revisiting, either can initiate a re-drafting of terms.

Learning Contract

Between _____
(Learner)

and _____
(AU mentor)

for the purpose of completing a learning portfolio for PLAR assessment at Athabasca University.

Part 1: Learner's commitment to product

I will complete the following tasks related to my portfolio:

Task:

Estimated date of completion:

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Write a narrative autobiography* | _____ |
| 2. Write other front-end pieces* | _____ |
| 3. Submit preparatory draft of learning statements* | _____ |
| 4. Discuss progress to date with mentor* | _____ |
| 5. Submit first mini-draft of learning statements | _____ |
| 6. Submit second mini-draft of learning statements | _____ |
| 7. Submit first full draft of learning statements | _____ |
| 8. Submit second full draft of learning statements | _____ |
| 9. Project portfolio completion date | _____ |

**Initial timing suggested by mentor*

Part 2: Learner's and mentor's commitment to process

As an engaged learner:

Learner initials:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. I will strive to honour my timeline. | _____ |
| 2. I will let my mentor know when I cannot meet my targets. | _____ |
| 3. I will review assigned webinars. | _____ |
| 4. I will ensure portfolio requirements are met, as outlined in the PLAR parts and requirements resource . | _____ |

As an engaged mentor:

Mentor initials:

- 5. I will honour the time and energy that learners can invest in the PLAR process.
- 6. I will respect the learner’s request to revise the learning contract.
- 7. Throughout the portfolio preparation process, I will advise learners of my concerns if the portfolio does not meet requirements.

Part 3: Signatures

Please note: Typing your name in the signature line below will be considered equivalent to signing a hard copy of this document.

Learner signed: _____

Date: _____

CLA Director signed: _____

Date: _____

Conversation checklist

During the scheduled conversation (see above), we will discuss any or all of these topics. Other topics may also be raised by either mentor or learner.

- 1. Method(s) of contact
- 2. Student status (at AU)
- 3. Nature of learning statements (Use preparatory draft submission to review the importance of learning statements, their format, and the process of development)
- 4. Supporting documentation
 - a. Letters of attestation (where to start, process)
 - b. Primary and Secondary Source documentation
 - c. Other elements of supporting documentation (such as statement of purpose forms)
- 5. Review portfolio checklist
- 6. Timeline
 - a. Negotiate dates/portfolio completion date
 - b. Establish renegotiation process
- 7. Questions? Concerns?

Appendix E

Example use of supplemental narrative

The following pages show 2 samples of learning statement summaries where a Supplemental Narrative is included. The supplemental narrative example is provided at the end of the category and reference to the narrative is stated in the “supporting documentation” column. Note that the title of the supplemental narrative connects it to the preceding criteria.

Example 1: use of supplemental narrative

#3: Nurtures Value-Based Learning: Uses Values to Guide Theory and Practice			
Learning Criteria	Learning Statements	Origin of Learning	Supporting Documentation
Promotes values and ethics in self, colleagues and clientele	Compose information promoting the continuation of prior vision, mission, and values of the organization to staff and tenants so it is clear that the founding values continue to guide services within the new facility.	The Care Centre 2004 – 2009	Tab 6
	Measure how well I lead and am able to maintain my values and ethics in work by following my personal motto, “lead by example in all things in all ways” so staff understand that what is expected of them is also expected at the management level.	The Care Centre 2004 – 2009	Supplemental Narrative (following)
	Measure staff morale and job satisfaction by surveying staff annually using key performance areas and benchmarks to identify areas of challenge and success to promote ethical practice in care giving and in teamwork.	The JH Home 1990 - 2004	Tab 8 Tab 10
	Develop an employee appreciation and recognition program with the involvement of all team members in order to lessen divisions between departments, foster team building and cooperation, reinforce the values and mission of the organization and boost morale.	The JH Home 1990 - 2004	Tab 8 Tab 10
	Evaluate the effectiveness of annual staff appreciation recognition events by requesting and then comparing participant	The JH Home 1990 - 2004	Tab 8

	<p>responses, including recommendations for future events so that staff continue to shape the event, which generates continued interest and involvement.</p>		<p>Tab 10</p>
--	--	--	---------------

Supplemental Narrative to Preceding Learning Statement

(Promotes values and ethics in self, colleagues and clientele)

In the late fall of 2004 I was involved in the opening of The Care Centre. During the course of 4 days we transferred 205 residents and 60% of the staff from the JH Home to the Care Centre. When the organization became established, we realized that we needed to implement a new culture that incorporated the history of both the JH Home and the old Care Centre Hospital. The Care Centre Hospital was closed and renovated to accommodate Long Term Care. The Health System conducted a strategic planning session that steered the Care Centre on a path to create a new culture. In order to start the development of the Care Centre we realized that first we needed to set the foundation through the vision, mission and values statement.

I was elected the chair for this committee and set the structure and timeline for the completion of the document. Working on the vision, mission and values document for the Care Centre allowed me to delve deeply into the roots of the organization. As the point person I was instrumental in the development and critical review of the final document. During this process I was able to work collaboratively with the senior team at the Care Centre to ensure that the roots of the founding Catholic Sisters were well established in the final document. The Sisters are deeply rooted in caring for the marginal and providing for the needy, while supporting the staff, residents and family. This is the basis for the care that we provide and challenges us to maintain this level of excellence in our care today.

This process allowed me to look at ethics and values in a very personal way. I continue to incorporate the statement in the policies and procedures that I write for the Care Centre and am able to measure their success in the appropriate following of the policies. Being a part of the team who built the foundation allows me to ensure that the residents’ rights are considered and respected in everything we do, from recreation and therapy to nursing and personal care. I believe this is the key to our successful care giving and positive response from both staff and families. I am able to set up an environment of open discussion with families, residents and staff to foster relationships and build trust in the team.

In presenting the mission, vision and value statements to staff, residents and families through presentations, in-servicing, distributing flyers and posting framed copies throughout the organization. We were able to incorporate them as a part of the fabric of the facility. This allows us to refer easily to our values and encourage people to “walk the walk”.

Example 2: use of supplemental narrative

#9 Knows History of and Breadth of the Sector of Human Services: Demonstrates Familiarity with the History and Evolution of the Human Services Along with Several of its Fields			
Learning Criteria	Learning Statements	Origin of Learning	Supporting Documentation
Interprets the evolution of the Human Services field from several viewpoints	Translate a strong working knowledge of the Human Services Sector through work experience in the evolution and refinements in diagnosis and understanding of dementia as a disease. Illustrate an understanding that care plans must be tailored to individual clients in order to best care for each client reducing medication and providing dignified care.	The Care Centre 2004 – 2009	Supplemental Narrative (following)
	Distinguish developments in care practices by diagramming the overlap in care requirements regardless of patients’ age, physical or developmental strengths and challenges so others can visualize how each life stage and individual health status brings with them complex, and sometimes multiple medical issues that impact growth and recovery.	The JH Home 1990 - 2004	Tab 7 Tab 8 Tab 10
	Recognize the importance of continuing education by comparing my current skills set to changes in health technology and legislation to improve skills and remain cognizant of changes in the field that affect policy and practice.	The JH Home 1990 - 2004	Tab 7 Tab 8 Tab 10

Supplemental Narrative to Preceding Learning Statement

(Interprets the evolution of the Human Services field from several viewpoints)

I am fortunate to have over 20 years of experience in the Human Services field. I have learned to apply a strong working knowledge of a wide variety of Human Services Sectors, including physically challenged adults, developmentally delayed children, the cognitively impaired and the aging population. My knowledge of working in these areas has evolved in many ways; from working directly with the clients in the above areas and growing to a position of supervisor of staff in the Human Service Sector to Manager and decision maker within the Human Services Sector. I also grew in my understanding of vast areas of human services by diversifying the clientele who I work with as well as being a mother of two children I am actively involved in my family's leisure, community and volunteer interests.

I continue to work collaboratively with co-workers to improve the field of Human Services for the future. I develop individualized care plans for the clients in Long Term Care in consultation with a multidisciplinary team which includes an Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Registered Nurse, Registered Practical Nurse, Dietitian, Chaplain, Physician, Social Worker, Counselor, family member and client. I evaluate effectiveness of care plan, formulate changes to improve the outcome for the client and set up opportunities for discussion with team for conferences to improve the services we are providing our clients.

Over the past 20 years I have been a part of significant change in the delivery and focus of care for the clients I have been honored to work with. There has been a significant increase in the focus of dignity in care from the past and push towards individualized needs of each person as evolved. Medication restraints have gone from acceptable regular use to use only when deemed truly necessary. Reality orientation, a program that was used in dementia clients to bring them to our reality, has shifted to validation therapy to encourage us to allow the dementia client's reality to resolve old issues and focus on their needs. In my opinion all these things have improved the care that we give and shifted the paradigm from staff focus to a much gentler client focus. Families have become an integral part of the care team that has expanded from personal care to various therapy modalities. These changes along with my constant need for improving my knowledge base in the Human Service Sector have allowed me to grow in my field and in my personal life.



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