Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) at Athabasca University

A Handbook for Preparing Portfolios
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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This handbook is designed to offer a practical, step-by-step guide to portfolio development for students wanting to acquire credit toward an Athabasca University certificate or undergraduate degree using the prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) portfolio assessment option.

Athabasca University grants university credits for prior and experiential learning through the prior learning assessment and recognition process. The number of credits available varies depending on the program selected. Those choosing the PLAR option will have their assessed credits 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 issues. Visit the CLA website at [http://priorlearning.athabascau.ca](http://priorlearning.athabascau.ca). Separate credits may be gained by credit transfers from other institutions or through challenge for credit. (Transfer credits must be completed before PLAR assessment can occur.) Visit the Registrar’s website at [https://tux.athabascau.ca/oros/jsp/welcome.jsp](https://tux.athabascau.ca/oros/jsp/welcome.jsp) for further information about these options. Program advisors (e-mail: advising@athabascau.ca) are the best source of general information about your program plans.

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 credential 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 represents a choice, and it is one of several ways to obtain credit at Athabasca University. The theory on which PLAR is based 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.

Although this handbook provides instruction on how to extract your learning from the experiences that have contributed to your learning, you are encouraged to contact the Centre for Learning Accreditation in order to begin work with a mentor. For further information about PLAR, visit the website at [http://priorlearning.athabascau.ca](http://priorlearning.athabascau.ca).

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 costs 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. PLAR is a powerful learning tool:

○ Developing a portfolio helps you to review, reflect upon and understand your experience.
○ Developing a portfolio helps you clarify goals and explain your skills and knowledge clearly to others in job applications and interviews.
○ By identifying what you know and what you want to know, a portfolio can help you decide which university courses to take.
○ Through self-reflection, you can develop insight into yourself as a learner, as a person and as a citizen.

How Transfer Credit Relates to PLAR

Transfer credit is AU academic credit granted for courses or programs completed at other accredited post-secondary institutions that you have attended. To find out whether a course or program may be transferable to your AU credential, visit the following website: http://www.athabascau.ca/cgi-bin/credit_transfer.pl.

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 transferring 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 for is the total number of credits required for your program less the number of credits stipulated as the residency requirement for that program. Complete details of the challenge for credit policy are available at the following website: http://www.athabascau.ca/registrar/challenge.php.

The evidence that you use in a successful challenge for credit cannot be used in a later portfolio assessment. However, you may use your challenge material to support your portfolio submission if you are unsuccessful in your challenge for course credit.
The Portfolio/e-Portfolio

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

1. Paper Portfolio. This portfolio takes the form of a three-ring or metal strip binder with labelled dividers. Photographs of sample portfolios are available at the following website: http://priorlearning.athabascau.ca/complete-portfolio.php

2. e-Portfolio. This option utilizes a web-based portfolio-building site. http://priorlearning.athabascau.ca/e-Portfolio.php

3. Technology-enhanced portfolio. You can upload your documents onto a CD or a memory stick. All regular templates and instructions apply.

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 should contain the following parts:

- a cover and/or a title page
- a declaration page
- a table of contents
- 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, following a prescribed format, written by you to identify the learning that you have. Instructions on how to write learning statements are given later in this handbook.

To verify the information you present, you may include videos, other media, certificates, or photos showing the kinds of work you have done, awards, letters of attestation (or validation), newspaper articles or any other type of proof that is appropriate to your particular situation. Where appropriate, it is desirable to include samples of your own work as it relates to the learning being claimed. 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 how soon you enrol at AU and get started, how busy you are at work, how busy you are at home, how dedicated you are to completing the portfolio, how much material you have to collect to verify your claims and how quickly your supporters provide letters of reference or attestation or other materials. Usually, it will take three to six months or longer to develop a portfolio. You should allow an additional three months from the date on which your portfolio arrives at AU for assessors to complete their assessment of it.
Before You Start

Before you begin work on your portfolio, you must ensure that you are properly enrolled 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 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. Get an Athabasca University Calendar. The calendar is available online at http://www.athabascau.ca/calendar/ or you can order a print copy by contacting AU at 1-800-788-9041 (Canada/US) or 780-675-6100 or by sending an e-mail request to auinfo@athabascau.ca.

2. Enrol at AU. Complete instructions on how to make an online application for admission are available on the following webpage: http://www.athabascau.ca/main/enrolling.php. Downloadable forms to use when applying by fax, by mail or in person are available at the same site or inside the back cover of the print version of the university calendar.

3. Pay the non-refundable admission fee. (Refer to calendar fee amounts.)

4. Obtain an AU student identification number.

5. Since AU is an open university, you may enrol without a formal academic credential. However, if you have post-secondary course credits, some of them may be transferable through the transfer credit option. For complete information visit the following website: http://www.athabascau.ca/cgi-bin/credit_transfer.pl. (Note: Some of the short courses you have taken, if not transferable, may provide material for your portfolio as verification of your abilities.)

6. If you are applying for transfer credit, contact the community colleges or universities where you completed the courses in question and request that transcripts of your marks be forwarded directly to the Office of the Registrar, Athabasca University, 1 University Drive, Athabasca, AB T9S 3A3.

7. Check the fee schedule in the calendar to determine the Transfer of Credit evaluation fee.
**DEVELOPING A PORTFOLIO**

Preparing a portfolio for assessment is a part of your larger learning strategy. There are decisions to make in deciding to take the portfolio route and others to make during the portfolio development process.

**Step 1: Initial Actions**

When you are ready to begin to prepare a portfolio, you will have a number of decisions to make regarding how you will put your portfolio together. But first, contact the CLA centre directly:

- by telephone: 1-800-788-9041, ext.6348 (Canada/US) or 780-675-6348.
- by FAX: 780-675-6431
- by e-mail: plar@athabascau.ca

Staff at CLA will help you decide on a number of issues and strategize the approach to developing your portfolio.

You will be put in touch with one of CLA’s mentors. A learning contract will outline the PLAR process and permit you to negotiate an appropriate timeline with a mentor. (See a copy of the learning contract in this document as Appendix E.)

**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 that you will need to provide support for your claims of “knowing.” Be thinking about this as you begin the process of reflection that you will engage in while you prepare your portfolio. Instructions below suggest how you might go about this process:

**Recall, Select, and/or Collect Documents and Other Materials**

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

- a credit course not used previously to obtain transfer credit
- a non-credit course
- a workshop
- a certification or commendation
- 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).

If you plan to use certain documents as documentation in your portfolio, you will need to assemble...
them. Choose your documents carefully, as there are practical limits to the amount that can be included in your portfolio.

You might find the following checklist useful:

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**Checklist for Gathering Materials**

**Non-credit Courses**

- Do I have diplomas, certificates or attestations from educational institutions or other organizations I attended?
- Do I have letters of verification or evidence of my performance or contribution to training programs or specialized workshops?
- Do I have letters of verification or evidence of my performance in volunteer organizations?
- Do I have letters of verification from my teachers describing what I know and can do and my level of performance as a student, a leader or an assistant?
- Do I have finished products, such as audio or video recordings or computer programs that show my achievements in courses?

**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?
- Do I have letters of recommendation or other letters of verification from my employer, a supervisor or clients?
- 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?
- Do I have finished products that prove my ability to do something?

**Unpaid Work (volunteer work, homemaking, etc.)**

- Do the volunteer organizations I worked for have job descriptions for the positions I held?
- Do the organizations have in their files descriptions of my work and the time I spent doing this work?
- Did anyone evaluate my performance?
- Do I have letters from the organization, my supervisor, colleagues or clients congratulating me on my work? Do I have letters of verification for my work?
With some idea of the range of your learning as evidenced by materials that you have thought about or gathered, you are now ready to start work on the first written parts of your portfolio.

**Step 3: How to Write an Autobiographical Essay/Personal Narrative**

The purpose of the autobiographical essay, also called a personal narrative, is for you to be able 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, four to six pages (double-spaced), begins your portfolio. It tells the assessor how you got to be who you are now (attitudes and behaviour), what things you did to gain what you know now (knowledge) and what you can do (skills). It is important for the narrative to show how you and your abilities are connected to the kind of work you are doing now and what work you hope to do in the future. The process of making a portfolio, therefore, begins with remembering the life experiences that are relevant to the intended outcome.

The following steps provide one way to assist you to think about ways of constructing your narrative. These are just suggestions. You do not HAVE to do it this way, but you may find the guides to reflection useful.

- 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 prizes, awards, trophies or any other form of commendation that I received 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 prizes, awards, trophies, medals or letters of congratulations received for my contribution to recreational activities?

**Life Marker Events**
- Did anything happen to me personally that sparked my interest in my proposed 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?
1. Drawing a Lifeline

A lifeline is a line drawing that visually shows the important personal, volunteer, community and work events and activities, that have happened in your life; for example, you will mark events on the line 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 with respect to your degree program.

How is drawing a lifeline useful to me?

A lifeline drawing helps you remember important events in your life so you can write your life story; it is for your personal reference only. It is yours; you do not have to show it to anyone; it is not put in the portfolio; you are making a vision, a picture, of your life.

Assessors will want to know why you sought out your particular knowledge, and /or why you were interested in gaining your particular 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, 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.
2. The importance of 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 and above the line to a height that tells you how important it was to you; marking the “X” very high above the line means the event was very significant to you; marking the “X” above the line, but closer to the line, means the event was not very significant to you.

If a negative event happened to you, mark your “X” below the appropriate year and below the line to a depth that tells you how important it was to you; again, if you mark the “X” very low and away from the line, this means the event was very significant to you; if you mark the “X” below the line, but closer to the line, it was not very significant to you.

Connect the “Xs” together to form a continuous line from left to right on the paper. Some people like to use various colours to mean various things when making their lifeline. This is fine; just make sure they are erasable, as you may change your mind from time to time about the significance of events upon you or you may remember a significant event and want to add it later.

Marking important personal events on the lifeline shows you where you’ve been, where you are, and where you’re headed. These make clearer who you are, so you can explain yourself in detail to anyone, whether it is an assessor or a job interviewer. You might be surprised at the events you turn up while working through this exercise!

Remember, assessors are looking for the autobiographical essay to show

- **clarity**: You understand what you have to offer; that you understand 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).

3. To begin this process, think about your life as having three stages: past, present, and future

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

**Looking into the past**

It is important to take a look backward to understand the future. Our present ambitions and abilities often can be found in our childhood. Who one is may be found in early family stories. e.g., 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. So think back and identify events in your past that influenced who you are now: what you believe, what is important to you, what you like or dislike.

These 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, for example: summers spent with grandparents; a school award; marriages, divorces; births, deaths of family members; recognition for special achievements in sports; a personal best that others might not know about? Think of the usual milestones that mark the first 20 years of life; what did you learn about yourself in the way you approached, for example, learning to ride a bike; did you struggle to keep at it until you could do it, in spite of scraped knees; did you fall down and then ask the adults in your life to help you until you learned from this group accomplishment. **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 trying for here is recognition of, “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.” e.g., some personal beliefs and values may centre around things like: the importance of strong family ties; learning as a top priority; an interest in human rights and racial or gender equality issues; it is important to be able to identify and get what one needs in the family or on the job; being able to negotiate your way through tough times.

It’s important to use past events as tools for reflection. **Do not get bogged down in details from the past while preparing your personal narrative!** While some incidents will be critically important to your development, many are not. Those incidents that are presented as being important must be linked effectively to your present role and aspirations for the future. The “Framing the Issue” piece of the portfolio can provide a good place for making sense of critical incidents from your past. See pages 17-21 for directions on writing “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 toward the end of your narrative some indication of your future educational and career goals.

Think about the life you anticipate **in the next ten years** in the career sense. Think of some goals you have and the age by which you want to attain them. Remember you aren’t 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 near the mountains).
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.

As a general guideline, the first page of your narrative should summarize either your “early years” or “where you came from.” Devote the following pages to exploring your development as an adult, a worker, or a learner.

4. How personal should the narrative be?

While details from your past will inspire your writing, the assessors do NOT need to know your life’s intimate details. There is no need to reveal anything more than you are comfortable with. If a past event, however unpleasant, is critically important to the life-path you took, include it in a tasteful and respectful way. Also avoid using the REAL names of people in your story whose privacy might be compromised. At the same time, be assured that all portfolios are held in confidence and treated with security.

Autobiographical Essay/Personal Narrative

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.

Later 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.

Seeing no other alternatives, I continued to work odd jobs in our community. One of these led me to be self-employed with the local day care. I was a private home care provider, caring for as many as five to seven children at a time. Having children in my care every day since September 1989 made me yearn for my own children. This decision changed the course of my life once again. I became a mother in May 1991 and continued to work as a private home care provider until my husband, who had been unemployed since our marriage, found work.

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 March 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 Concentration 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 Reflection (Optional)**

As with anything, if you are to do it well, you must understand the nature of the task. In the words of Mezirow, who has devoted much of his work to the study of reflective practice,

> 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. [Mezirow, J. (1990). Reflective practice. How critical reflection triggers transformative learning. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.]

PLAR is a process that is intended to guide you in a reflection upon your life’s learning so that you can present that learning to assessors who have the expertise to assess the relevance of your prior learning to the credential that you are seeking at Athabasca University.

The essence of the PLAR portfolio should be critical reflection. In order to help you critically reflect on your learning, we have created this opportunity for you. Following these instructions should help you produce the desired critical reflection for your portfolio. It does not have to be very long, perhaps only around 500 words (two pages, double-spaced in 12 pt. type).

This piece should frame the issue of your learning; that is, 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 credential. An example of critical incident learning follows.

**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.

Brookfield (1990) describes critical incidents as situations or events that are vividly remembered and hold special significance for the writer [Brookfield, S. D. (1990). *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass]. In other words, a critical incident is an important occasion that has created a memorable opportunity for learning. (Hint: Learning about oneself is hard. Learning about oneself is a step away from learning about a fact or a condition. Learning about oneself follows the analysis of more basic learning.)

**How to Write your Own Critical Reflection**

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

- From memory or from your lifeline (the diagram of important learning incidents in your life developed in preparing the autobiographical essay), select several meaningful critical incidents that you can further elaborate on.

- Describe the impact and effect of these incidents on your growth. Keep focused on the effect of these incidents on your learning and your decision-making. Refer to the effects of these incidents on subsequent life events.
Ensure that you make connections between the significant events that you describe. For example, if the first job you ever held, when you were 17, was in a drugstore, 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 the ways that that learning stayed with you or contributed to future learning. The true story on the following page provides an example:

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 a 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.
This piece will differ from the autobiographical essay/personal narrative in these ways:

- It will not tell your life story.
- It will not be written chronologically.
- It will focus on connecting, analyzing and interpreting your life’s critical learning incidents.
- It will present a high-level, overarching view of your learning.
- It will pull together the past, present and future.

**How the Assessors Will Use Your Critical Reflection**

Your reflection will help assessors understand how you have made your experience meaningful. Writing this piece gives you a chance to extract your most significant experiences and to bring them 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 Reflection Is Optional**

Critical reflections are difficult to write because they require a lot of thought and organizational ability. They draw from information already presented in other ways in other places in the portfolio. Not everyone will choose to take the time to write such a piece. You will not be penalized for not writing one, but including one can be advantageous if the critical reflection is well done. Taking the time to write such a critical reflection can also be useful to you in thinking deeply about your life and about how or why you became the person you did.

**Step 5: Demonstrating Your Learning by Writing Learning Statements**

The learning statements are the heart of the portfolio. Through consideration of these statements, assessors will determine the breadth and depth of the knowledge that you are claiming.

To create your learning statements, you must re-examine the experiential learning that you identified in Step 2 and organize it into clusters that match up with course or program criteria. Be prepared to take time to construct good learning statements that showcase your knowledge to advantage.

Learning statements are expressed differently for course-based portfolios and program-based portfolios. (Your initial strategizing with a CLA mentor will have determined which kind of portfolio you should do.)

- For a course-based portfolio, you will use the competency worksheet for course-based learning portfolios presented in Appendix A.
- For a program-based portfolio, you will use the learning summary worksheet for program-based learning portfolios presented in Appendix B.
Background: The Importance of Learning Statements

The term prior learning can encompass learning that a person has acquired in formal or informal learning settings: in a classroom or through 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). New direction for experiential learning (Vol. 1). London: Jossey-Bass.]

The phrase prior learning assessment conveys several ideas:

- Firstly, it emphasizes that it is learning, not experience, that 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.

- Secondly, it implies that the learning to be assessed was acquired prior to the learner’s involvement in his or her university program. That is, the process focuses on learning gained outside and before the student entered Athabasca University.

- Finally, it indicates that the learning must be expressed by the learner in such a way that it can be assessed or measured in a formal process. Much of what you will engage in during the portfolio development process will be 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 perhaps the most widely used assessment techniques, particularly in an educational setting. Evaluation of written tests, essays and portfolios are all examples of written assessments. Written assessments are particularly useful in evaluating skills and knowledge in circumstances where the ability to perform well on paper is important to a person’s overall ability to be successful as is the case in educational settings.

At Athabasca University, the development of a prior learning portfolio is predominantly a written assessment process. Athabasca University believes that the ability to articulate what you know in a written form is an essential skill for success in both higher education and the professional realm. That belief is one reason for our support of the written portfolio assessment method.

Developing Your Learning Statements

Learning statements are clear, descriptive and effective statements of your prior learning, articulated in precise language. They are specific.

Once you have identified the learning you have gained from experience, you will translate this information into learning statements that can be used in your learning summary. To do so, you
should use language that describes your learning, skills and competencies. The outcome of this exercise will be accurate statements of your experientially acquired knowledge that are clear and consistent and, for the portfolio reader, bear a similarity to 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.

**The Assessment Scoring Sheet: Criteria for Developing Your Learning Statements**

A copy of each program’s assessment scoring sheet is available online at [http://priorlearning.athabascau.ca](http://priorlearning.athabascau.ca), and examples are presented in Appendix C. It is important that you study the appropriate assessment scoring sheet as a part of your preparation strategy. Use the criteria as guidelines for demonstrating your learning.

**Bloom’s Taxonomy**

To give the readers of your portfolio an accurate picture of what you know, you are asked to develop clear, succinct learning statements that accurately and honestly describe the learning that you have gained through experience and that relate to your learning objectives. To help you in this task of describing your learning, you will find it beneficial to use a specific vocabulary that is 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, denoting six levels of intellectual behaviours. Along with these various levels, he developed a list of words that describe one’s depth of understanding for each level. [Bloom, B.S. (1965). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals*. New York: McKay.]
## Bloom’s Taxonomy

### 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, employ, illustrate, demonstrate, use, translate, practice, operate, schedule, shop, sketch

### 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, assemble, collect, construct, create, set up, manage, prepare

### 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, you will notice that verbs such as name, relate and define in Level 1 describe what we may consider less sophisticated activities than evaluate, compare, or assess in Level 6. Whether your learning occurs at an advanced or introductory level, ensure that you have described it accurately.

### Assessing the Effectiveness of Your Learning Statements

The strongest learning statements satisfy three criteria:

1. They are stated in terms of learning rather than of experience. If you wrote that you “did accounting for 4 years,” the readers of the portfolio could not judge what you learned from the experience.

2. They contain an appropriate degree of specificity. If you wrote that you knew accounting principles, your statement would distinguish your learning in accounting from learning in other areas, like staff supervision or mathematics, but it would not reveal to the readers of the portfolio which principles you know. Good learning statements in accounting would enable the readers to distinguish your learning in accounting from knowledge of basic
bookkeeping. From your learning statements, the readers should be able to judge, for example, whether you know basic or advanced accounting or whether you are a specialist in a particular aspect of accounting such as taxes or costing. Here are three examples of effective learning statements for someone who wishes to show learning in accounting:

- a. Analyze, interpret, and prepare financial statements (e.g., income statements and balance sheets) on a monthly basis for submission to COO's office prior to Board meeting.

- b. Demonstrate the basic mechanics of double-entry accounting, such as debits and credits, standard accounting format and trial balance in regular and monthly document preparation.

- c. Maintain responsibility for the general ledger and oversee, manage, and take responsibility for a variety of transactions to it, enacted by a staff of six.

3. They generalize learning outside the context in which it was learned. For example, you may know the personnel procedures of the company at which you work. In the portfolio, you want to present this learning in a way that lets the reader know whether your knowledge in this area is broad enough, or general enough, to be useful in another company.

Completing the following exercise will also help you to understand the requirements of effective learning statements.

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**Exercise: Developing Effective Learning Statements**

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

1. a. Counselled both short- and long-term clients in an out-patient setting.

   b. Differentiated 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, ie. Microsoft Word 2007; Excel; Powerpoint; Outlook 2007...

   b. Knowledge of all the keys on a computer keyboard.

3. a. Have 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.
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 verb (demonstrate) to describe how the knowledge can be applied (the behaviour that shows the knowledge).

3. Statement ‘b’ is stronger. Have followed describes experience, not learning.

4. Statement ‘b’ is stronger. Statement ‘a’ does not tell what one needs to know to “work with diesels,” etc.

Another Tool for Demonstrating Learning: The Supplemental Narrative

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” (see example in Appendix F), your mentor will suggest that you write a supplemental narrative to either replace or complement your learning statements.

The supplemental narrative is essentially a mini-essay in which you put down your knowledge about the particular topic. It should be written in essay format and should 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. Make sure that the title of your Supplemental Narrative tells what learning criterion or program goal it is connected to. In the Supporting Documentation column of the competency worksheet or learning statement template, make sure that you list the Supplemental Narrative and give its location (page number). It should immediately follow the learning statements that it is connected to.

Step 6: Presenting Documentation and Verification of Your Learning

We ask that you document your claims of knowledge. There are two broad categories of documentation: 1) primary source documentation, and 2) secondary source documentation.

Primary source documentation

This is material that you have created or helped to create. If your supporting documentation includes finished products, such as media presentations, each finished product must be accompanied by an information sheet. The following guidelines apply to submitting finished products:
Each media item should be a short segment, five minutes or less, showing a particular learning or skill.

The information sheet accompanying the product should include the date, the topic, the names of the people who participated in the creation of the product (producer, assistant, etc.) and the copyright number if any.

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.

Secondary source documentation

Most of your documentation will probably be secondary source documentation. The most useful of these are Letters of Attestation.

Letters of attestation are also called letters of verification or documentation. The assessors rely heavily on these letters, so they must speak clearly about your learning. A letter of attestation is not a reference letter. Give the writers of your letters of attestation the following details, so they know what information to give the assessors to help you verify your claims. The writer of a letter of attestation must

- know you and mention you by your full name in the letter
- state his or her relationship to you (e.g., employer; supervisor)
- write the letter on the official letterhead stationery of his or her company or organization
- have first-hand knowledge of the particular activity or knowledge that he or she is writing about
- explain the context of the experience—the who, why, when, for how long, where, and what of the activity
- focus the letter on the duties, responsibilities, and tasks included in the activity describe and explain your learning
- be able to give his or her assessment of your learning using qualifiers such as average, above average, or exceptional
- use examples whenever possible to illustrate the standards he or she has used to evaluate you and your performance, such as “performed at the same level as my other employees who possess a bachelor’s degree”
- know that this letter will be used for assessment of your work. It is not a letter of recommendation; we are more interested in verifying your learning than in predicting future performance.
- sign the letter and send it directly to the Centre for Learning Accreditation.

A sample letter of attestation is presented below. (Note that the sample is a very long letter of attestation. Effective letters do not have to be this long, but this one gives a clear indication of how those writing such letters can address the applicant’s learning.)
Submitting **three to five letters** of attestation is a good rule of thumb. This number is easier to conform to if one writer can attest to several areas of your learning. If that is not possible, that is, if you need to contact several different people to attest to various areas of your learning, your mentor will advise you on an appropriate number of letters. While too few letters or poor 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.

- As suggested above, you can also submit materials (certificates, awards, etc.) that contribute to clarifying your accomplishments. These are usually the least useful types of documentation and should be used limitedly. Your mentor will help you with these decisions.

If you do not have the necessary supporting documentation to support your learning claims using any of the means discussed here, the Centre for Learning Accreditation will advise you on how you can prove your competence.

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**Sample Letter of Attestation**

St. Mary’s Catholic Elementary School  
52 Benton Ave., Midtown, ON K0K 7H7, (999) 555-1110

Centre for Learning Accreditation  
Athabasca University  
1 University Drive  
Athabasca AB T9S 3A3

June 28, 2006

Dear Dianne Conrad,

My name is Mary Morin and my educational background is:  
**Master of Science in Education (Primary and Junior Division)**  
**Bachelor of Education in Teaching ESL**  
*University of Toronto, Ontario* (1988)  
**Bachelor of Arts**  
*Brock University,* (1970)

My work experience is:  
**Lynbrook Separate School Board** 1991  
**Garden District School Board** 1999 to present  
Grades SK to Grade 2

This letter is being sent on behalf of Martha Brown. Martha is seeking university credit through her 15 years of work experience.

I have had the opportunity to observe Martha’s skills and abilities while she was an educational assistant in my classroom. She was assigned to my room to support a student with severe autism and behavioural outbursts during the
school year 2003-2004. Since then, I have also interacted with her throughout the day, both professionally and academically. Martha is a true professional.

The following are examples of Martha’s abilities and skills that she has utilized throughout her professional career.

1. Establish professional communication through integrating and assimilating relevant knowledge from a variety of experiences, and present information to support professional opinion with evidence and argument during case conferences, parent/teacher meetings or school based team meetings.

I have observed Martha’s professional communication:

- Martha has the ability to gather information and knowledge from a variety of professionals and combine these opinions with her own professional insight. She then provides a clear, well developed and in-depth summary of a student’s abilities and needs during case conferences and team meetings.
- She has the ability to engage in respectful and interactive communication with a variety of professionals and family members.
- She is skilled at providing a comprehensive analysis into possible reasons for student’s behavioural outbursts and concisely communicates those insights effectively to other professionals.

I believe Martha has communication skills that are comparable to that of my other colleagues with teaching certificates.

2. Compose and implement effective verbal and non-verbal communication techniques to promote active inquiry, responsive and supportive interaction within the classroom and with individual students.

- Martha has established an effective communication style that all students, including students with special needs, respond to. Her ability to relay important information using a variety of multi-sensory or adapted approaches enables the students and Martha to engage in a very interactive communication process.

Through her consistent expectations and respectful interactions, Martha is capable of establishing and maintaining behaviour with groups of students.

3. Construct and implement a personal value-based teaching style that creates an adaptive environment conducive to learning through consistent and fair expectations which supports, nurtures, and encourages physical, social and intellectual development for all students.

- As an educational assistant, Martha has formulated a professional teaching style that supports the development of all students. She:
  - has consistent expectations
  - is fair in handling disagreements
  - is creative and innovative when adapting or modifying activities for students
  - utilizes behaviour modification techniques effectively
  - utilizes appropriate social skills programs with students
  - creates and maintains role-model bond with all students
  - encourages students to experience, and promotes discovery learning.

4. Foster collaborative relationships in the community to support students’ learning and well-being.

- Throughout her daily role, Martha effectively influences and works well with a variety of professionals and is able to synthesize the learning goals for the student.
- She maintains interactive communication with many professionals including:
5. Relate and integrate classic constructivist views of education to formulate and implement a comprehensive teaching style the continually transforms and evolves.

- Martha has created and implemented a very comprehensive approach when teaching and supporting students with challenges. She has a great deal of knowledge of child development and learning stages, along with the ability to assess and analyze a student’s current level of development, then adapt and modify activities that will facilitate increased development in many areas, for example: language development, social/emotional skills, physical skills and academic skills.

In my professional opinion, Martha has a firm grasp of the theories and methodologies needed for providing support to students with exceptionalities within the classroom.

6. Revise and modify lessons or activities to accommodate and provide for optimal learning experiences and inclusion of students with special needs within a classroom environment.

- While supporting a student with severe Autism and explosive behaviours, Martha would revise/modify the activities or lessons to meet the needs of the student and promote inclusion with the student’s peers. Due to sensory integration difficulties, this student needed activities that provided a multi-faceted approach. Martha is accomplished at taking a lesson and adapting it to design an activity that enables the student to build on present skills.
- She is efficient at prioritizing necessary skills for students’ development (functional skills before academic).

7. Weigh and integrate theories or arguments and utilize a synopsis to support or defend personal professional position and determines which strategies are useful and effectively defend her reasoning, including the following:

- behaviour modification
- reward incentives
- removal of preferred activities
- ignoring certain behaviours

8. Compile and interpret a variety of professional knowledge to facilitate personal conceptualizations and determine an appropriate and effective course of action to elicit change.

- While Martha was an educational assistant in my class, the student she worked with was becoming more violent toward others and herself. Martha formulated her own conceptualization of possible reasons for these behavioural outbursts, discussed them with me and then adapted expectations to relieve the student’s anxiety.

11. Compare and contrast each area of expertise (ECE/Resource Assistant, Intervener, and Educational Assistant) along with how they have evolved and how they are inter-related with the Human Service sector.

- Effectively kept records and daily logs of student’s behaviour and accomplishments.
Martha utilizes child development, behaviour modification techniques, sensory integration skills and in-depth knowledge of a variety of special needs to provide exceptional service to students.

She has a strong understanding of pre-school education and exceptionalities and is able to draw on that knowledge.

She is knowledgeable about the evolution of intervention and integration within education.

12. Advocate on behalf of a variety of Human Service Professions, and for humanity in general, along with analyzing the impact that personal values and ethics have on influencing social acceptance and social change.

Martha has demonstrated the highest level of professionalism and acceptance of all people. I have observed that Martha:

- advocates for students' needs
- advocates for acceptance and tolerance of differences
- advocates for and defends the rights for all people to be an active part of the community
- educates others on intervention, regulation, and community agencies.

Martha understands how her personal philosophy and values impact how the students she works with are accepted by their peers, along with how her personal professionalism and ethics influence others around her.

13. Implement and apply professional integrity and ethical practices throughout all roles by maintaining professional boundaries, following procedures and adhering to policies and guidelines, through:

- confidentiality
- following child protection legislation
- maintaining boundaries of students and families
- acceptance and tolerance

I believe Martha has the professional integrity that is matched to other colleagues with teaching credentials.

14. Design and practise a high level of professionalism and continually examine personal ethics, values, and actions to evaluate how they influence or impact the effectiveness of responsibilities, along with how personal professionalism impacts on the respect and value that the teaching profession has from society.

Martha has established herself as a professional in her profession. She practices self-reflection that is notices in her daily roles. She revises her actions to adapt to the change and needs of the students. She also seeks out information/knowledge that will make her more effective in managing behaviours (for example, non-violent crisis intervention and safe-management techniques). She realizes that the more skills and knowledge she acquires, the more respect she gains for her profession.

15. Collect and integrate new knowledge and paradigms through active professional development.

Throughout the year that Martha worked with me in my classroom, she attended seminars and workshops to increase her knowledge. She attended autism and sensory integration workshops that were provided by the school board, and then informed me of relevant information that she thought might be useful for our students.

16. Create a personal professional plan, maintain motivation and frequently revise more appropriate strategies to attain goals.

Martha continues to strive for her goals. She has set her mind on attaining her degree, and is working hard to make that happen. She is very determined and motivated and will succeed.
Through her many years of experience in the work force, one can see that Martha Brown is a true professional and has the skills necessary to pursue her education toward becoming a certified teacher.

Respectfully,

Mary Morin, MSc
St. Mary’s Catholic Elementary School
Midtown, ON
(999) 555-1230

**Step 7: Writing a Résumé**

Your portfolio should include an up-to-date résumé. Your résumé should be clear, factual, concise and well laid out. The information within each section of it should be presented in reverse-chronological order; that is, your most recent accomplishments should be stated first.

Your résumé helps the assessors trace your educational 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 understand your learning history.

There are many acceptable résumé styles. Information on how to create an effective résumé and several samples of effective résumés in a variety of styles are available at the following website: [http://www.sauder.ubc.ca/ccc/docs/resumes.pdf](http://www.sauder.ubc.ca/ccc/docs/resumes.pdf).

**Step 8: Creating a Cover and Title Page**

You may or may not choose to include a cover page (although it is preferable). A title page, however, is necessary and must contain the following information:

- what it is (a title)
- who wrote it (your full name)
- your AU student number
- the name of your program and the name of the university
- your address
- your telephone number(s) and e-mail address
- the date

30
PORTFOLIO NAME

by

Erin W. Brown
Student Number: 4900012
telephone: 604-234-5678
e-mail: ewbrown@telusplanet.net

submitted for prior learning assessment and recognition
towards credit in
[Program Name]
Athabasca University
Athabasca, Alberta

2385 Edmonton Street
Vancouver, B. C. V6L 1X1
March 12, 2005
Step 9: 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 most popular style is described below and demonstrated by the virtual portfolio available at http://priorlearning.athabascau.ca/complete-portfolio.php.

To help the assessors move efficiently and easily through your work, your portfolio should be

- double-spaced for easy reading
- spell-checked
- neat, clear and concise
- organized in a logical, chronological way (i.e., earliest to latest material)
- attractively formatted
- clearly labelled with tabs separating the different sections.

You may also submit an electronic portfolio, using a CD or a stick. Consult your mentor if you choose this route. If you do this, double-check all the links in whatever format you use and ensure that navigation is clear and simple.

Step 10: Creating the Table of Contents

Once you have decided how you are going to organize the material in the portfolio, you are ready to create the final element, the table of contents. This is a very important piece of the portfolio as it allows assessors to find their way easily through the document.

The content sections should be separated with clearly labelled tabs or separators and numbered with Arabic numerals; e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4. A sample table of contents for a program-based portfolio is presented below:
## Table of Contents

**Portfolio Declaration Page**

**Front End Pieces**

Program Plan | Tab 1  
Resume | Tab 2  
Autobiographical essay: Three Decades in Labour Studies | Tab 3  
Critical Incident Summary | Tab 4  

**Identification and verification of learning** | Tab 5  

**Supporting Documentation**

**Letters of Attestation**

Libby Davies, Vancouver Councillor | Tab 6  
Jim Dougan, Business Manager, United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters | Tab 7  
David Fairey, Director, Trade Union Research Bureau | Tab 8  
William Zander, Carpenters Union | Tab 9  

**Primary Source Documents**

“The Bloody Road to Ballantyne,” 1977 newspaper feature | Tab 10  
Excerpt from article by Sean Rossiter, Vancouver Magazine, Dec. 1980 | Tab 11  
“False Creek Chicanery,” Vancouver Sun article, Feb. 27, 1980 | Tab 12  
“Municipal Politics and Political Change in Canada,” Viewpoints Magazine, spring, 1988 | Tab 13  
“Phase II – Pressure on Government Must Escalate,” article, April, 1983 | Tab 14  
“Socialism with a whole new face,” Vancouver Sun article, Dec. 21, 1989 | Tab 15  
“Marxism After State Socialism,” the introduction, September, 1990 | Tab 16  
“Labour Law is For Works,” table of contents and selected sections, April, 1992 | Tab 17  
“Sectoral Certification and Closing the Wage Gap,” article, Just Wages, 1993 | Tab 18  

**Miscellaneous**

Canadian Association of Labour Media Award | Tab 19  
Capilano College WCB appeal course certificate | Tab 20  
JUMP Program overheads | Tab 21  
Identification card, Treaty Negotiation Advisory Committee | Tab 22
Step 11: Reviewing and Submitting Your Portfolio

Before submitting your portfolio,

1. Do a final review of the entire document to check:
   - page numbering
   - spelling
   - grammar
   - consistency of style
   - that the sections are in order
   - that you have included all copies of necessary verification
   - that your signature is on the cover page

2. Make four copies of all parts of the portfolio.

3. Keep one copy of the portfolio for your records, for possible revisions or for future use and mail the other three copies to

   Centre for Learning Accreditation
   Athabasca University
   1 University Drive
   Athabasca, AB
   Canada T9S 3A3

   Please ensure that you have sufficient postage and that your return address is clearly visible on the outside of the package. CLA does not return portfolios.

Note: If you would like to submit your portfolio electronically, please contact CLA at plar@athabascau.ca or by phone at 780-675-6348 to discuss options for doing so.

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

When your portfolio arrives at AU’s Centre for Learning Accreditation, it will be reviewed for completeness and appropriateness and a copy will be sent to each of three assessors. The assessors will then review and score your portfolio without consulting with one another. The average of the three assessors’ scores will become your final score.

When the assessors have completed their assessment, the Centre for Learning Accreditation will

   - receive and assemble the assessors’ comments
   - compile the comments and your assigned scores in a letter stating the outcome of this process
   - send copies of the letter to you, the Registrar, the assessors and the chair of your academic
consult with the Office of the Registrar to ensure that you are awarded the appropriate number of academic credits.

Following completion of this process, you may appeal the outcome of the assessment if you are dissatisfied with it. Contact the director of the Centre for Learning Accreditation (plar@athabascau.ca) to enquire about the appeal procedure.

**Sample Assessor Comments**

Reviewing the following sample comments from assessors will give you some idea of the types of qualities assessors are looking for in a portfolio.

- Martha notes (p. 14 of her portfolio) that she has worked hard to upgrade her writing skills. Evidence shown backs this claim as she presents a very disciplined, efficient portfolio. This was an easy-to-follow document, well designed to include the necessary information with no fluff or fat. It was a pleasure to read and easy to comment upon.

- Yvonne shows good evidence of professionalism and understanding of ethics. The required philosophy courses in her program should round out that understanding.

- Zelda 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. One specific recommendation would be to seek out critical commentary on ______. Here are a couple of sources to either read directly or to use to track down books or articles on the subject: [sources provided by assessor].

- 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. She has steadily progressed through positions of increasing responsibility, a tribute to her.

- Jane’s life experiences, formal study and employment provide her with insights of great value to her program learning goals. More broad-ranging social theory (additional to the more specific professional theory and concepts she already has at her command, along with the materials included the program requirements) will provide a stronger foundation upon which to build her ideas about how meaning and direction can be planned for as her career advances.

- Jack seems at the point where the wealth of professionally-oriented self-knowledge gained from his background can open up to new interpretations once he reads and discusses the theory and concept courses recommended above. His portfolio material indicates he is poised for new revelations grounded in those theoretical bases.
Hints from Assessors to Help You

We asked our assessors to provide some suggestions to help you make a good portfolio. Here is what they said:

- Applicants need to find a balance in their personal chronologies between providing relevant information concerning their personal development and providing lengthy descriptions of events that may be tragic but of questionable relevance. For example, some applicants have included information, ranging from disclosures of past abuse to documentation of family holidays, which was of questionable relevance to me as an assessor. If applicants think such information is relevant, then they need to demonstrate why.

- I encourage all applicants to write in the active voice. I like to see the applicant say: "This is what I know and this is how I know it." (Editor’s note: The active voice uses verbs like this: “I noticed that…” In contrast, the same statement in the passive voice, would begin: “It was noticed that…” The passive voice is not as powerful, straightforward or effective as the active voice.)

- Applicants should be clear about what they are asking of the assessor. Usually there is a statement that they hope to secure PLAR credit at Athabasca. It would be great if they could indicate up front what aspects of their experience (e.g., previous courses, continuing education, work experience, etc.) they see as qualifying for prior learning credit. Sometimes, it seems that some applicants tell us everything that ever happened to them, hoping that something sticks in our minds. It would be great if they could be a bit more direct and also speak to the issue of writing as an active learner.

- Portfolios which follow the tell-everything-hoping-something-sticks approach in every section are often repetitive. The best portfolios that I read find a way to make each section new and relevant to the issue at hand.

- Learners need to ensure that they understand what it means to demonstrate and what counts as providing sufficient evidence to illustrate the knowledge that they have instead of simply asserting that they do in fact have this knowledge. Offering some examples is always beneficial.

- It is a good idea to provide three or more relevant pieces of documentation for each competency (triangulated)—a best practice.

PLAR for Post-Secondary Teaching Experience

You may apply for PLAR for learning that you have acquired from your experience as a post-secondary teacher. This process, which differs from the usual portfolio-based PLAR process, is outlined below.

In Appendix D you will find a PLAR for Teaching form. Make a separate copy of the form for each course that you have taught and for which you intend to apply for credit. Provide the following
information with reference to each course:

- the name, level and credit value of the course
- the name of the course at AU to which it corresponds
- the nature of your involvement in the course (i.e., instructor, developer, etc.)
- the length of time that you have been involved in the course (e.g., number of times that you have taught it)
- the qualifications you hold relevant to your involvement in the course
- a letter of attestation of your involvement in the course from a supervisor or senior administrator
- a detailed course outline/syllabus for the course

With this information, professors who are responsible for corresponding AU courses will conduct the appropriate assessment.

Submit this information to

Dr. Dianne Conrad, Director
Centre for Learning Accreditation
Athabasca University
1 University Drive
Athabasca, Alberta
Canada T9S 3A3
APPENDIX A

Competency Worksheet for Course-Based Learning Portfolios
(with sample completed worksheet)
Use this template to identify the criteria to which you are writing and the learning that you have identified that meets the stated criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency Worksheet for ________________ (course title)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course learning outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hint:</strong> Gather as much information as possible about the content of the course. Start with the online course descriptions or the print calendar. Follow the advice of your PLAR mentor to access course learning outcomes (what you should know after completing the course). Learning outcomes for many courses are listed in the “Course Learning Outcomes” document posted on the CLA website.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency Worksheet for CMIS 245, Microcomputer Applications in Business (Windows)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course learning outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing in Word</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Learning Summary Worksheet for Program-Based Learning Portfolios
(with sample completed worksheet)
Use this template to identify the criteria to which you are writing and the learning that you have identified that meets the stated criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Criteria (From program criteria table, 0-10)</th>
<th>Learning statements</th>
<th>Origin of learning</th>
<th>Supporting documentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hint: In this column you will organize your learning according to the different outcomes of your program and show the assessors your understanding of how the program is structured. To form your different learning clusters, gather as much information about your program as possible. Using the information collected, list the major topic areas of the program.</td>
<td>Hint: Learning statements form the core of the portfolio. The language and detail you use here will show the assessors what you know. Please see “Guidelines for Preparing Portfolio Learning Statements” for guidance on how to prepare effective learning statements.</td>
<td>Hint: Identify the place and time of the learning. Any location or date can be used more than once in your competency worksheets.</td>
<td>Hint: Wherever possible, make reference to supporting documentation that provides evidence of the learning you have claimed. Using tabs and cross-referencing are useful tactics to make your supporting documentation easily accessible to the assessors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Criterion: understanding need for organized and collective approaches to issues</th>
<th>Learning statements</th>
<th>Origin of learning</th>
<th>Supporting documentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political and Social Relationships</td>
<td>Recognize the dynamics of mass movements and political change through extra-parliamentary means. Discuss the role of state, political parties and social movements in a liberal democracy during a period of social conflict. Debate the institutional roles and limits imposed on trade unions by labour law and political culture. Interpret the social roles for activists in a movement, and articulate strategies and policies that can challenge dominant relationships and point toward social change.</td>
<td>BC Solidarity Movement Steering Committee, Lower Mainland Coalition Floor Leader, Activist, Organizer 1983-1988</td>
<td>Tab 7 Letter of attestation, Joe Smith, United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters Tab 8 “Phase II – Pressure on Government Must Escalate,” article, April, 1983</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Sample Program Assessment Sheets
Criteria for Developing Learning Statements
(with notes)
**A. Demonstration of Content and Knowledge**

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Breadth and depth of knowledge of program content</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not demonstrated</td>
<td>Acceptable level of knowledge related to the discipline. Shows basic understanding of program content*</td>
<td>Demonstrates some specialization of disciplinary knowledge with evidence of reading and/or research beyond the basic level</td>
<td>Demonstrates ability to apply disciplinary knowledge in real situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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.*
<p>| II. Understanding of theory/concepts related to program content* | 0 | Not demonstrated | 1 | Acceptable level of familiarity with relevant theories, principles and concepts used in the field* | 3 | Understands and can apply theories, principles and concepts to hypothetical situations | 5 | Demonstrates ability to apply theories, principles and concepts to real world designs, purposes, or projects | 7 | Demonstrates ability to choose among appropriate theories and make appropriate decisions based on theory and principle | 9 | Monitors and assesses developments, behaviours, and changes in the field based on theoretical understanding; develops theory where appropriate |
| III. Policy and policy development | 0 | Not demonstrated | 1 | Understands and is aware of the role of policy and their importance to the field | 3 | Describes and distinguishes among policies relative to need | 5 | Demonstrates ability to use policy and/or policy frameworks as a professional tool | 7 | Demonstrates thorough understanding of the role of policy and its contribution to issues, decision-making, and the profession | 9 | Interacts with others or spearheads policy implementation, development or change |
| IV. Critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making | 0 | Not demonstrated | 1 | Demonstrates awareness of essential elements of critical thinking and the need for problem-solving and decision-making | 3 | Demonstrates a grasp of the tools, mechanisms, and processes of critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making | 5 | Analyzes situations with some consistency and demonstrates growing confidence in applying thinking and decision-making tools | 7 | Exhibits ability to recognize dilemmas, ambiguity, and a range of problems; proposes a variety of solutions | 9 | 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 | 0 | Not demonstrated | 1 | Writes in relation to the discipline in a clear, informed and constructive way | 2 | Uses disciplinary knowledge to express self competently in order to facilitate understanding | 3 | Demonstrates organized, sound, and systematic written work related to the discipline | 4 | Demonstrates consistently sound writing | 5 | 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 | 0 | Not demonstrated | 1 | Demonstrates sound understanding of appropriate discipline-related practice and ethics | 2 | Applies knowledge of professional environment and related organizational structures in a conscious and ethical manner | 3 | Demonstrates appropriate use of authority and knowledge of profession to achieve goals | 4 | Demonstrates grasp of appropriate ethical and policy consideration | 5 | Exhibits complex and nuanced judgments based on professionalism and ethical understanding of field |
| VII. Working independently and/or in teams | 0 | Not demonstrated | 1 | Demonstrates ability to complete tasks under supervision as a junior team member or to work independently with supervision | 2 | Demonstrates understanding of potential of working collaboratively and contributes to team success. | 3 | Brings enthusiasm to team roles and/or works independently with limited supervision | 4 | Frequently and successfully acts on own initiative and/or contributes to team success by mentoring or acting in leadership role | 5 | Provides formal team leadership, assessment of team skills, team training, or exhibits ability to complete complex tasks autonomously with little supervision |
| VIII. Planning, organizing and executing projects | 0 | Not demonstrated | 1 | Demonstrates basic planning, organizing, management skills in response to problems/projects and plan or organize for them appropriately | 2 | Can identify need for problems/projects and plan or organize for them appropriately | 3 | Develops and/or implements effective planning procedures for most situations | 4 | Facilitates project organization through team participation and/or partial or shared leadership | 5 | Provides formal leadership for project plan or implementation and assumes responsibility for success, troubleshooting, and alternate plans |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IX. Leadership and supervisory ability</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>Not demonstrated</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Ability to follow and/or give directions with supervision; will exercise or take limited responsibility</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Takes responsibility for self and subordinates; seeks leadership opportunities and engages in training opportunities</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Demonstrates leadership abilities and is committed to growing in leadership/supervisory potential</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Is assigned to/creates leadership and mentorship roles; self-directs toward learning opportunities</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>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</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X. Self and professional development</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not demonstrated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Participates in some appropriate workshops and seminars; demonstrates familiarity with professional literature</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Membership in professional organizations; broad familiarity with professional literature; established participation in professional development activities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Structures self-development activities; understands place of professional in the larger context</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Is guided by long range learning and/or professional development goals; contributes to organization of professional development activities in the workplace/field organization</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Assumes leadership role in profession; teaches, mentors or models professional activity within the field; works toward developing the profession within society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Number of Credits Based on Assessor Average Scores: 92-100% = 30 Credits; 82-91% = 27; 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 [Maximum Credits = 30]
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 learning goals or competencies of the AU program.

- The three members of the assessment team are looking in your material for documentation and proof that you have knowledge of or can do these things.

- The assessment team will assign numerical weight to your documented and verified prior learning against each listed learning goal or competency of the program you are in. From left to right on the Assessment Scoring Sheet are boxes showing descriptions of the degree to which an applicant demonstrates learning related to the learning goals or objectives.

- Assessors score your material 0 to 10 for each learning goal. A score of 0 means there was no opportunity to assess this particular goal or competency as you had not included any material related to it in your portfolio. When scores are tallied this goal or competency will be removed from the calculation.

- If you do not submit any evidence to show you have knowledge or skill in a particular learning goal, 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 particular learning goal, they likely will give you 9 or 10 points.

- A score of 1 usually means “just barely acceptable performance for a recent graduate with little or no experience beyond university study in the program.” A score of 10 usually means “outstanding, exemplary, near perfection, unusually insightful.

- When you prepare your portfolio material, you must say or show how your particular prior learning specifically proves you have knowledge or skill of a stated AU program learning goal or competency. You may not get many university credits if you do not do this. Being able to tie your abilities, experience, and knowledge to the learning goals and competencies is very important.
APPENDIX D

PLAR for Post-secondary Teaching Form
Applying for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition for Learning Acquired through Teaching Courses at Post-secondary Institutions

It is possible to apply for PLAR for learning that has been acquired from your experience as a teacher. This process’s documentation differs slightly from the normal process and is often included with the rest of a PLAR portfolio, although individual circumstances may vary. (CLA mentors will advise accordingly.) Rationale and process are outlined below.

**Rationale**

It’s often said that we do not know a subject until we teach it. While that may be quite true, we still ask that you demonstrate the learning that you have acquired from your teaching experience. The types of acceptable documentation and the focus of the information provided, however, are different from “mainstream” demonstrations of knowledge.

**Process**

The following section presents two options, depending on how you plan to use your PLAR for Teaching knowledge.

**Option 1. Follow this route if you are going to use only the PLAR for Teaching forms in your PLAR submission.**

**Step 1.** Based on what you teach, locate courses offered by AU that correspond accordingly. Of course, your course choices must fit into your AU program. Your mentors, and AU advisors, will help you with this.

For each AU course for which you intend to apply for credit, please provide the following information on the accompanying form. Make as many copies of the attached page as necessary.

1. The name, level, credit value of each relevant course that you teach.
2. The name of the course at AU to which it corresponds.
3. The nature of your involvement with the course (ie instructor, developer, etc).
4. The length of time that you have been involved with the course, in whatever capacity (ie. number of times taught, etc).
5. The qualifications you hold relevant to your involvement with the course at your institution.
6. A letter of attestation of your involvement with the course from a supervisor or senior administrator.
7. A detailed course outline/syllabus for the course in question.

Also include an up-to-date resume, a CLA-regulation cover sheet (see Documents page of the website), and PLAR application form with the forms and compile all the documents together in a slim binder, Duotang, or Cerloxed booklet, as size determines.
Step 2 (To be used if you are teaching at college level (years 1 or 2) but are seeking credit for that teaching at a senior level.) Your mentor will walk you through this procedure. In this case, you are required to demonstrate that your learning meets university requirements for senior-level learning. To do that, you are required to construct a set of learning statements OR a supplemental narrative. The learning that you highlight in your learning statements should be at senior level, as per Bloom’s Taxonomy. Consult with your mentor on how to do this.

Step 3 (To be used if AU has no corresponding course, and if your teachable area is still deemed “academic” (as compared to a technical course, ie, in Woodworking, for which there is no university equivalent). In this case, you may create the parameters of your own course, and name it accordingly. CLA mentors will advise on this. Then provide the information outlined above, in Step 1.

Option 2. Follow this route if you are including PLAR for Teaching forms along with a full PLAR portfolio.

Step 1. Work with mentor to prepare PLAR portfolio.

Step 2. Complete PLAR for Teaching forms (as in Step 1 of Option 1, using one set of forms for each course targeted.) Ensure that the PLAR for teaching forms are clearly identified in your Table of Contents and appropriately situated within your portfolio.

Submission of your work

For Option 1. Submit a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 3 copies of your work. Be sure to keep a copy for yourself. The number of copies submitted is dependent on the number of courses you have targeted. CLA staff will advise you on this.

For Option 2. Keep a copy of your work. CLA does not return documentation. Send 3 copies of your work to:

Centre for Learning Accreditation
Athabasca University
1 University Drive
Athabasca, Alberta
CANADA T93 3A3
Applying for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition for Learning Acquired through Teaching Courses at Post-secondary Institutions

Your name ____________________________________________

Information about the course at your institution upon which you are basing your application for PLAR credit:

Name of course ________________________________________

Course number ___________________________ Credit value ____________

Your relationship with the course (instructor, developer, etc.) ________________

History of your relationship with the course (number of years, etc.) ________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Your relevant (to this course) qualifications ________________________________

Athabasca University course to which this course corresponds ________________

Name and position of supervisor/senior administrator whose letter of attestation is enclosed

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Don’t forget to include a detailed syllabus or course outline, including course resources and assessment.
APPENDIX E

Learning Contract
Centre for Learning Accreditation
Learning Contract

...assisting 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. Learning contracts attend to a process plan, giving learners the opportunity to both think about their process and control it, as they undertake a learning project, in this case, the preparation of a PLAR portfolio.

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 can't predict how long it will take you as that depends on how much energy you devote to it and how much time you can actually spend with it. Most learners approach the portfolio on a part-time basis while continuing to take courses or at least while continuing with other job responsibilities and normal life commitments. Because there is not a firm time period during which a portfolio must be completed, we feel the learning contract can help serve as a 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?

Jointly, and in a collaborative fashion, you and your CLA mentor will agree on terms for the completion of your portfolio. We will begin by sending you this learning contract that has been prepared for you, outlining the 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 learner or mentor that the contract needs revisiting, either can initiate a re-drafting of terms.
**Learning Contract**

Between ________________________________
(learner)

and ________________________________
(AU mentor)

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

**Part I. Learner's commitment to product**

I will complete the following tasks related to my portfolio:

1. Write a narrative autobiography* ________________________________

2. Discuss progress to date with mentor (phone)* ________________________________

3. Write other front-end pieces* ________________________________

4. Update my resume By the end of portfolio preparation

5. Submit first draft learning statements ________________________________

6. Project portfolio completion date ________________________________

7. Ensure that portfolio requirements, as outlined on the checklist, are met. ____________

(learner initials)

* initial timing suggested by mentor

**Part 2. Learner's and Mentor's commitment to process**

**For learners**

1. As an engaged learner, I will strive to honour my timeline. ____________

   (learner initials)

2. As an engaged learner, I will let my mentor know when I cannot meet my targets. ____________

**For mentors**

3. I will honour the time and energy that learners can invest in the PLAR process. ____________

   (mentor initials)
4. I will respect the learner’s request to revise the learning contract.

5. Throughout the portfolio preparation process, I will advise the learner of my concerns if the portfolio does not meet requirements.

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

Signed:

__________________________________________  __________________________
Learner                                      Date

Signed:

__________________________________________  __________________________
Director, Centre for Learning Accreditation    Date

Phone Call Checklist

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

1. Mode of contact (discuss preferred method of contact, email and/or phone)

2. How did you hear about PLAR?

3. Student status (at AU)

4. Nature of learning statements (review the importance of learning statements, their format and the process of development)

5. Supporting documentation
   a. Letters of attestation (when to start, process)
   b. Other forms of supporting documentation (statement of purpose)

6. Review portfolio checklist

7. Timeline
   a. Negotiate dates/portfolio completion date
   b. Establish renegotiation process

8. Questions? Concerns?
APPENDIX F

Example Use of Supplemental Narrative

What you see here is a sample of the learning statement summary that indicates that a Supplemental Narrative is being used as a form of documentation (right-hand column). Note the title of the Supplemental Narrative, connecting it to the preceding learning statements.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Criteria</th>
<th>Learning Statements</th>
<th>Origin of Learning</th>
<th>Supporting Documentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| promotes values and ethics in self, colleagues and clientele | Compose and disseminate information promoting the vision, mission, and values of the Care Centre to staff and tenants.  
Compose documents for a variety of uses in the Human Services field to share important relevant information to the organization and the field.  
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.”  
Illustrate ethical practices by following and enforcing the law in contracts and ensure the values of the centre are considered when recruiting a new tenant.  
Measure staff morale and job satisfaction through an annual staff survey to identify areas of challenge and areas of success to promote ethical practice in care giving and in teamwork.  
Develop an employee appreciation and recognition program with the involvement of all team members in order to lessen | The Care Centre 2004 – 2009 | Tab 6  
Tab 8  
Tab 9  
Supplemental Narrative (following) |
divisions between departments, foster team building and cooperation, reinforce the values and mission of the organization and boost morale.

Evaluate the effectiveness of staff appreciation recognition events that take place throughout the year and make improvements as recommended by staff.

---

**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: Use of Supplemental Narrative**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Criteria</th>
<th>Learning Statements</th>
<th>Origin of Learning</th>
<th>Supporting Documentation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Interprets the evolution of the Human Services field from several viewpoints</td>
<td>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. Distinguish developments in the care of seniors, children, physical challenges, developmental challenges and complex multiple medical issues. Recognize the importance of continuing education to improve skills and remain cognizant of changes in the field that affect policy and practice. Integrate new learning in the daily operations of the Human Service Sector.</td>
<td>The JH Home 1990 - 2004 The Care Centre 2004 – 2009</td>
<td>Tab 7 Tab 8 Tab 10 Supplemental Narrative (following)</td>
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</table>
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 families 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.