# RBA Portfolio Development Guide, Marshall University

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A portfolio is a detailed, academic argument demonstrating that you have mastered the learning objectives of a college-level course through outside-the-classroom experiences, such as workplace training, certifications, or intensive self-study. It is evaluated by a full-time Marshall University faculty member with subject-matter expertise who decides whether to grant college-equivalent credit. **Check with the RBA coordinator first to see if a standard award covers your experience**, as certain common experiences can be awarded credit without a portfolio.

Creating a portfolio is an extensive, self-motivated effort that typically takes six months to a year to complete. It is a rigorous process designed for highly self-directed individuals with good writing skills and significant levels of experience, usually 5-10 years. To submit a portfolio students should have already completed English 201, the second composition course.

## Step-by-Step Portfolio Roadmap

1. **Determine Suitability & Eligibility:** Does a portfolio match your academic goals and graduation timeline?
2. **Identify Competencies & Target Courses:** Map out your life experiences in chronological order and match them to specific courses in the undergraduate catalog.
3. **Locate Course Syllabi & Objectives:** Obtain course syllabi to isolate the exact learning outcomes you must prove you have met through your outside-the-classroom experience.
4. **Gather Supporting Documentation:** Collect formal, verifiable evidence (work products, certificates, letters) to prove your hands-on experience.
5. **Write the Experiential Learning Narratives:** Draft focused, 2-to-4-page academic arguments for each course using the technical language of the field.
6. **Assemble the Portfolio Binder(s):** Organize your materials into structured, professional three-ring binders separated by academic department.
7. **Submit the Draft & Pay Fees:** Submit a draft to the RBA coordinator for review, once approved pay the submission fee, submit the final version, and await faculty evaluation.
8. **Finalize Credit Awards:** Pay the transcription posting fees for any approved credits.

# Comprehensive Deep Dive of Each Step

## Step 1: Determine Suitability & Eligibility

Before investing significant time into portfolio development, it is vital to understand the strict parameters of what a portfolio cannot do.

- **What a Portfolio Cannot Do:**
    - It **cannot** satisfy the RBA residency requirement, which requires 24 hours of graded coursework from public higher education institutions in West Virginia including 12 hours of graded coursework from Marshall University.
    - It **cannot** raise your Grade Point Average (GPA); portfolio credits are GPA-neutral and appear on transcripts as "College Equivalent Credit" (CEC) with a grade of CR.
    - It **cannot** be used to earn an Area of Emphasis or a minor.
    - It **cannot** fulfill certain most general education requirements, like English Composition.
    - It **cannot** serve as course prerequisites for graduate or professional programs, which usually demand recently graded classroom work.
- **The Timeline Dilemma:** Because portfolios often take a year to compile and faculty reviewers have up to a full semester to evaluate them, students who need fewer than 10 to 12 credit hours to graduate should typically take regular classes instead.

## Step 2: Identify Competencies & Target Courses

The portfolio process is built on three core pillars: **Identification**, **Justification**, and **Verification**. You begin by blending your work history with your conceptual learning.

- **Build a Chronological Table:** Create a comprehensive spreadsheet detailing your job history, training programs, licenses, volunteer work, and hobbies. Ask yourself what you had to know to perform the job, how you would teach it to someone else, and what terminology you mastered.
- **Review the Marshall Undergraduate Catalog:** Search the current undergraduate catalog (marshall.edu/catalog) to find departments and descriptions that match your skills. Focus your attention on the level of credit that you need to graduate; do not waste time petitioning for lower-level courses if your degree requires upper-level credits. **Send a list of these courses to the RBA coordinator before you start writing as some departments do not review portfolios**.
- **Avoid Overreaching:** Do not petition for credit in internships or practica (faculty-supervised experiences). Furthermore, do not petition for an entire department's suite of

courses, as this damages your credibility with faculty reviewers. Very few people have the experience to be awarded more than 12-24 hours' worth of credit (4-8 courses).

- **Out-of-State or Out-of-Network Courses:** If Marshall does not offer a matching course, your coordinator can reach out to other West Virginia public institutions to see if petitioning their catalog is an option. Remember that community colleges only offer lower-level (100–200) courses, while four-year institutions offer both lower (1-200) and upper-level (300–400) courses.
- **No Double-Dipping:** You cannot petition for credit for a course for which you have already received credit.

## Step 3: Locate Course Syllabi & Objectives

Once you target specific courses, look up their exact syllabi to extract their structural learning objectives.

- **Syllabus Repository:** Search the myMU Syllabus Repository, checking back through the last five years if necessary. If multiple syllabi exist, prioritize those from senior, full-time faculty members rather than adjuncts, as senior faculty are much more likely to review your submission. Ask if you are unclear about whose syllabi to use or if a syllabus is not available on the repository.
- **Theory vs. Practice:** Reviewers look for learning that is both theoretical and applied. For example, simply participating in groups is not enough to pass a Group Communication course challenge; you must demonstrate that you understand the underlying academic principles, roles, and functional theories of group dynamics. You may need to consult textbooks via libraries or online portals to align your practical knowledge with academic theory.

## Step 4: Gather Supporting Documentation

Your claims of knowledge mean nothing without rigorous, verified proof. You must compile clear evidence that validates your skills.

- **Acceptable Documentation Types:**
  - Work products (redacted for proprietary or confidential information or accompanied by a non-disclosure agreement request for the reviewer).
  - Official job descriptions, performance evaluations, and licenses.
  - Certificates of completion for professional workshops or non-credit training.
  - Articles, programs, or advertisements documenting performances, creative works, or exhibits.
  - Letters of reference written on company letterhead by supervisors or experts who have personally observed your work. These letters should explicitly outline your

duties, performance level, and changes in responsibility—they must not be generic letters of recommendation.

**Alternative Verification:** If a skill cannot be documented traditionally (such as a foreign language proficiency), faculty evaluators may opt to assess your knowledge via an interview, oral exam, or written test. This will be up to the faculty member reviewing the portfolio.

## Step 5: Craft the Experiential Learning Narrative

The narrative is a 2-to-4-page written argument written uniquely for each course. It must explicitly spell out the connection between your experiences and the course objectives, so the faculty reviewer does not have to guess how your experience applies to the courses they teach.

- **Tone and Style:** Write with a self-confident, assertive, yet unarrogant tone. Use the precise technical language of the academic field correctly. The text must be typed and double-spaced. The narrative should be an argument that you have met the learning objectives of the course, not just a diary or a recounting of your experiences.
- **Required Formatting:** Every narrative must begin with an exact, standardized opening statement (provided below) followed by the reproduced course information from the catalog:

I request that the following information and documentation be evaluated and that I be granted credit for the course(s) shown at the division level and credit hour recommendation(s) depicted.

**Marshall University Undergraduate Catalog**

*[Insert Course Code, Title, Credit Hours, and Exact Catalog Description Here]*

- **Structuring the Argument:** Introduce your relevant experience, explicitly state each individual learning objective from the syllabus, provide concrete examples of how you satisfied that objective, and weave clear citations into your narrative that point to your supporting documents which should be clearly labeled with numbers or letters for reference.

## Step 6: Assemble the Portfolio Binder(s)

Physical presentation leaves a lasting impression on faculty reviewers. You must present your arguments in a highly clean, organized, and error-free manner.

- **The Binder Setup:** Use a three-ring binder with a clear plastic overlay for your cover sheet. If you are petitioning for multiple courses across different departments (e.g., Management and Communication), you must build separate binders for each individual department. If you are not near enough campus to drop the portfolio binder or binders off, talk to the RBA coordinator about other ways to submit the portfolio.
- **The Structural Sequence:**

1. **Cover Sheet:** Centered text, 14-point font minimum, displaying your name, "A Portfolio of Learning Experiences", "Regents Bachelor of Arts Degree Program", "Marshall University", the date, and the target academic department. Avoid clip art.
2. **Portfolio Summary Page:** A single sheet placed at the very front detailing your personal information, a brief description of the foundational work experience and a table of the requested courses that you are petitioning for.
3. **The Resume:** A straightforward background document mapping out your personal info (excluding your date of birth), reverse-chronological education history (referencing corresponding transcript tabs), training programs, and employment history. Unofficial academic transcripts should also be included here to prove you aren't double-dipping.
4. **The Narratives:** Your 2-to-4-page written course challenges.
5. **Supporting Documentation:** All photocopied verifying materials, systematically organized with labeled physical tabs so the reviewer can easily navigate your claims. Never submit your only original copies of documents, as the portfolio will not be returned to you. Make a copy of everything that you submit so you have it.

## Step 7: Submit the Portfolio and Pay Fees

Portfolios are only accepted and sent out for evaluation during two windows each school year:

- **Fall Window:** From the first class day in August until the last class day of September.
- **Spring Window:** From the first class day in January until the last class day of February.
- **Coordinator Review:** You must submit a full draft of your portfolio to the RBA coordinator at least two weeks before the deadline for structural review and feedback. Email is fine, the full binder does not have to be submitted until the final step.
- **The Assessment Fees:** Once the coordinator approves your portfolio for submission, a non-refundable $300.00 assessment fee will be applied to your student account and must be paid to the Bursar before submission of the portfolio to the coordinator. This covers all portfolio submissions that happen during one submission period. The fee pays for the faculty review itself, it does not guarantee the awarding of credit.
- **The Review Phase:** The coordinator handles all communication with the academic departments. Do not contact the faculty reviewers directly. Faculty perform these evaluations out of good will alongside their normal duties, meaning turnaround speeds vary and graduation within the same semester is never guaranteed. Faculty reviews are a "one-shot" attempt; they will very rarely reach out for clarification if your argument is vague, so your argument must be clear to them upon their first review.

## Step 8: Post-Review Outcomes and Credit Awards

Faculty evaluators will return a recommendation, which could be full course credit, partial credit, unspecified lower or upper-division credit, a request for an interview/additional materials, or a flat denial of credit.

- **Posting Fees:** For every individual credit hour awarded by the faculty reviewer, you must pay a $10.00 transcription posting fee to the Bursar's office before the credits are officially added to your permanent academic record.
- **The Residency Gate:** To have portfolio credits officially posted to your transcript, you must have already completed at least one semester within Marshall's RBA program, completing a minimum of 6 credit hours with a cumulative GPA of 'C' (2.0) or better.
- **Transferability Limits:** While your earned portfolio credits will transfer to other RBA programs within the state of West Virginia, they will not transfer into traditional, non-RBA degree programs.
- **Archival Retention:** By state and institutional law, the RBA coordinator must retain the physical portfolio on file for a minimum of five years for review by accrediting bodies and the state commission. You may request that your portfolio not be shown to future students as an example.