

Sakai/OSPPortfolio: How do schools use the Matrix in OSPPortfolio? What's a typical workflow for the OSP Matrix?

A Matrix, at its core, is just a two-dimensional collection of cells. Really.

But there's a LOT you can do with the OSP matrix! Your matrices will be something you build and design from the ground up, to serve the specific needs of your learners and your institution.

For example, each cell of the matrix is designed to utilize three specific forms:

- reflection (for student introspection)
- evaluation (faculty assesses student work)
- feedback (peers can give a learner feedback as well)

Not only can you define each of these forms from the ground up (text here, attachment there, date over here...) -- but each of these three forms is optional... plus additional forms can be "attached" to any matrix cell as well.

In addition to all this, each cell can include its own guidance, rationale and examples. Each of these is an HTML page, with any kind of pertinent attachment available as well, such as graphics, flash snippets or PDF documents.

So, not only defining the columns and the rows, but *which forms* and *which guidance* are used in any particular cell of the matrix -- well, that's an important set of decisions to make, at every step!

Rows and Columns

Often the **rows** of a matrix are used as **criteria** -- certain skill sets or expectations or standards that the learner is expected to improve upon. The **columns** are often **levels** of accomplishment: beginner, intermediate, advanced, for example, or maybe freshman, sophomore, junior, senior. With the progression from one level to the next, the matrix workflow can be set up to automatically unlock the cell at the higher level, once the faculty admits that the learner has adequate mastery of the lower level.

But you can set up matrices at your institution however you like! If you want your columns to be categories, and your rows to be skill level, by all means do so. Some schools use a one-column matrix as a holding place for assignment artifacts. Others leave all cells wide open, letting the students decide where their items fit best, and at the end of the school year, if there are some glaring holes, they know they need to revise their curriculum. Still others use the matrix as a structured place for certification -- students submit a cell for evaluation when they're happy with its contents, and faculty can give it (or refuse to give) "thumbs up" to certify it. How your school uses the OSP matrix is entirely up to you!

Evaluation and Feedback

Typically the way the matrix is set up in [OSPPortfolio](#) (the electronic portfolio within Sakai), faculty determine which forms are to be used in which cells (often it's the same forms over and over again, for all the cells -- other times each cell will have its own distinct set of forms) and the students

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populate the matrix with their evidence and artifacts (documents, course work, etc) to match.

Some schools leave it at that -- and then at the end of every year they evaluate their own curriculum for "holes" by seeing if there are lots of common empty spots in learners' matrices. In other words, by reviewing the choices made by the students throughout the year, the faculty

On the other hand, many schools encourage their learners to "Submit" each cell for evaluation when the learner feels it's "complete", and this process usually involves having the learner fill out an introspective reflection form. This temporarily locks the cell from modifications. At this point the faculty (or assistants) can peruse the student's work, giving feedback according to the evaluation form attached to that cell; if the learner's work is approved then the cell and all its contents are locked for good, as if "certified" -- if it's not up to par, the cell is unlocked instead, so the student can continue making changes). The evaluation form can include things such as a letter grade field, if you like, and the results can be included in any portfolio that's drawn from such a matrix.

And some schools open the matrix up for peer-review as well. A learner's peers can then review his or her work, giving feedback and encouragement; sometimes a peer's opinions can have more impact than the instructor's!

Plan your OSPortfolio implementation carefully and thoroughly

Defining the Matrix is a very deliberate process; building XSD forms from scratch, determining which forms would be most appropriate in the Matrix and where, selecting which workflow style to use, developing customized XSL templates to provide portfolios from the matrix, and whatever else you need to get your OSP "off the ground".

[Serensoft](#) can help with all this, and more.

OSP is an open-source electronic portfolio built into Sakai, which is an open-source collaboration and learning environment.

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