

HOW TO:

BE A “HAPPENING” STUDENT

A Blind Mice Guide to Portfolio Building

BY



with JHY

Foreword

We believe that a portfolio should go beyond simply being a collection of activities and achievements. It should be an expression of your journey in pursuing your passions and discovering yourself.

This guide is created to provide you with some directions so you will not feel as lost as we were during your pursuit for holistic development. Portfolio building is unique to everyone and there are no definite rules on how you should go about it. This guide is in no way a comprehensive instruction manual to achieving a “perfect” portfolio (which is subjective anyway).

Disclaimer: The advice and opinions given are purely based on our own personal experiences and perspectives. They may be subjective to some individuals so heed them at your discretion.

Note: This guide was written in collaboration with Jisoon Hope Yoon (JHY). Jisoo is an English major at Stanford University, and has been offering individualised US college application support for more than a year. She is a writing tutor and a mentor at College Key Foundation. Contact hopeyoon@stanford.edu for more information.

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INTRODUCTION

What does “Happening” mean?

Originating from a close mentor that has continuously guided FBM, this term is used to describe a genuine person who is passionate, driven and constantly hungry to learn. This guide aims to help you become such a person ~~(or at least appear to be one)~~.

What is a portfolio, and why do I need it?

Imagine undertaking a great journey... but having nothing to show it. How will you convince others that you were capable of undertaking such a journey and that you have learned valuable lessons along the way?

Think of your portfolio as the “footprints” from this journey. It is visible and tangible proof that will show what you spent your time and energy on.

What should be included in the contents of my portfolio?

Just because it is a student portfolio, it does not mean the contents need to be limited to academics— other initiatives you have taken in and out of school that is important to your personal growth all belong in your portfolio.

A student portfolio in particular is focused on showcasing the knowledge and skills you have gained throughout your school career, such as classes that positively impacted your academic development or classes in which you have shown outstanding performance.

Is a portfolio any different from a resume or transcript? Absolutely! A portfolio is not simply an ordered list of classes and activities you have pursued. It is a story of personal development with continuity and themes.

Not every random activity you have pursued belongs in your portfolio. Instead, carefully curate the materials that portray your greatest passions and priorities. These should be your focal points. The various elements should interact and build off each other, such that the portfolio has a collective significance, rather than just being a sum of its individual constituents.

Growth VS Fixed Mindset

One way to approach this idea of a holistic, cohesive portfolio is by keeping a growth mindset instead of a fixed mindset. This means that you believe your intelligence and talents are not fixed, predetermined traits, but that any skill can be developed through effort and persistence.

If you successfully completed a series of projects in a field, this should not be attributed to how competent you were to begin with. Instead, you should frame it so that the focus is on how you

overcame challenges and developed your ability through active effort, resulting in increasingly high-level projects.

FIXED MINDSET		GROWTH MINDSET
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SOMETHING YOU'RE BORN WITH• FIXED	SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• COME FROM HARD WORK.• CAN ALWAYS IMPROVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SOMETHING TO AVOID• COULD REVEAL LACK OF SKILL• TEND TO GIVE UP EASILY	CHALLENGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SHOULD BE EMBRACED• AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW.• MORE PERSISTANT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• UNNECESSARY• SOMETHING YOU DO WHEN YOU ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH	EFFORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ESSENTIAL• A PATH TO MASTERY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• GET DEFENSIVE• TAKE IT PERSONAL	FEEDBACK	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• USEFUL• SOMETHING TO LEARN FROM• IDENTIFY AREAS TO IMPROVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• BLAME OTHERS• GET DISCOURAGED	SETBACKS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• USE AS A WAKE-UP CALL TO WORK HARDER NEXT TIME.

Source: [The Most Important Mindset for Long-term Success](#)

THE “HAPPENING” PYRAMID

Why is the “Happening” Pyramid important?

The “Happening” Pyramid explains the realistic hierarchy of what is needed to achieve excellence in a field.

If you are active in your search for new endeavours, you are bound to encounter many experiences and opportunities. One common mistake made by ambitious, high-achieving students is to simply take up every opportunity and pile everything on their plate. After all, one should not miss a good opportunity when it comes your way, right?

Wrong. This is not an ideal strategy. Having your time and effort spread thin between too many things not only strains your well-being, but also erodes your ability to adequately focus on each pursuit.

There are only 24 hours in a day. These hours are enough if you use the “Happening” Pyramid concept to weigh your options and prioritise your opportunities wisely. Sometimes, less is actually more.

What is the “Happening” Pyramid about?



Level One: Passion

The first level is *Passion*, because no endeavour will be a genuine success if you are not interested in the work. If you find yourself considering undertaking a role just because it sounds impressive or due to social pressure, reject it and find something else that you're passionate about.

Level Two: Competence and Experience

The next level has two halves: competence and experience.

Competence asks you whether you have the skills needed to perform well in the field. This does not mean you already need to be good at or know everything about the tasks involved—again, according to the growth mindset, you can develop competence in anything if you put your mind to it.

The more important question is whether you have the fundamental skills that allow you to develop significantly. For instance, considering an advanced Physics Olympiad would not be a meaningful use of your time if you do not possess the basic Mathematics skills needed to solve the equations. In this case, you might want to try other things that will help you build up to eventually being able to pursue this opportunity and make the most out of it.

Experience is simpler. Draw on past results with similar opportunities, and reflect if they are meaningful to you. If the answer is no, is there a good reason to think that this opportunity will have better results?

Don't waste your time repeating an unsuccessful attempt without changing your approach or developing relevant skills. Competence and experience go hand in hand: with more experience, you will become more competent and future experiences are more likely to be successful.

Level Three: Excellence

At the top level is the *Excellence* that we all want to achieve. The simple pyramid model is a helpful reminder that excellence will be easily attained if it is backed by passion, competence, and experience. Utilise this framework to critically compare if one opportunity helps you achieve growth faster than the other.

Must Read:

The "Happening" Pyramid will be the basis of all our subsequent portfolio building frameworks. As such, it is also the largest takeaway from the FBM Portfolio Building Series. **Even if you decide not to read further, we believe that just by having this pyramid in mind will be sufficient in providing you with all the realistic considerations needed for success.**

FBM PORTFOLIO BUILDING FRAMEWORKS

Overall, there are two portfolio building frameworks that you can use:

1. **The Proactive Framework:** Created to help you reach your specific goals, the Proactive Framework is for woke students who already have an idea of what they want to achieve and are looking for some structure in their journey. You can Read/Download it [here](#).
2. **The Retrospective Framework:** This framework is useful for soon-to-be graduates who want to consolidate their portfolio and for students who want a benchmark to see how far they have come and where they should be heading next. You can Read/Download it [here](#).

These frameworks are created based on the personal experiences of the Four Blind Mice creators. After (blindly) navigating through the maze that was our portfolio journey, our hope is that these frameworks can help you build a clearer and more comprehensive portfolio.

We understand that everyone has different and diverse experiences, so go ahead and modify them to best suit your needs.

CONCLUSION

While creating and developing your student portfolio may seem like a daunting task at first, do not begin by anxiously worrying about the amount of effort needed. Instead, start by approaching it with enthusiasm and excitement.

At the end of the day, the creation and development of your portfolio is to make yourself a better person. You will come out the other end with a better understanding of yourself. Trust that this self-knowledge will result in a more enriching academic and work life.

Helping you get to the next step and achieving your goals are simply added bonuses.

So instead of only thinking about:

- How much work do I need to do to attain a certain level of results?
- What are the most challenging parts of this process?
- Who do I want to present myself as to institutions and employers?

Also think about:

- How will I grow as a person by attaining these results?
- What are the most exciting parts of this process?
- Who do I want to be?

Creating your portfolio will not only serve as something to show off to others and yourself, but it is also a tangible report for you to look back on. When moments of doubt hit you during your journey, you will be able to look to your portfolio as an affirmation that you worked hard to get where you are and you will eventually discover the goals you want to reach in your life.

Good Luck and Have Fun, from all of us at Four Blind Mice! 😊