

Harnessing Social Media for Professional Practice: An Instagram Portfolio Assessment Model

Abstract

This case study examines how a Sports Coaching program transformed professional practice assessment by implementing Instagram portfolios for level 5 students. These students develop contemporary digital skills while consolidating their professional development by creating professional social media profiles that showcase and collated weekly learning activities. The success of this approach is evidenced by strong student engagement, external examiner support, and the assessment's longevity and evolution over eight years.

Students: 45-50 x Level 5 students

Keywords

Digital literacy, Social media, Professional Skills, Portfolio, Reflection, Authentic assessment, Continuous assessment

Overview

Vicci Boyd has developed an innovative assessment approach in a level 5 professional practice module that transforms traditional coursework into authentic digital portfolio creation. The approach teaches students to use social media as a professional tool rather than merely for socialising, developing professional digital literacy skills alongside subject-specific learning. Students create dedicated Instagram accounts where they post weekly content related to module topics, consolidate their learning from a number of CPD courses, and build an online identity. The assessment rewards consistent engagement and professional behaviours while offering flexibility in how students approach the tasks. The method allows either private student-to-tutor sharing or broader visibility at the student's comfort level. An unexpected benefit is the peer-to-

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

peer resource sharing that happens naturally through the platform, with students effectively creating a community of practice where learning resources are exchanged.

- Instagram Portfolio (50%): Weekly content posts that align with module learning
- Coach Education Workshop (50%): Practical delivery assessment

The Instagram Portfolio assessment was designed to meet several key challenges :

- Limited opportunities for students to develop professional digital literacy skills
- Need to consolidate learning from multiple CPD courses and experiences
- Finding alternatives to traditional academic assessments for a professional practice module
- Encouraging ongoing engagement rather than last-minute assessment completion
- Preparing students for the digital aspects of professional coaching roles

The Innovation

Assessment Structure:

- Students create dedicated professional Instagram accounts, separate from personal social media
- Weekly content posts aligned with module topics and learning activities including:
 - External CPD course completion – (such as those in LinkedIn Learning)
 - Requirement to find, curate and share diverse learning resources beyond academic journals
 - Creation of digital content including reflection pieces
- Connection to previously created LinkedIn profile in Level 4 module.

"It's all linked within each week, so the content related to say Neurodiversity week, everything links to that. . . A lot of it is consolidating their learning and them saying 'this is what I've picked up from it, this is what you could learnt'" explained Vicci.

Support Structure

Student Guidance:

- First week contextualisation about professional social media use

- Clear weekly tasks aligned with module content
- Discussion about professional boundaries and safeguarding
- Explanation of the benefits of continuous engagement
- Emphasis on the difference between professional and personal social media use

Staff Engagement:

- Weekly monitoring and engagement with student posts
- "Hearting" posts to acknowledge receipt and review
- Tracking completion of required elements via spreadsheet
- Offering flexibility while encouraging regular engagement

Technical Support:

- Initial setup guidance for professional accounts
- Clear instructions on privacy settings and professional connections
- Evolution of platform requirements based on changing social media landscape, e.g. transition from multiple platform options (Facebook, blogs) to Instagram focus

Feedback Design

The assessment incorporates multiple feedback channels:

During Weekly Posts:

- Staff acknowledgment through "hearting" posts
- Peer engagement through professional connections
- Real-time visibility of others' approaches

Assessment Feedback:

- Checking off completed elements using tracking spreadsheet
- Binary "present/not present" approach for most elements
- Focus on completeness rather than subjective quality judgments
- Clear timestamping to track engagement patterns

Post-Assessment Learning:

- Students maintain access to all peers' portfolios as a resource

- Many continue using their professional profiles after the module
- Self-employed graduates often transition to using these skills in practice

Impact and Outcomes

The approach has achieved several positive outcomes:

- Sustained student engagement throughout the module
- Development of transferable digital literacy skills
- Creation of a peer learning community through shared resources
- External examiner praise for innovation and workplace relevance
- Evolution over eight years in response to changing digital landscapes
- Strong pass rates and generally positive student feedback
- Graduates applying skills directly in professional contexts

As Vicci notes: *"The students appreciate something different... an assessment should just be as much about learning as the taught content should be"*

Challenges and Solutions

Key Challenges:

1. Tracking and Assessment:
 - a. Managing numerous portfolio elements across multiple students
 - b. Ensuring all components are found (including "swipe right" content)
 - c. Time-intensive nature of monitoring weekly engagement
2. Student Concerns:
 - a. Initial hesitancy about using social media professionally
 - b. Concerns about privacy and mixing personal/professional content
 - c. Tendency for some students to complete everything at the end
3. Platform Evolution:
 - a. Need to adapt to changing social media platforms over time
 - b. Balancing consistency with contemporary relevance

Solutions:

- Clear tracking spreadsheet to monitor completion
- Binary "present/not present" grading to simplify assessment
- Professional account setup separate from personal social media

- Detailed explanation about privacy controls and professional boundaries
- Flexibility in timing while encouraging regular engagement
- Regular revision of platform requirements based on current practices

Transferability

While developed for sports coaching, the core principles could be adapted for other programs:

- Professional digital literacy development through authentic practice
- Weekly engagement model that encourages ongoing learning
- Platform-flexibility that can evolve with technology trends
- Binary assessment approach that rewards completion over subjective quality
- Integration of external courses and experiences into a unified portfolio
- Resource curation and sharing as professional practice

The success of this approach over eight years, managing 45-50 students across multiple weekly activities, suggests it could serve as a model for other programs seeking to develop professional digital literacy while supporting ongoing engagement and peer learning.

Key advice for implementation: *"Make sure you're very clear on what you want to have in, when you want to have it. Make sure you familiarise yourself with Instagram and you create your own professional profile... Don't be afraid to be creative with it."*