

Multimodal Mastery: Elevating Student Engagement in Advanced Academic Writing With Interactive Portfolios

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Abstract

In today's digital landscape, traditional text-centric research writing often limits students' ability to engage deeply with complex ideas and communicate effectively across modalities. This presentation details an innovative pedagogical intervention implemented in ENG 204 (Advanced Academic Writing) at the American University of Sharjah during the 2024-2025 academic year. The project introduced an Interactive Multimodal Portfolio System via the bulb online platform, augmenting standard essays with digital artifacts including infographics for research proposals, reflective blogs on learning processes, and multimodal research essays. Employing a mixed-methods case study approach with 90 multilingual undergraduates, data were collected mid-course onward through post-semester surveys with retrospective self-assessments, rubric-evaluated portfolio artifacts, student reflections, focus groups, and engagement observations. Qualitative insights reveal heightened motivation, stronger material connections, and the portfolios' utility as professional showcases, though challenges like technical barriers were addressed through phased training and templates. Rooted in multiliteracies theory, the study highlights multimodal portfolios' potential to bridge academic writing with real-world digital demands, offering practical strategies for educators in multilingual contexts to foster critical thinking and engagement. Implications for curriculum innovation and further research on longitudinal outcomes will be explored.

Keywords: multimodal portfolios, academic writing, digital literacy, higher education pedagogy, multiliteracies theory, student engagement