

**Prior Learning
Assessment and
Recognition
(PLAR)
Student's Guide**

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Introduction

Contact: Pathways Coordinator, pathways@loyalistcollege.com

The Pathways Coordinator is the first person to contact for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). They can provide information on the steps involved to PLAR a course, including the costs, timelines and the next steps (i.e. setting up a meeting with the program coordinator).

This PLAR Guide has been developed to:

- Introduce students to the concept and practice of PLAR
- Assist students in preparing for the PLAR process
- Provide clear and consistent information about what PLAR is and isn't

This guide is intended primarily for situations where students would like to seek course credit for one or two courses after they have determined that they have acquired most or all of the learning of the course from experiences elsewhere. The guide will provide essential information and is a tool to outline the steps, costs, and timeline necessary to prepare for the PLAR process. It is intended to be used along with guidance from your faculty, program coordinator and the Pathways Coordinator. **It is highly recommended that the PLAR challenge process be completed prior to the beginning of the course, in case of an unsuccessful attempt.**

Note: Students seeking multiple course credits or a large portion of an entire program (or those simply want to develop a more comprehensive portfolio) should speak with the program coordinator about how best to proceed.

What is PLAR?

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is a process that involves the identification, documentation, assessment and recognition of learning acquired through formal and informal study. This may include work and life experience, training, independent study, MOOCs/webinars/podcasts, volunteering, travel, hobbies, and family experiences. The recognition of prior learning can be used toward the requirements of an academic or training program,

occupational/professional certification, or for employment/labor market entry purposes or for personal development.

Responsibility of the Student

Through PLAR, formal recognition and credit is awarded for *learning* acquired from experience, not credit for experience. It is the student's responsibility to prove that significant, related, college-level learning has taken place in order for credit to be granted by faculty.

Methods of Assessment

Utilizing the course outline, faculty will determine the most appropriate method(s) of assessment. Occasionally, faculty will use a combination of methods (e.g. portfolio and interview). Examples of assessment methods are as follows:

- Challenge Exams
- Interview
- Skills Demonstration
- Portfolio
- Other

Steps in the PLAR Process

The PLAR process involves a number of steps:

1. The student will contact the Pathways Coordinator about PLAR before they start the course they wish to PLAR. The Pathways Coordinator will advise the student about the process to complete the PLAR, fees involved, and timelines. The student will then be directed to the program coordinator for specific course information and requirements to conduct the PLAR.

2. The student will meet with the program coordinator or course faculty member for the pre-assessment interview. The student will be given a detailed course outline to help determine whether the student would be a good candidate for PLAR. The student will also be informed on the PLAR method of assessment.
3. Based on the information received in the pre-assessment interview, the student will then decide whether or not to proceed with the PLAR process. If the student decides to proceed then the PLAR form will be completed by faculty and returned to the Pathways Coordinator to register them to PLAR. **PLAR fees must be paid prior to the beginning of the assessment.**
4. For portfolio based assessments, student will follow the instructions provided by the program coordinator or faculty as well as the instructions in the *PLAR Student's Guide* to begin working on compiling their portfolio.
5. The student will complete the PLAR and submit it to faculty for assessment within the first 10 days of the semester. For multiple course requests or complex PLAR requests, additional time may be granted after discussions with the program coordinator and the Pathways Coordinator.
6. The faculty will receive and assess the PLAR and makes a credit decision (Yes, No or additional documentation needed).
7. If credit is awarded, the faculty member will assign a grade for the course and send it to the Dean for final approval. It will then be sent to the Pathways Coordinator for processing. For transcript purposes, the College makes no distinction between a credit awarded through PLAR or by having taken the course.
8. Faculty member informs student of status of course challenge (successful/unsuccessful) in a timely manner. Portfolio is returned to student.

Portfolio

A portfolio is a detailed document developed by the learner, kept in a binder, e-portfolio, file or a folder, which articulates and documents their learning acquired through work, study and life experience in relation to learning outcomes of the course(s).

Components of a Portfolio

Although the portfolio is in many ways a highly individualized product, there is a suggested format to be followed.

The portfolio consists of:

1. A **Cover Letter**, which states your request to have your learning assessed for post-secondary credit.
2. An up-to-date, detailed **Résumé** outlining previous education, paid and unpaid work experience.
3. A **Course Outline** which contains the learning outcomes for the course for which you are requesting PLAR credit.
4. A **Course Match Document (CMD)**, whether in chart form or narrative form, provides a clear and concise outline of related experience and the resulting learning as well as documentation as proof (see chart form below).
5. **Index to Documentation** – the documents should be filed under A-Z index tabs.
6. **Documentation or evidence** of your learning experiences as they relate to the course learning outcomes (see Documentation in PLAR below).

Writing the Course Match Document (CMD)

The **CMD** is prepared in a three-column format using the following headings:

- Description of Experience
- Learning from Experience
- Documentation

Course Match Documentation (CMD)

Course Code (SSWP2010)	Course Name (Building Community Capacity)		
Course Learning Outcomes	Description of Experience	Learning From Experience	Documentation
Outcome #1 Explain current issues that influence the various roles of an early childhood educator within a Canadian context.	Prepared PowerPoint presentation for staff meeting for Standard 2.	ECE assistant from 2018 – 2020 at ABC child Care	Letter from employer Artefact #1
	Participated in small group activity to discuss Code of Ethics during staff meeting.		Link to College of ECE standards of practice Artefact #2
	Demonstrated role awareness during day-to-day responsibilities.		PowerPoint presentation Artefact #3
Outcome #2			

Documentation in PLAR

Documentation is a critical element in demonstrating one's prior learning. Its main purpose is to help provide proof or evidence that the learning being sought for credit took place and can be verified.

Important Points to Consider: Documentation can be divided into two categories – direct and indirect.

Direct: The strongest documentation to support evidence of learning in PLAR includes products, manuals, performances, projects, reports, plans, podcasts, webinars, etc., created by you.

Indirect: Indirect documentation about your achievements from third parties is also acceptable evidence. This includes reference letters written by employers, certificates, awards, commendations, performance appraisals, and official records such as diplomas or transcripts. Indirect documentation generally refers to information about you and your achievements.

Sample Portfolio Template

**PLAR
Portfolio
(Your Name)**

Date: January 25, 2020
To: Loyalist College
From: John Smith
Re: PLAR Portfolio Assessment
Program: Social Service Worker
Faculty: Mark Gallupe
I respectfully submit my expectation for evaluation of this prior learning portfolio for the following course(s):
1. Course Code Course Name

Table of Contents

1. Resume
2. Course Outline
3. Course Match Document
4. Documentation
 - a. Letter of validation
 - b. Job Descriptions
 - c. Workshop Certificate
 - d. Work product sample

**Section 1
Résumé**

**Section 2
Course Outline**

**Section 3
Course Match
Document**

**Section 2
Documentation**