Desktop Publishing is an underused technique in the classroom. I am aware of use by teachers and students only in the journalism and marketing sectors. What is desktop publishing? The term refers to software that specializes in creating documents for desktop or commercial printing. The software combines text and graphics to produce books, newsletter, or brochures. It also involves page layout skills. As an example of desktop publishing, we used Adobe software to convert Word or PowerPoint documents into read-only files that were assembled in a booklet with bookmarks. The read-only feature is what makes this type of document extremely useful in classroom settings due to its tamper-proof quality.

Students can produce their portfolio project in any sort of software, and then convert their creations into PDF files and save them on a CD or flash drive. Adobe allows them to assemble their own portfolio outside a classroom setting in preparation for college applications or job interviews. The format makes it end-user friendly regardless of the type of hardware. In other words: An employer would be able to access the document and read it whether they used a PC or a Macintosh thus taking the guesswork out of the application game and leveling the ground. Desktop publishing allows students to genuinely showcase themselves in many ways that other programs don’t allow. Submitting a multitude of documents in various formats and software types may lead to unread documents for a variety of reasons: the intended reader may not have the software to open the document. Documents that should be read in a specific sequence appear out of order and do not have the same impact on the reader. Finally, the reader may simply not have the patience to open so many documents.

I can visualize having my students in German class use PDF files and desktop publishing in a variety of ways with specific focus on their quarterly project and in taking an active role building up their portfolios over the years. For example, all my students have one project that involves making a PowerPoint presentation about themselves at the end of the first year. Converting these PowerPoint presentations into PDF files would allow them to post their documents on a password protected class web site where every class member could enjoy these extremely creative files. Yet, the documents would be protected from alterations by others.

As a teacher, I intend to post the multitude of my documents on my website in PDF format, so my name as author cannot be deleted. Like many other German teachers I believe in sharing documents and ideas, but I like to be known as their author. On the passive side I have been using many documents that colleagues have posted as PDF files. These documents are free for use in the classroom but may not be used commercially.

The only downside is that schools do not always have the software. As a result, students usually do not have access, and it is up to the teacher to purchase and provide the software through their laptop which all students would have to access. Until that situation changes, use in my classroom will probably be limited to

* me helping students assemble a portfolio in a scheduled private session
* me assembling a “German class digest” style document for use on the class or school website or as a documentary for Parent-Teacher Night or
* for recruiting German students by showcasing student samples, and
* converting Word, Excel and PowerPoint documents before posting them on my website.