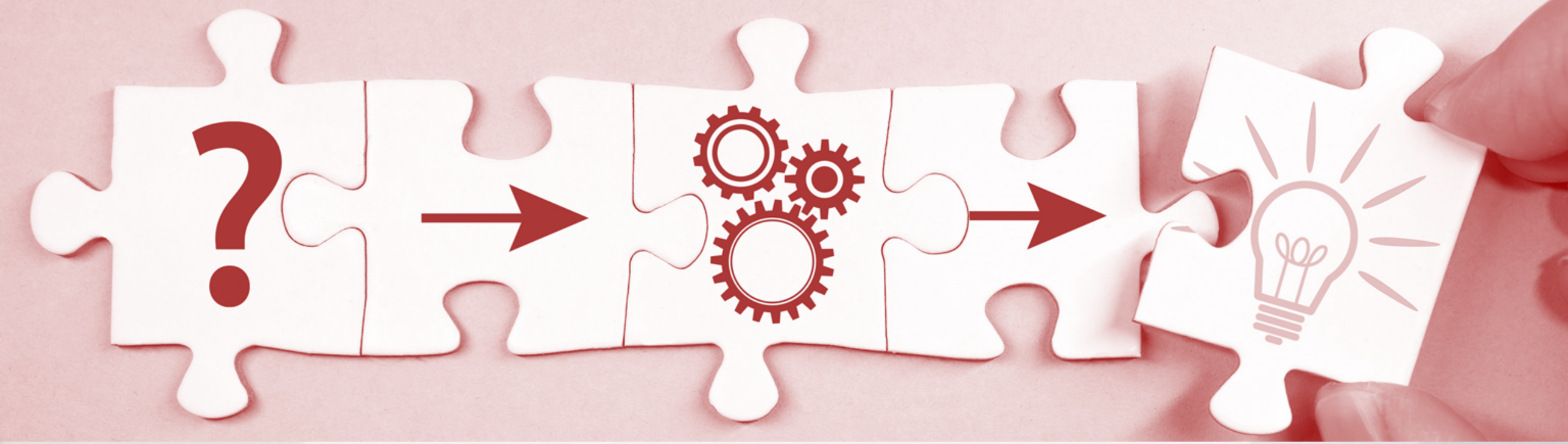


PLAR

Student Guide

Adapted from Thompson Rivers University, Office of PLAR

OVERVIEW

- PLAR Overview
- What is PLAR, Principles, Candidates
- Pathways for PLAR
- Steps
- Expectations
- Quick Guide

WHAT IS PLAR?

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is a common educational practice in Canada. Most universities and colleges in Canada have implemented PLAR, beginning in the 1970s. Acadia first approved PLAR both as a basis of admission, as well as for potential program credit, in April of 2025.

PLAR offers students an individualized path to and through higher education that is inclusive, open, and accessible.

PLAR allows students to confirm the value of their experiential, informal, and non-formal learning, and strengthens the links between traditional studies, work, and life experiences.

HOW IS PLAR USED?

Prior Learning Assessment (PLAR) recognizes a student's previous professional, cultural and/or lived experiences and learning. Acadia recognizes the potential for these experiences as a basis for both admission and credit towards Acadia programs. The University recognizes that knowledge, skills, and abilities can be acquired through various experiences (formal, informal, and non-formal) as well as demonstrated in varying ways.

If you believe that your prior learning experiences should be considered for admission and/or credit towards Acadia courses, you can apply for PLAR.

A PLAR assessment allows students to earn course credit for specific Acadia course/s, or undesignated (9000 level) course/s, via the demonstration of their learning obtained from various settings and presented in a variety of formats that represent the learning in a meaningful way.

PLAR PRINCIPLES

1. PLAR can be used for either admission or credit completion purposes.
2. The Registrar's Office will coordinate all Acadia PLAR activities related to credit.
3. The Admissions Office will coordinate all Acadia PLAR activities related to admission.
4. Academic units will be involved in, and have the final decision on, PLAR based admission into their respective programs.
5. Academic units will be involved in, and have the final decision on, PLAR course equivalency credits awarded.
6. The determination of equivalency, including level, type, and number of credits will be made by the academic units and appropriate subject matter experts.
7. Recognition of specific course equivalencies are granted where a passable standard of the knowledge, skills, attributes and/or outcomes expected upon course completion are demonstrated.
8. PLAR credits will be counted toward program progression and overall credit hour completion but will not be counted toward the GPA. Recognized PLAR equivalencies will appear on the official transcript and will show as a P grade.
9. PLAR for course credit equivalency cannot be sought for courses previously attempted or assessed at Acadia.

PLAR CANDIDATES

PLAR candidates will request PLAR assessment when they believe that they have already achieved significant learning from areas such as:

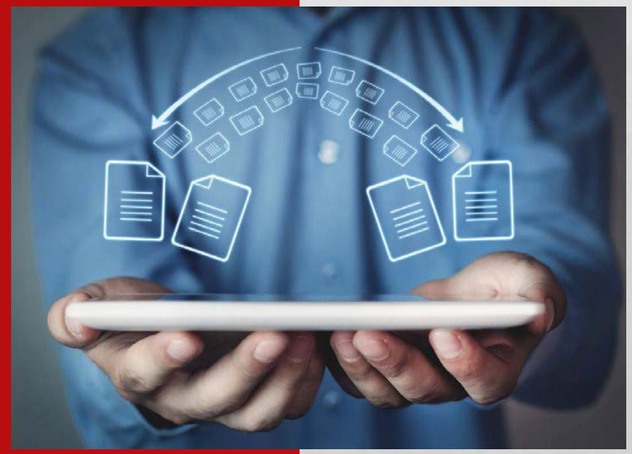
- Employment
- Employer- and Industry-provided Training
- Volunteering
- Industry Certifications
- Indigenous ways of knowing and being
- Designations
- Courses (e.g., private institutions, self-study, continuing education, micro-credentials)
- Trades Certifications
- Self-study

PLAR PATHWAYS

PLAR at Acadia has several pathways for students to follow, either singularly or in combination:

1. Skills/Experience Portfolio/s
2. Interviews
3. Skills/Knowledge Demonstration/s
4. Challenge Exams

Candidates are also encouraged to submit expressions of support from persons that can attest to the candidate's skills, aptitudes, community involvement and impact.



SKILLS/EXPERIENCE PORTFOLIO

A skills/experience portfolio is an option for candidates to present their learning through writing, research, and evidence that allows for assessment and ultimately, credits. The learning students demonstrate often comes from employment, volunteering, private institutions, independent study, professional development, designations, industry certifications, community, etc.

What it frequently includes:

1. **Personal background and learning goals**
   - A reflective statement or resume outlining work, training, volunteer experiences, and learning journey.
2. **Learning outcomes or competency mapping**
   - Experience to specific learning outcomes of a course or program.
3. **Evidence of learning examples**
   - Certificates from non-credit training
   - Work samples
   - Letters from employers, supervisors, beneficiaries or community
   - Photos, projects, reports, etc.
   - Journals or reflective writing
4. **Narrative or reflective statements**
   - Descriptions of what was learned, how it was applied, and how it matches the academic standards.

PLAR INTERVIEW

A PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition) interview is a structured conversation where an individual's prior learning, acquired through experience, is assessed against the learning outcomes of specific course/s or program. The interview can be a key component of the PLAR process and aims to evaluate the applicant's knowledge, skills, and abilities to determine if they meet the requirements for course credit or program admission.

Key elements of a PLAR interview:

1. **Structured Questions**
   - The interview typically involves a series of questions designed to explore the applicant's prior learning experiences and how they relate to the learning outcomes of the target course or program.
2. **Portfolio Review**
   - The applicant usually submits a portfolio of evidence (e.g., work samples, projects, certifications) that demonstrates their learning. The interviewer may refer to this portfolio during the interview to ask specific questions
3. **Competency-Based Assessment**
   - The applicant usually submits a portfolio of evidence (e.g., work samples, projects, certifications) that demonstrates their learning. The interviewer may refer to this portfolio during the interview to ask specific questions.
4. **Discussion of Learning**
   - The interview provides an opportunity for the applicant to articulate their learning experiences, explain how they acquired their knowledge and skills, and demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter.

SKILLS/EXPERIENCE DEMONSTRATION

A PLAR demonstration is a means to prove prior learning through a practical, hands-on, or performance-based methods — instead of (or in addition to) a written portfolio. This method involves practical examinations, skill demonstrations and simulations in which students demonstrate prior learning as it relates to the learning outcomes of a course(s). In this situation, students are provided with course materials, for example course outlines and performance checklists, in addition to texts and other course resources. Program faculty assess the specific learning outcomes and performance standards. If successful students will be granted course credit.

Common types of PLAR demonstrations:

1. **Skills demonstration or performance test**
   Student performs a task or set of tasks that reflect real-world skills.
   - *Example:* a Business PLAR candidate prepares a specified mock business plan.
2. **Structured interview or oral assessment**
   Assessor asks questions to evaluate a student's understanding.
   - *Example:* a psychology candidate answers questions about child development theories and safety protocols.
3. **Project or simulation**
   Student creates or presents a project that demonstrates applied learning.
   - *Example:* a business manager develops a mock business plan, marketing strategy, or financial model.

CHALLENGE EXAM

A PLAR (prior learning assessment and recognition) challenge exam is a formalized method of assessing a learner's existing knowledge, skills, and competencies against the learning outcomes of a specific course. It provides an opportunity for individuals—typically adult learners or professionals with substantial informal, experiential, or non-formal learning—to demonstrate that they have already mastered the content and skills the course is designed to teach.

The exam functions as an alternative to traditional course participation, allowing the institution to maintain academic standards while acknowledging that learning can occur outside of the classroom. As a faculty assessor, your role is to evaluate whether the student's demonstrated performance—via written responses, applied problem-solving, or case-based analysis—meets or exceeds the expectations for successful course completion.

A successful PLAR challenge exam result warrants the awarding of full academic credit for the course, as if the learner had completed it through standard instruction. The assessment must be comprehensive, rigorous, and aligned with the course's stated learning outcomes, ensuring that the integrity of the course credit is upheld.

- *Example:* An already in-use final exam for a course.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The Chair and/or Faculty Assessor will determine which assessment framework would be best suited to the course(s) and/or program for which you are seeking PLAR.

For example, observation may work well for a music course, while a challenge exam or skills demonstration may work well for an accounting course. Assessors may wish to combine elements such as an interview and a challenge exam.

Please note that you may be asked for supplemental material or an additional method of evaluation after your initial submission.

A few examples of additional or alternative methods of assessment include:

- Video Submission
- Community Statements
- Quiz/Test
- Live Demonstration
- Project

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU SEEK PLAR BASED ADMISSION?

STEP 1

Student believes they have background through employment or other areas of life to challenge admission requirements, initiate PLAR application via admission app and PLAR form.

STEP 2

Admissions interviews applicant. Process may conclude here if department gives Admissions authority to do so, and if applicant is deemed admissible, otherwise, Admissions sends the interview notes and application to Department to proceed with next steps.

STEP 3

Department assessment based upon Department determined PLAR methodology.

STEP 4

Department decision made and communicated to Admissions Office.

STEP 5

Admissions communicates to applicant.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU SEEK PLAR FOR CREDIT?

STEP 1

Student indicates an interest in PLAR. They receive PLAR package (from RO) – and completes the form.

STEP 2

Form is received by RO (**Coordinator, Transfers and Articulations**).

STEP 3

Coordinator communicates with **Department**.

STEP 4

Department looks at form and requested credit(s) and determines what type of assessment is applicable/desired.

Coordinator communicates necessary assessment components with student.

STEP 5

Student evaluates requirement/s and decides whether to proceed.

STEP 6

Student submits/completes required assessment pieces and pays one-time PLAR assessment fee.

STEP 6

Department conducts assessment, determines which/if credits are granted, or whether anything additional is needed to supplement submission.

STEP 7

Results reviewed, communicated and actioned (via **Coordinator**).

STEP 8

If student is not already enrolled, **student** must apply to the University.

EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS

Be clear as to the nature and extent of your PLAR request.

You are strongly encouraged to submit materials no later than 8 weeks prior to the start of the desired entry term. Submissions received after this date will be processed, when possible, but may not be ready for the start of the term.

Respond to requests for additional information in a timely manner.

Cite and reference material, where applicable.

Be clear and organized with your writing and/or discussion.

STUDENT QUICK GUIDE

What Assessors look for in a Candidate's Prior Learning, Lived and/or Cultural Experiences
Adapted from Quality Assurance in PLAR: A Guide for Institutions Vol. II

Criteria	Definition
Breadth	Have you shown a wide range of knowledge and skills in your area of learning? Does your experience cover comparable topics to those in the course or program you are seeking credit for? Tip: Review the course outline or program outcomes. Note how your experiences align with the main topics and skills expected.
Depth	Does your evidence show understanding beyond just doing tasks (e.g., explaining why things are done, analyzing situations, solving complex problems)? Does your portfolio demonstrate critical thinking and application of your knowledge? Tip: Use specific examples that show decision-making, problem-solving, or analysis. Consider frameworks like Bloom's Taxonomy (e.g., apply, analyze, evaluate) when explaining your learning.
Currency	Are your skills and knowledge current with industry, cultural, or community practices? Have you included recent examples, training, or continued application of your learning? Tip: If your learning happened in the past, show how you have kept it updated (e.g., attending workshops, continued use in work/community roles).
Sufficiency	Have you included enough documentation and explanation to demonstrate your knowledge and skills clearly? Would someone unfamiliar with your background understand the scope of your learning? Tip: Use multiple types of evidence (letters, examples of your work, reflections, certificates) to strengthen your portfolio.
Authenticity	Is the evidence your own work, skills, and knowledge? Have you included letters of validation from employers, supervisors, knowledge holders, or community leaders if needed? Tip: Be prepared to discuss your experiences in an interview or provide demonstrations if requested.