Using Digital Media
Starting Points for Graduate Students in English

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1   THE BASICS

- Your file system is your research database over the long term.
- You should compile a bibliographic database with Zotero (zotero.org).
- Set up automatic backups of everything, or else.

2   MAKING A WEBSITE

2.1   SOME TYPES OF SITES

Wordpress
- blog format by default, but can be used to create a non-blog site
- fairly straightforward web interface
- customizable, within limits, by themes and (depending on hosts) plugins

Static site
- no databases, just HTML (and CSS, and Javascript)
- requires hand-editing and/or a templating system (Jekyll, Hugo)
- requires a method for uploading files to a host
- highly customizable, but more time-consuming to set up and use

Drupal or other content management systems (CMSs)
- same idea as Wordpress, but more flexible and (much) harder to use
- not focused on blogging
- not recommended except for elaborate projects

MLA Commons

- support.commons.mla.org/guides/sites/creating-a-site-or-blog
- comes with MLA membership; *could* just set up a Commons profile page
- URL of the form: X.commons.mla.org
- hosted Wordpress Multisite (numerous but finite options for customization)
- can *but need not* be used as a blog

Personal Hosting

- yearly costs for the domain and for hosting
- URL of the form: X.com or X.org (or . . .)
- any type of site, but support and ease-of-use for various types varies
- recommendation: Reclaim Hosting (reclaimhosting.com)

Low-cost Static Hosting: Github Pages

- hosted at no cost by Github (pages.github.com)
- free (for now) and available until the end of history (for now)
- URL of the form X.github.io unless you register another domain separately
- uses the Jekyll static site generator (jekyllrb.com)
- requires hand-coding in Markdown, plus HTML/CSS for customization
- requires git to deploy; tricky, but can be reduced to magic incantations

Scholarly Repositories

- long-term archiving of scholarly outputs; item URLs via the DOI system
- not suitable as a web host but a medium of non-peer-reviewed publication
- Rutgers SOAR (soar.libraries.rutgers.edu): when you have an article accepted, you must either deposit it or file a waiver
- MLA CORE (commons.mla.org/core)
- Open Science Framework (osf.io)

Disrecommendations

- "free" wordpress.com: places ads on your site (paying the ~~extortion~~ rent: okay)
- corporate social media: Facebook, academia.edu, LinkedIn, Medium, etc.
- eden.rutgers.edu/~netid: old-school; very serviceable . . . until you graduate

- Francesca Giannetti's workshop on HTML and CSS: links at
  dh.rutgers.edu/spring-2016-workshops
- my introductory workshop on Markdown and HTML:
  dh.rutgers.edu/empowerment-ii

- Forum on the semipublic intellectual, *PMLA* 130, no. 2 (March 2015).
- Tressie McMillan Cottom, "Who Do You Think You Are?," *Ada* 7 (April 2014).

3   DIGITAL HUMANITIES RESEARCH

Digital humanities (or *DH*) mainly refers to three things:
- computer-assisted studies of large collections of texts (etc.);
- digitized archives and interactive digital tools for scholarship;
- studies of digital media by the humanistic disciplines.

These three strains are more often in conflict than in harmony. DH sometimes overlaps with the history of the book, library and information science, media studies, and computational social science (computational linguistics, digital sociology, quantitative political science, and so on).

- Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (Verso, 2005): the one book to read in this domain, if you read just one. It is not explicitly "digital," but it makes the most important argument for the kinds of literary-historical methods that now seem to require computers.
- Matthew K. Gold, ed. *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013), and its sequel, *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*, edited by Gold and Lauren Klein (both open-access at dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu): useful, large collections of short position papers. See, especially, the essays by Kirschenbaum, McPherson, and Liu in the 2012 volume.
- Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth, eds., *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies* (Blackwell, 2008; open-access at digitalhumani-

ties.org/companionDLS). This overview of humanities computing is dated but revealing about the history of DH.

3.2   JOURNALS

- Recent special issues of *Representations* (on search, 127, no. 1) and *MLQ* (on scale and value, 77, no. 3) are notable indices of how DH is currently entering into generalist discussion.
- Stanford Literary Lab Pamphlets (litlab.stanford.edu): not a journal, but a series of essays, most authored or co-authored by graduate students, coming out of the department most strongly associated with quantitative approaches to literary study.
- *Journal of Digital Humanities:* a recently established open-access journal that attempts to cover DH in a broad sense.
- *Digital Humanities Quarterly:* another open-access journal, of somewhat longer standing.
- *Digital Studies in the Humanities:* formerly known as *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, this journal addresses technical specialists.
- *CA: Journal of Cultural Analytics:* the newest entrant in this subfield.

3.3   TEACHING YOURSELF

DH has a widespread culture of autodidacticism when it comes to computing skills (programming, building databases or websites, statistics for data analysis, etc.) This is rather problematic, since joining a scholarly subfield should not require having the substantial spare time and extra resources that teaching yourself typically requires. It also throws the challenge of identifying *what* to learn and *how* to learn it back on the learner. Better to find a course, when you're ready. In addition to term-time coursework, there are off-season intensive courses to consider (not only the Summer and Winter Digital Humanities Institutes but also the Rare Book School and perhaps the ICSPR summer program).

Bracketing the proviso about teaching yourself . . .

· Palladio (hdlab.stanford.edu/palladio) is a web-based program for exploring humanities data. If you have data in spreadsheet form, Palladio can organize and visualize it in some very interesting ways, include social network diagrams, maps, and timelines. For a gentle introduction to exploring data, access Miriam Posner's tutorial at miriamposner.com/blog/getting-started-with-palladio. Posner demonstrates how to use this tool to explore a dataset of mid-twentieth-century photographs.

· Voyant Tools (voyant-tools.org) lets you experiment with basic word-counting techniques in one or multiple texts (multiple texts are more interesting: you can compare distinctive words across texts, for example). Click "Open" and choose Shakespeare's plays from the menu, or paste in your own texts. The documentation is at docs.voyant-tools.org.

· Alan Liu's Toychest (dhresourcesforprojectbuilding.pbworks.com) is an enormous catalogue of tools, tutorials, and overviews curated by a senior scholar. Browsing there is an overwhelming experience, but Liu's aim is to collect everything that is freely available and of potential interest for graduate and undergraduate humanities students, so there is much that might catch your eye.

Voyant and Palladio strongly emphasize visualization. The conflation of visualization technique with analytical method is endemic in DH. Suffice to say that there are many more ways to understand data than to squint at images.

3.5   AT RUTGERS

· The Rutgers Digital Humanities Initative (dh.rutgers.edu)
· Francesca Giannetti, DH Librarian (francesca.giannetti@rutgers.edu)
· The DH Lab (dh.rutgers.edu/lab)

3.6   IT'S NOT ABOUT TOOLS

If you look at those websites and find them baffling or dull, never mind them. A better test of whether you might want to look further into the digital humanities is whether you find any of the following questions interesting (this is not an exhaustive list):

· What does the mass digitization of (some) of the cultural archive mean for scholarship?

- Should we study literature differently when we access it in digital form?
- How do access and expertise work in the digital context? Must existing cultural and social hierarchies be reproduced in the digital domain?
- How do we study aggregates as well as singular objects, operating on larger (or smaller) scales?
- How can quantitative methods from the social sciences work in our field?
- How do digitization and computer networks change how scholars communicate with one another and with their broader publics? Does the Web permit (or require) us to work in new genres, alongside the familiar print-digital genres of journal article and scholarly book?

4 HOBBY-HORSE CODA: PREPARING DIGITAL DOCUMENTS

4.1 THEY DON'T HAVE TO BE THAT UGLY

- *No more Times New Roman.* Choose another typeface meant for setting extended text: Garamond, Palatino, Hoefler Text, Baskerville . . .
- A really wide line of text is a chore for the reader. Use generous margins, with no more than 75–85 characters in a line of text.
- Matthew Butterick's "Typography in Ten Minutes" and the book it is part of give reasonable suggestions:
  practicaltypography.com/typography-in-ten-minutes.html.

4.2 YOU COULD STOP WRITING IN WORD

- Kieran Healy, "The Plain Person's Guide to Plain Text Social Science": kieranhealy.org/publications/plain-person-text.
- andrewgoldstone.com/tex gives an idea of the abyss into which you can eventually fall.