

## Struggling with timelines: helping you with making the best possible choice



To create this assignment my student assistants Sidney Wiltgen and Marvin Schieben, and I, have assessed the advantages and disadvantages of various timeline tools. We would like to share our insights to help lecturers make the best choice. If we would have the possibility of offering an open source timeline tool that can be customized to the needs and skills of teacher and pupils, these are the elements that would be on our wishlist:

- A comprehensive tutorial that addresses all possible hiccups
- Being able to work on it with different people at the same time
- Being able to populate it with multimedia in a responsible way (meaning that copyright law and privacy are taken into consideration)
- An interface that offers a glimpse of what the end result will look like, so that you can take that into consideration while selecting content
- An interface that makes it easy to go one step back and edit
- The possibility to create the timeline in a password protected area, so that it can be monitored by the lecturer during its creation, stored after completion, so that new ones can be made on the same subject by new students (think of the timeline assignments as an exam question)

Despite the shared belief within Digital Humanities that educational tools on the web should be free, expecting software developers to develop a tool that would offer all these features for free is not entirely fair. Just as in any other profession, software developers have to 'bring home the bacon'. This is why nearly all timelines offer a basic free account with limited options, that can be upgraded to a paid account with features that allow collaboration and more flexibility.

The exception are tools developed within an academic environment, but these are not always the most user friendly ones for beginners. Contrary to companies, university lecturers and researchers are foremost focused on the development of the tool and its performance within a research setting. Often a project that begins and ends. They cannot support users of their tool throughout the world or create variations with different levels of complexity. This requires a level of customer service that is not viable in the setting of a university.

So there is a tension between the dynamics of the creation of a tool and what is necessary to keep it running, and the context of working with it in the classroom with limited resources and skills.

To help you with making your choice, we have created the following table:

	Tutorial	Features of free version	preparation	interface	collaboration	multimedia	monitoring password protected	storing password protected	Extra advantage or disadvantage
<a href="https://estory.iohttps://estory.io">https://estory.iohttps://estory.io</a> , <a href="https://estory.iohttps://estory.io">https://estory.iohttps://estory.io</a>	Slides: <a href="https://estory.io/explore">https://estory.io/explore</a> ???	free	Create folder with: - short text in text file - search for images/audio/video and download copies or copy links	Easy and intuitive	No, because everybody has to work with an own account to create a timeline.	Files can be uploaded easily or the program helps you to find them on the internet.	Not possible	Not possible	Very easy to handle and it  estory does not have a password safe environment, so the lecturer has no Control over the assignments
<a href="https://timeline.knightlab.com/#make">https://timeline.knightlab.com/#make</a>	Pdf:  Clips: <a href="https://vimeo.com/143407878">https://vimeo.com/143407878</a> (October 2015)  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiAn89u0D7M">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiAn89u0D7M</a> (September 2013)	free	One has to complete an excel file in a very precise way	One cannot see how the timeline is going to look, difficult to understand whether someone is on the right track.	????	Files can be included by copy pasting the online link of it into the field "media".	?????	?????	The program is difficult to use. You need a good instruction to get efficient results.
<a href="https://www.tiki-toki.com">https://www.tiki-toki.com</a>	Clips: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4e97aGl4zOA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4e97aGl4zOA</a> (June 2014)  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UgiEhJ1xBE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UgiEhJ1xBE</a> (August 2014)	Limited usable in free version, only one time	You get a timeline in 2d or 3d with short texts, photographs and you can make timespans visible. After	Easy to use, but you have to change some interfaces. For example if you don't want days and months in your timeline,	Full access would cost 125\$ per year	Files can be easily included by uploading them.	???	????	Easy to use after having watched the a tutorial clip  Only one timeline in free version

			having finished it, you can scroll through the years like you are on a highway.	you have to change that in the settings before.					
<a href="https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/1471445">https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/1471445</a>	<p>Clip: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rk9fcBDVMd4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rk9fcBDVMd4</a> (January 2014)</p> <p>Slides: <a href="https://www.slideshare.net/educ215langosch/time-toast-tutorial">https://www.slideshare.net/educ215langosch/time-toast-tutorial</a> (April 2014)</p>	<p>Comes with publicity</p> <p>Entitled to only 1 draft private version, others are automatically made public</p> <p>Only one user per account</p> <p>Limit of 10 timelines</p>	<p>Create folder with material:</p> <p>Write short text in text file</p> <p>Search for images/audio/video and download copies or copy links</p>	<p>Timeline does not show automatically, you have to press MORE and VIEW THIS TIMELINE to see what you are doing</p> <p>Going back to re-edit is fairly easy</p>	Only possible with basic: 72 dollar a year, no adds, timelines stay private, unlimited timelines	Images can be uploaded, audio and video through links	Upgrading needed to basic and more	Upgrading needed to basic and more	Very easy to handle,

We would suggest the following:

**The easiest way** - If this is the very first time you are dealing with a digital timeline, and have no plans to integrate it into your teaching in the long run, then you might want to limit yourself to assignment 1a, and make use of the existing assignment account with Tikitoki. You just add two new entries. Be aware that you have to take turns to complete the entries, as you cannot work at the same time within one account. The problem with *the life of Boder* is that there are very limited images available for free. So creating a timeline every new time this assignment is assigned would cause problems. This is why we want to keep this assignment behind a wall, and store it after completion, instead of publishing it online.

**An investment in a teaching resource** - If you are interested in integrating this tool in your lessons, and have the time to have your students create alternative timelines, than the possibilities to find copy free material are much bigger. In that case you might want to try the very easy tool *estory*, or to create a paid teacher account in *tikitoki*, with many possibilities.

**Understanding the backend of a timeline** - If this exploration is the start of engaging deeper into Digital History, then you have to cover the subject of how the backend of a timeline is created. This means learning to work with tables, structured data, and with urls, addresses of where the data is stored. The tables have to be completed in a very precise way, so that they can be turned into entries in the timeline. This is a visually complex task, work vertically on something that is going to be presented horizontally. It requires time for skill development, but is very useful to get acquainted with handling digital data. In this case Knightlab would be a good choice.

See below notes from different contexts that provide the insights for this blog.

Bemerkungen Marvin:

Ja, aber das Programm "Timeline" benötigt eine kurze Einweisung durch die Lehrkraft, damit der Student effektiv damit arbeiten kann.
Ja es ist möglich aber beansprucht viel Zeit. Besonders wenn man mit dem Programm versucht die Zeitleiste besser zu gestalten, also Fotos und so weiter einzufügen.
15 Minuten, jedoch muss man sich zuerst mit dem Programm vertraut machen. (diese Vorwissen hatten wir teilweise) Außerdem konnten wir noch 3 Stationen in Boder's leben in diesem Zusammenhang hinzufügen.
Das Anlegen einer Zeitleiste mit dem Programm Timeline. Zudem die Schwierigkeit mit solchen Programmen zu arbeiten.
Die Anzeige mit den Zeiten gefällt mir sehr gut, jedoch wirkt zum Beispiel estory als Programm für diese Aufgabe weitaus benutzerfreundlicher. Zum Beispiel machte diese Programm dem Nutzer Bildvorschläge, während "Timeline" einen selbst auf die Suche schickt und dann Schwierigkeiten beim Anzeigen des Fotos bereitet. Die drei angegebenen Forschungszweige Politics and societal developments, Technology und The History of Psychology sind für einen Studenten recht umfangreich und erfordern Vorwissen bzw. eine gute Quellenlage, die jedoch nicht sofort und ohne längeres Suchen abrufbar ist.

Comments Sidney

knightlab too complicated for spontaneous work in class, estory is better suited WE HAVE CONSIDERED THE OPTIONS AND CHOSE FOR TIKITOKI
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>KNIGHTLAB</b></li><li>- a short introduction would be needed especially since the interface for knightlab is an excel sheet, making it difficult to imagine the final appearance</li><li>- three possible rows for date, not completely clear which one to use</li><li>- estory proposed pictures, have to look for pictures in knightlab</li><li>- have to have all the dates for knightlab, or it mixes up all the different stations in life</li></ul>

- 15 min to get acquainted with the tool, although we already worked with it months ago. It is not very intuitive. only able to fill in first three stations in life
- when putting pictures in knightlab, you have to copy the picture link, not the link of the google search
- considering the assignment (also reflecting on politics, societal developments, technology and history of psychology), you would have to be an expert in all three fields to be able to put his personal life in context with political, societal and technological advances, as you could fill a timeline each with developments in those fields. Overwhelming for students with no insight into the matter.
- first page students refer to is wikipedia, which does hardly elaborate on Boder's life and political events surrounding it. A link to "voices of the holocaust" would be a good hint for students.
- when students think of the Great War, Russian Revolution etc, how to implement it in Timeline? Tricky since it is overlapping and one event might have led to other events. Also in what way do political events have an impact on digital source criticism, the intended main topic of the lesson? Agree that David Boder is an interesting personality, but focus should not be his life but the sources and their transformation itself.

RETHINK!!!

### Stefania - Instructions on how to create a timeline with Time Toast in different online lesson:

#### C. Assignment: Create a timeline on the history of literacy and communication of your family

This assignment is meant to make you more conscious of the connections between the introduction of certain technologies in society and their take up in your own social environment. It will give you a clearer sense of how social practices and conventions with regard to creating and spreading information emerge, disappear or are sometimes re-mediated into new medium. You are going to create a digital timeline, that will be gradually populated with dates, texts, images and clips, while completing the various sections of the course

- **First go to: [www.time toast.com](http://www.time toast.com),**

this is a website that offers a free account for creating an easy timeline without the need for a corresponding excel file with data, from which you have to extract your data.

- **If you click on the purple block 'get started', you will see three options appear, choose the PUBLIC one.**

This means that your timeline is free, but that you are only entitled to one draft version, that will not be shared. All the others will be automatically made public. If you want more then one timeline and object to displaying foto's or data of your family in a public timeline, then take into consideration not to use photographs of them, but images that are copy right free. You can make your own, or look for copy right free images in the wiki commons images. The same applies to using names. The information that really matters in this context is when, at what age, and in what form people are socialized with certain practices. It is also possible, that your family will very much enjoy your creation, and support you with supplying useful information.

- **Creating time periods** Start with marking the decades of the time of birth of your grandparents, and end with the present decade. You can do that by 'adding a time span' that begins with your grandparents and ends in the present time. Then you will be asked to add the first event. Choose the birth year of one grandparent,

and then insert a next one. Then add the birthdays of both your parents and those of your siblings, then finally add yours. You will see that the timeline does not show automatically. To see the result you have to click on the purple block MORE, and then on 'view this timeline'

- **Creating events** To create an event, you click on the box, and then a field appears that can be completed with data, you can also upload a picture, or include a link to a website. In the free account you can not add links to audio and video that can be directly opened, you are directed to the link, and can open the link at the other location.

NOTE: I am of the generation that automatically starts writing a step by step written instruction, but you will probably be more at ease with the you tube tutorial that has been created by **Educast** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rk9fcBDVMd4> (January 2014)

Or by the slideshare show that can be viewed here: <https://www.slideshare.net/educ215langosch/time-toast-tutorial> (April 2014)

be aware however, that the design of the website has changed, and some fields shown in the video are different then on the time toast website that you are using at present. See for an example of a populated timeline: <http://www.timetoast.com/timelines> (TODO)