

Digital Collections and Exhibits with Omeka

Caterina Agostini

Omeka is a practical tool for describing and curating primary sources in support of research and teaching in the humanities. This workshop will be an introduction to the basics of creating collections and exhibits with the Omeka web publishing platform.

Files

We need some files to build digital collections and exhibits with Omeka. Let's download these files:

- Rutgers College, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1913.
<http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/pan.6a07785> (Download the JPEG)
- Subset of the Library of Congress's GIPHY dataset. Google sheet: <http://bit.ly/2yGDNP1>. (Go to File > Download as > Comma-separated values), or
- A dataset on the French encyclopedia writers, shared by Melanie Conroy
<https://ageofrevolutions.com/2017/09/25/visualizing-social-networks-palladio-and-the-encycopedistes-pt-i> (Go to Google Sheets > Download > Comma-separated values).

What is Omeka?

Omeka is:

- a web publishing platform used to create multimedia exhibits, providing an accessible web service
- a searchable online database of digitized primary sources
- an open source software application that can be installed and run on a web server (Omeka Classic or .org); a single installation that supports multiple sites (Omeka S); a web app hosted by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (**Omeka.net** is the version we are exploring today)
- a non-profit project funded by granting agencies like IMLS, Mellon, and Sloan, and supported by fees from premium Omeka.net plans.

Omeka Projects

The following are a few public history sites that we'll examine together. Consult the Omeka Classic Directory (<https://omeka.org/classic/directory>) and the Omeka.net Showcase (<https://info.omeka.net/showcase>) for more examples.

- Black Liberation 1969 Archive. <http://blacklib1969.swarthmore.edu>
- Goin' North: Stories from the First Great Migration to Philadelphia. <https://goinnorth.org>
- 1886, digital library of the Bordeaux University, <http://1886.u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr>

Omeka Terminology

Item: the basic unit of an Omeka site. An item can be anything: a photograph, a work of art, a person, an idea. You'll describe each item, and you can upload files to represent it, too.

Dublin Core: An Item contains metadata, or descriptive data about that specific things, based on the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative. Items can belong to a collection, be tagged with many keywords, and used in multiple exhibits.

Collection: a set of items that you've grouped together. Your Omeka site can have multiple collections, but an individual item can only belong to one collection at a time.

Exhibit: a tour of your items, which can be organized thematically, chronologically, or however you want. Each exhibit has pages, which can be nested. A page can have text, a group of items, or a group of items with text. You can have multiple exhibits, and items can belong to multiple exhibits.

Item Type: an item can be many different things, like a photograph, a website, a book, or a person. An "item type" is the kind of thing the item is – still image, audio recording. You can choose from a built-in list of item types, or you can create your own.

Simple Page: a web page on your Omeka site that isn't part of an exhibit or item. For example, you can add an "About" page using Simple Pages.

Dashboard

Omeka's administrative panel or Dashboard is where you can manage all of the functions and information in an Omeka website: adding items, creating collections, modifying item types, building an exhibit, and managing its plugins and themes.

Omeka Account Creation

- Sign up for an Omeka.net account. You can have one Omeka.net account—and thereby one free site—per email account. <https://www.omeka.net/signup>
- Choose the free trial (Basic) plan
- Complete the form—make sure you record the password and email address that you enter!
- Check the email account you entered, find the email from omeka.net and click on the link in the message to activate your account
- Go to your account dashboard and click on Add a Site. Fill in information about your site's URL, the title you want to use, and a description (optional). Click on Add Your Site.
- Your site will now appear in the account dashboard. Click Manage Site. You are now in your site dashboard.

Plugins

- Click on Plugins in the site Dashboard. Plugins add functionality to your Omeka site.
- Press the Install button for these plugins: Exhibit Builder, CSV Import, and Simple Pages.

Themes

- Click on Appearance. The free version of Omeka.net comes with 4 themes. Switch themes by selecting one of the options on the page. Press the Use this theme button to activate your new theme. Then visit your public site by clicking on the name of your site at the top left of the page.
- Return to the Dashboard by clicking on Omeka Admin in the top right.

Create Simple Web Pages

- You may wish to use the Simple Pages plugin to create simple web pages for publishing an essay, or to create an About or Credits page, or use it to link out to Teacher Resources. Any of those pages can become part of the main navigation for your website.
- Create a basic web page for discussing your project by using the Simple Pages plugin. A Simple Page does not require items or require programming knowledge to build, but optionally allows users to add HTML markup, PHP code, or embeds from multimedia web objects.
- Choose a look for your website and modify the site's navigation and homepage, by picking and configuring a theme and installing your plugins.
- Upload sources and files by Adding Items.
- If you need to edit or add more fields to describe the types of sources you are adding, you can Modify or add an item type. You can build an exhibit with the items in your site using the exhibit builder plugin.

Add an Item

- In the Dashboard, click on Items on the left menu, and then Add an item.
- Dublin Core is the element set that you can use to describe your item. They are all optional, but try to be consistent. To complete metadata for the map of New Brunswick, look at the RUcore page from which you downloaded the file.
- Be sure to click the Public checkbox so that your item is viewable by the general public. If you don't click that box, only people who are logged into your site will be able to see the item.
- Note: The decision about whether you're describing the object or the representation of the object is up to you (and may be influenced by your research). But once you've decided, be consistent.
- When you've finished adding metadata, you can attach a file to your item record by clicking Files at the top of the Dublin Core form.
- Once you've added a file or files, you can add Tags by clicking on the button. You can also click on Item Type Metadata to choose the kind of thing your item is. If you don't see the appropriate item type for your item, you can add new item types.
- When you're all done, click the green Add Item button.

Create a Collection

- You can begin to bring order to your list of items by grouping them together in collections.
- To do this, return to your dashboard, click on the Collections tab, and click on Add a Collection.
- More metadata! Enter some information about your new collection, and remember to click on the Public button near the bottom of the page. Then save your collection.
- To fill up the collection you just created, click on the Items tab. From your Browse Items list, click the boxes of the items that belong in your new collection. Then click on the Edit button.
- On the Batch Edit Items page, select the Collection you'd like to add your items to.
- (Also, take note of all the other things you can do on this page.)

While on the topic of collections, create one more collection and call it GIFs. We're going to do a batch upload of items with that spreadsheet we downloaded earlier.

– If you like, you can indicate the following as the source: Library of Congress, Web Archive Datasets, <https://labs.loc.gov/experiments/webarchive-datasets/?loclr=blogsig>

CSV Import

- The CSV Import plugin makes it easy to do batch uploads of items of the same type (e.g. still images). This method of item creation also simplifies the project of metadata consistency, since you need to organize your metadata fields systematically in columns.
- In the Dashboard, select CSV Import. Press Choose File and navigate to where you saved the GIPHY_subset dataset from earlier.
- Make sure to uncheck (!) boxes next to “Use an export from Omeka CSV Report” and “Automap Column Names to Elements”. This spreadsheet doesn’t use Dublin Core fields, so we can’t use the automap feature.
- Select Item Type Still Image.
- Select Collection GIFs, which you just created. Make all items public. Leave the default options for the rest of the form. Then, press the green Next button.
- Map GIPHY.Title to Title.
- Map import_date to Date.
- Map GIF.ID to Identifier.
- Check the box under Files? for the Web.Archive.Link (do not map to an element).
- We’re going to leave behind the rest of the spreadsheet fields and click the Import CSV File button.
- Refresh the page to see the progress of your batch upload. Toggle over to the Browse Collections tab on your public site to inspect your new collection.

Create an Exhibit

- Exhibit Builder is useful for museum-oriented exhibits, to publish essays, and develop teaching materials inspired by the items in your archive.
- Each exhibit is comprised of sections that contains pages. Each page can contain a selection of items and some narrative text, or captions.
- Before you build an exhibit, it is easier to delineate an outline to specify the sections, pages, and items for each page.
- We’re going to breeze past the necessary work of constructing a logical pathway for your exhibit in the interests of familiarizing ourselves with the Omeka exhibit layouts. When you’re ready to move beyond this tutorial, spend some time thinking about how you’d like to guide your viewer/reader. Each section of the exhibit is organized much like a room in a physical exhibition, with one or more works accompanied by narrative text.
- For now, your silly task is to create an exhibit describing your academic year using the GIFs you just uploaded. Feel free to narrate your story using your own words. Or, to simplify matters, you can copy and paste some text from a lorem ipsum generator. Choose one from <https://meettheipsums.com>.
- From the Dashboard, select Exhibits, then Add an Exhibit. Fill out the form on the top half of the page. A slug is a machine-readable name for your exhibit and will become part of your URL.

Add an Exhibit Page

- Pages are where you’ll place the actual items in your exhibit. An exhibit can have multiple pages, and you can drag and drop pages to rearrange the order, even making some pages sub-sections of others.

- Click on the green Add Page button. On the following page, you'll enter some information and pick a layout for your exhibit page.
- On the page that follows, you'll see an option for Page Title and Page Slug. Fill those in. You'll see the option for New Block. Pages are made up of blocks, which can be files and text, just files, or just text.
- Click the File with Text option and then the green Add new content block.

Add Page Content

- In Block 1 (File with Text), click the Add Item button.
- In the window which opens, click on your item and then click Select Item. You can add a caption if you want. Click the green Apply button.
- When you're done, click the View Public Page button to see how your exhibit page looks.
- Last tip! If you want to have an animated GIF on your exhibit page, click on the image of the GIF from the item record and copy the URL (it will begin with <https://s3.amazonaws.com/omeka-net...>). Then, back in the Dashboard view of the exhibit, navigate to the page where you want to embed the animated GIF. In the text block, press the button with the opening and closing angle brackets (< >) to open the HTML editor. Place your cursor where you want the GIF to appear. Then, paste the URL together with the following HTML snippet: ``
- Click Ok and then Save Changes.

Now your site has items, collections, and an exhibit — all the basic units of an Omeka site!

Resources

This handout acknowledges information and methods available from the Omeka.net website. Special thanks to Francesca Giannetti, whose handout informs and benefits the present work immensely.

“Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web” by Dan Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig <https://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory>

Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media. “Omeka Tip Sheet.” <https://omeka.org/files/docs/OmekaWorkshopTipSheet.pdf>.

More on Omeka

Go to <https://info.omeka.net/help> for more information on your account, tutorials, use cases, and user guides. You can ask questions online at <https://info.omeka.net/contact>.

See questions and new projects with Omeka on their webpage on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/omeka>).

If you want to find out more to get your sites to show up in a Google search, your site needs to be linked from other pages that Google already knows about. You can link to your website on related sites or by using web services and social media networks, like Twitter, and you can search more information on Google at <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/34397?hl=en>

Contact Information

You can contact me and follow up with questions:

Caterina Agostini, Rutgers Italian Department, caterina.agostini@rutgers.edu