Introduction to Inky: Interactive Fiction & Narrative Games

DITI Consultants Emily Sullivan & Claire Lavarreda

LCWRI-5250: Electric Frontiers

Prof. Kemp

Fall 2025

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!
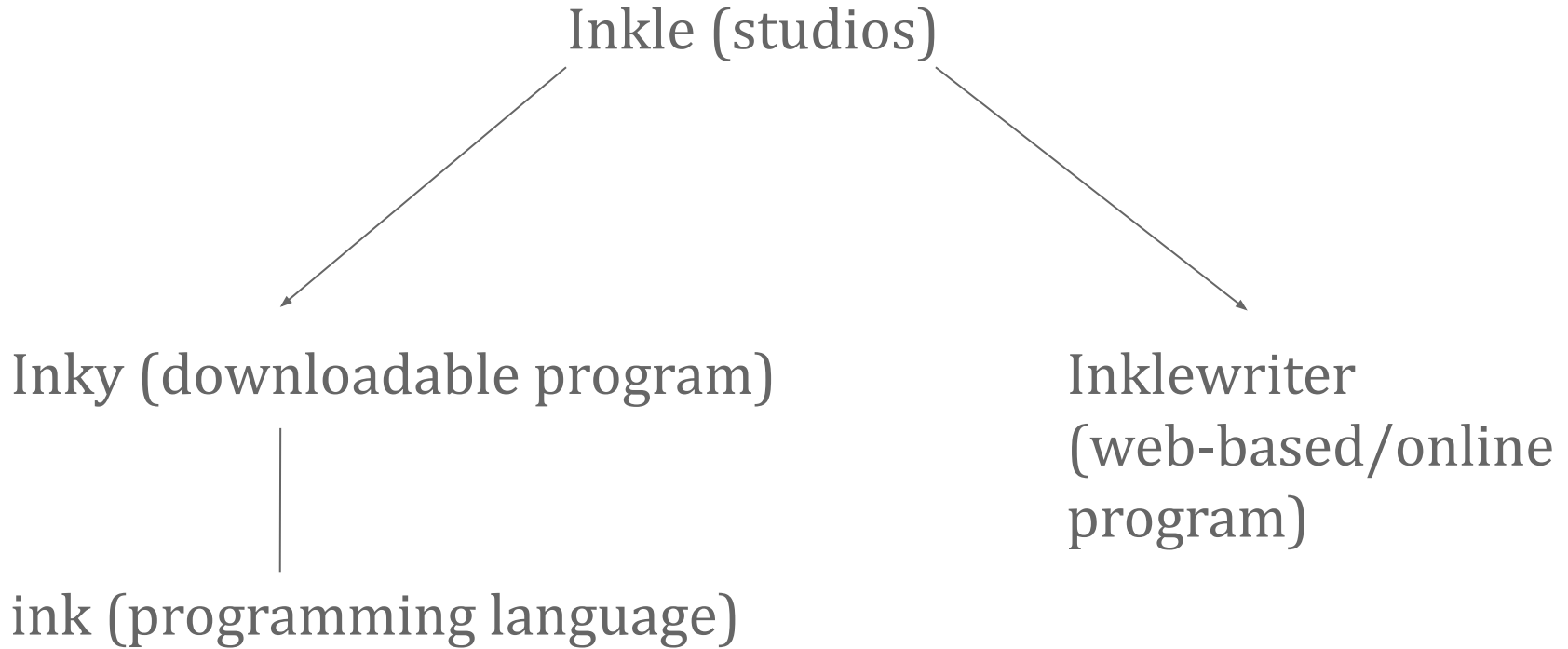
Workshop Objectives

In today's workshop, we will learn:

- The key functions of Inky as they relate to this class
- Inky-specific vocabulary to aid independent work
- How Inky can be used for interactive fiction and narrative games

Link to module materials:

https://bit.ly/fa25-Kemp-LCWRI5250-Inky

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point during the presentation!*

Inky, Ink, Inkle, Inklewriter???

Inkle (studios)

Inky (downloadable program)

ink (programming language)

Inklewriter (web-based/online program)

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

What is Inky?

Inky

Inky comes from the same studio (Inkle) that created [Inklewriter](#), which is also a free and open source tool for writing interactive stories online. The DITI also has a [module on Inklewriter](#).

Although Inky and Inklewriter can be used for the same kinds of projects, Inky uses a more specific coding language called "ink," and so is more customizable on a structural level.

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What is ink?

ink is a "system that was designed as a pluggable component that integrates into a traditional game engine." ([Inkle Studios](#)) In other words, it is a programming/coding language created by Inkle Studios to help you write interactive stories and games.

Some games that have been created using ink:
- ***[80 Days](#)***
- ***[A Highland Song](#)***
- ***[Bury Me My Love](#)***
- ***[Where the Water Tastes Like Wine](#)***,

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DITI Inky Example 1/2

BOSTON, 2025

Consultant of the Digital Teaching Integration Initiative

The DITI consultant visits your class. You are tasked with learning a new tool and programming language that will allow you to write interactive stories and narrative games.

"Would you like to give it a go?" they ask you. "We have an entire module prepared to help you learn!"

"But I don't have any background knowledge in programming or interactive fiction. Do you stil think I can do it?"

"I already know everything there is to know about interactive fiction and narrative games, thank you."

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DITI Inky Example 1/2

(Programming view)

```
1    BOSTON, 2025
2    Consultant of the Digital Teaching Integration Initiative
3     -> Boston
4
5 *  ===Boston===
6    The DITI consultant visits your class. You are tasked with learning a new tool
         and programming language that will allow you to write interactive stories
         and narrative games.
7    "Would you like to give it a go?" they ask you. "We have an entire module
         prepared to help you learn!"
8    +"But I don't have any background knowledge in programming or interactive
         fiction. Do you stil think I can do it?"
9     -> nervousnewcomer
10   + "I already know everything there is to know about interactive fiction and
         narrative games, thank you."
11    -> confidentgenius
12
13 * ===nervousnewcomer
14   "We designed our module to be user friendly, so anyone can learn, regardless of
         your prior knowledge!" says the DITI Consultant, in response to my
         apprehension.
15   "If you're sure..." you say.
16
17   +"Let's get started!"
18    -> learningisgood
19
20 * ===confidentgenius
21   The DITI Consultant replies: "I'm so glad you feel confident in these areas. But
         I bet there's a thing or two you could learn anew from our module. Plus,
         Inkle Studios is pretty cutting edge in the narrative gaming world - it's
         hosted games that were recently nominated at the Independent Games Festival."
22
23   + "Well, when you put it like that... now I want to know more!"
24    -> learningisgood
25
26 * ===learningisgood
27   You are eager to learn, assured that there is always room to grow, and excited by
         the opportunity to hone new skills and engage in the digital humanities!
28    -> END
29
```

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Vocabulary

- **Ink:** narrative scripting language
- **Inky:** the editing platform made by Inkle studios in which you can write/edit using the ink language
- **Knots:** the individual sections of the story that become linked, indicated with "`===`" (e.g., "`===Boston===`")
- **Diverts:** the function that links knots together, i.e., connects parts of the story, indicated with "`->`"
- **Choices:** the clickable text presented to the reader (paired with diverts) that will lead to different knots

```
+ "Should we go to the next slide?" -> next_slide
+ "I need a break." -> break_time
```

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Inky tutorials

- Inkle Studios offers a [tutorial on their website](#) that take you through the basics of how to use Inky and publish a web story
- Inkle Studios also offers more detailed documentation on using using Inky in an [official manual hosted on Github](#)

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Getting Started with Inky

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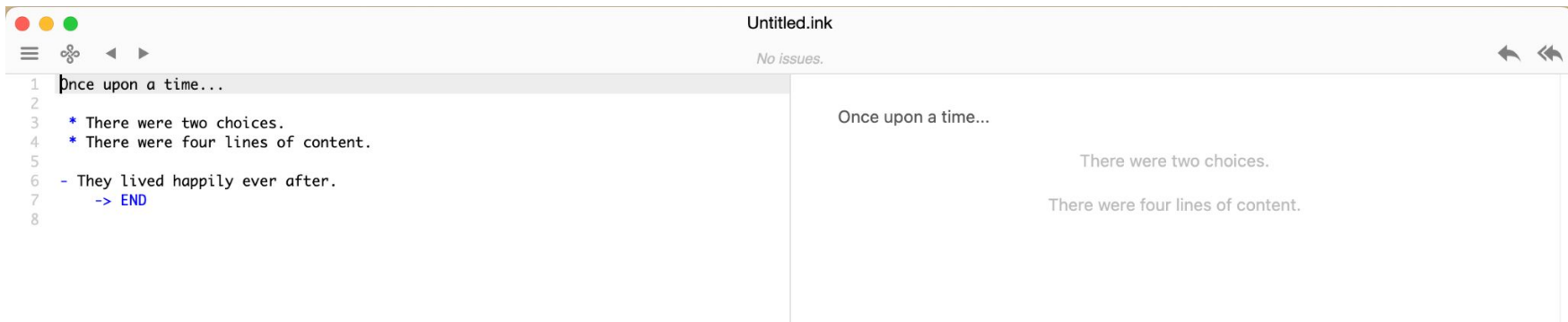# Downloading Inky

Here's the [Github page](#) where you can download Inky.

When you open the program, you will see two columns: on the left, there is the author/programmer view; on the right, there is the reader view

Inky

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Anatomy of an Ink Story

Knot

Choices

Diverts

```
1   BOSTON, 2025
2   Consultant of the Digital Teaching Integration Initiative
3    -> Boston
4
5   ===Boston===
6   The DITI consultant visits your class. You are tasked with learning a new tool
        and programming language that will allow you to write interactive stories
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7   "Would you like to give it a go?" they ask you. "We have an entire module
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8   +"But I don't have any background knowledge in programming or interactive
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10  + "I already know everything there is to know about interactive fiction and
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17  +"Let's get started!"
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21  The DITI Consultant replies: "I'm so glad you feel confident in these areas. But
        I bet there's a thing or two you could learn anew from our module. Plus,
        Inkle Studios is pretty cutting edge in the narrative gaming world - it's
        hosted games that were recently nominated at the Independent Games Festival."
22
23  + "Well, when you put it like that... now I want to know more!"
24  -> learningisgood
25
26  ===learningisgood
27  You are eager to learn, assured that there is always room to grow, and excited by
        the opportunity to hone new skills and engage in the digital humanities!
28  -> END
29
```

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Knots

The distinct sections of your story are referred to as "knots." The story as a whole will be created by linking these knots together in a meaningful sequence that you arrange.

To create a knot in Inky, use three equal signs followed by the title of your knot (and note, you cannot use spaces within the title of a knot)

`=== Boston ===`

If your text gets automatically highlighted in `blue`, that means it has successfully been written as a "knot" and Inky is "reading" it differently than the rest of your text.

Note: you can put "`===`" on both sides of your knot if you prefer that visually

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Diverts 1/3

Diverts are how you link together knots:

`-> learningisgood`

Create a divert by inputting an arrow (entered as a minus " **-** " then arrow bracket " **>** ").

```
 1  BOSTON, 2025
 2  Consultant of the Digital Teaching Integration Initiative
 3  -> Boston
 4
 5  ===Boston===
 6  The DITI consultant visits your class. You are tasked with learning a new tool
        and programming language that will allow you to write interactive stories
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 9  -> nervousnewcomer
10  +"I already know everything there is to know about interactive fiction and
        narrative games, thank you."
    -> confidentgenius

    ===nervousnewcomer===
14  "We designed our module to be user friendly, so anyone can learn, regardless of
        your prior knowledge!" says the DITI Consultant, in response to my
        apprehension.
15  "If you're sure..." you say.
16
    +"Let's get started!"
    -> learningisgood

    ===confidentgenius===
    The DITI Consultant replies: "I'm so glad you feel confident in these areas. But
        I bet there's a thing or two you could learn anew from our module. Plus,
        Inkle Studios is pretty cutting edge in the narrative gaming world - it's
        hosted games that were recently nominated at the Independent Games Festival."

    + "Well, when you put it like that... now I want to know more!"
      -> learningisgood
25
26  ===learningisgood===
27  You are eager to learn, assured that there is always room to grow, and excited by
        the opportunity to hone new skills and engage in the digital humanities!
28    -> END
29
```

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Diverts 2/3

All of your diverts must lead to a knot. If you input a divert that does not lead to a knot, Inky will give you a warning sign (see below) and highlight your text to indicate what is called a "loose end."

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Diverts 3/3

A "loose end" can also occur if you don't properly end your story. Make sure to include an " `-> END` " divert (e.g., can also be " `-> DONE`") to let Inky know that this is where your story ends.

```
25
26 ===learningisgood
27   You are eager to learn, assured that there is always room to grow, and excited by
        the opportunity to hone new skills and engage in the digital humanities!
28   -> END
29
```

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Choices 1/3

Choices in Inky are what make your story *interactive*.

On Inky, choices are indicated by using " **+** " (a plus sign) before each choice. Each choice must also be paired with a divert.

```
+  "I want to see an example!" -> next slide
```

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Choices 2/3

Choice 1:

+ "But I don't have any background knowledge in programming or interactive fiction. Do you still think I can do it?"

    (divert 1) **-> nervousnewcomer**

Choice 2:

+ "I already know everything there is to know about interactive fiction and narrative games, thank you."

    (divert 2) **-> confidentgenius**

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Choices 3/3

If you don't want your reader to be able to return to a previous knot after following a certain divert, you can use an asterisk " `*` " to indicate a choice *instead* of a plus sign " `+` "

Choice 1:
`+ "But I don't have any background knowledge in programming or interactive fiction. Do you still think I can do it?"`
       (divert 1) `-> nervousnewcomer`

Choice 2:
`* "I already know everything there is to know about interactive fiction and narrative games, thank you."`

       (divert 2) `-> confidentgenius`

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"Silent" Choices 1/3

In Inky, after a reader selects a choice, the text comprising that choice will appear in the following knot. For example, see below.

"I already know everything there is to know about interactive fiction and narrative games, thank you." The DITI Consultant replies: "I'm so glad you feel confident in these areas. But I bet there's a thing or two you could learn anew from our module. Plus, Inkle Studios is pretty cutting edge in the narrative gaming world - it's hosted games that were recently nominated at the Independent Games Festival."

"Well, when you put it like that... now I want to know more!"

The DITI consultant smiles in return.

Once a reader clicks on this choice…

"Well, when you put it like that... now I want to know more!"

You are eager to learn, assured that there is always room to grow, and excited by the opportunity to hone new skills and engage in the digital humanities!

End of story

The text of the choice will appear at the start of the next knot

P.S., remember, this is the `===learningisgood===` knot

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

"Silent" Choices 2/3

However, you can also create a "silent choice," which is indicated in the ink language by using **[** square brackets **]**. This means that the text from the choice will **not** appear in the next knot.

This is the regular choice

```
22    + "Well, when you put it like that... now I want to know more!"
23      -> learningisgood
24    + [The DITI consultant smiles in return.] ->learningisgood
25
```

This is the silent choice

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

"Silent" Choices 3/3

This is what it will look like after a reader selects a silent choice; notice that the text comprising the choice does not appear in the subsequent knot

"I already know everything there is to know about interactive fiction and narrative games, thank you." The DITI Consultant replies: "I'm so glad you feel confident in these areas. But I bet there's a thing or two you could learn anew from our module. Plus, Inkle Studios is pretty cutting edge in the narrative gaming world – it's hosted games that were recently nominated at the Independent Games Festival."

"Well, when you put it like that... now I want to know more!"

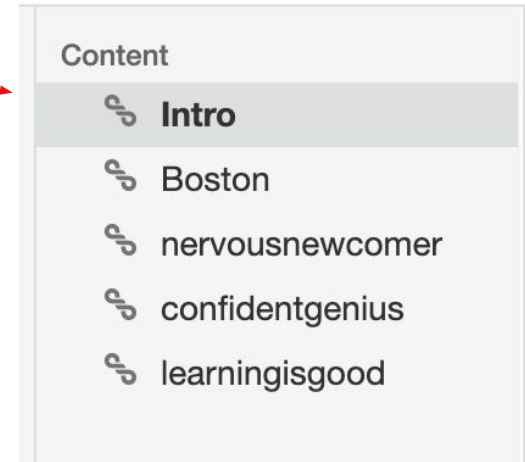The DITI consultant smiles in retur

You are eager to learn, assured that there is always room to grow, and excited by the opportunity to hone new skills and engage in the digital humanities!

End of story

(contrast to the previous slide "silent choices 1/3")

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Story Construction

As you create your narrative through knots, diverts, and choices, Inky provides this "content" column on the left side of the window that will allow you to "jump" through the various knots of your story

The side bar will be a helpful reference as your story becomes increasingly complex (for example, if you have multiple diverts leading to the same knot; or a divert that jumps down to a knot much later in the story)

Content

- Intro
- Boston
- nervousnewcomer
- confidentgenius
- learningisgood

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Special Web Features Using Ink

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Inserting an Image 1/2*

The image you want to use should be saved as a file in the same folder as your Inky files (see next slide for example). Then, you input `# IMAGE:` followed by your image file name. The end result will look something like:

`# IMAGE: imagename.jpg`

If you are using an image in a different folder, you will have to indicate a pathway in the code, like this:

`# IMAGE: myImages/imageName.jpg`

this feature is only available when you export using the web

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Inserting an Image 2/2

DITI-Example-Web

DITI-Example-Web

Name

- DITI-Example.js
- index.html
- ink.js
- main.js
- NUlogo.svg
- style.css

This file will open the web version of your story

Make sure you save the image to the folder with all of your other inky files

BOSTON, 2025

Consultant of the Digital Teaching Integration Initiative

Northeastern University

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"I already know everything there is to know about interactive fiction and narrative games, thank you."

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Image sharing and permissions

- It is important to verify that you are allowed to use images before you put them in your Inky story.
- Search for media that is public domain or shared with permissions that allow re-use.
  - DITI recommends Wikimedia Commons and DPLA (Digital Public Library of America).
- Ensure proper credit/attribution is given for all media

For more information on copyright and reuse, please see:

https://bit.ly/fair-use-handout

Global Tags*

There are also tags that allow you to change the appearance of your story.

For example, you can give the screen a darker appearance by inputting the following code at the start of your story:

```
# theme: dark
```

You can also create your own byline and input an author's credit, as follows:

```
# author: Your Name
```

this feature is only available when you export using the web

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Restart the Story*

You can also include a `# RESTART` tag at the end of your story if you want your reader to be able to jump back to the beginning of the story after they reach the end. Here's an example:

```
You are eager to learn, assured that there is always room
to grow, and excited by the opportunity to hone new skills
and engage in the digital humanities!

+ Rewind the story?

    # RESTART

    -> END
```
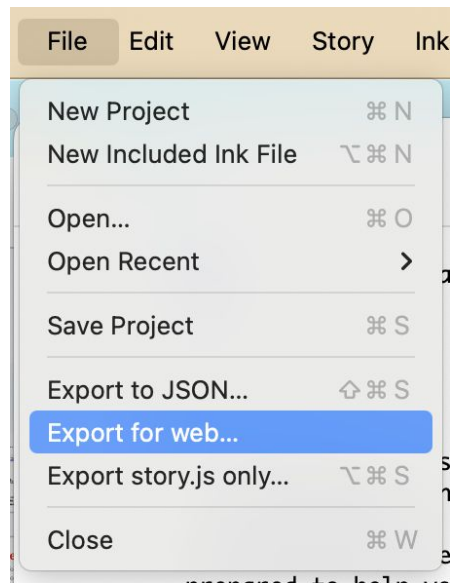
this feature is only available when you export using the web

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Reading and sharing your story

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Exporting your Story for the Web 1/2

In order to save your story and export it to the web, navigate to "file" and then select "export for web"

Selecting this file will open the online version of your story

It will then create a folder of files that collectively make up your inky story.

File menu:
- New Project   ⌘ N
- New Included Ink File   ⌥⌘ N
- Open...   ⌘ O
- Open Recent   ›
- Save Project   ⌘ S
- Export to JSON...   ⇧⌘ S
- **Export for web...**
- Export story.js only...   ⌥⌘ S
- Close   ⌘ W

DITI-Example

Name
- DITI-Example.js
- index.html
- ink.js
- main.js
- style.css

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Exporting your Story for the Web 2/2

The title that you give to your Inky file when you save it/export for the web **will also be the title** that appears online in the reader's view

< > **DITI-Example**

Name

DITI-Example.js
index.html
ink.js
main.js
style.css
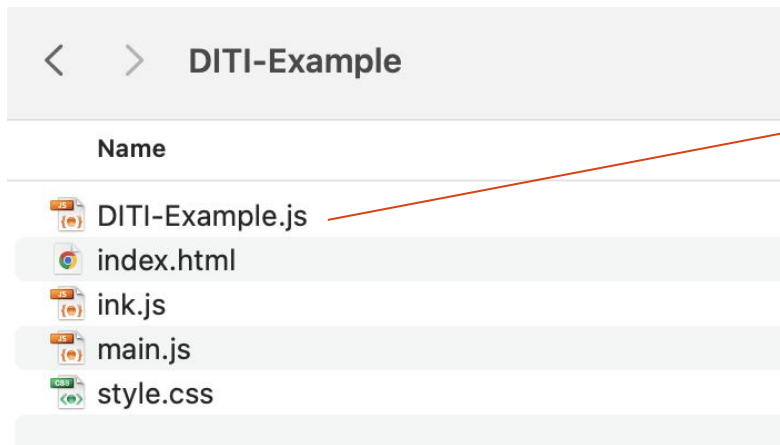
DITI-Example

BOSTON, 2025

Consultant of the Digital Teaching Integration Initiative

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Data Privacy

- It's important to pay attention to data privacy when using digital resources
- At its simplest, **data privacy** is a person's ability to control what of their personal information is shared and with whom.
- To help you make informed decisions about interacting with digital tools in ways that honor your boundaries with your data and/or personal information, The DITI has prepared a handout on **Data Privacy**

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

For further exploration

- [Handout: Copyright and fair use](#)

- [Handout: Data privacy](#)

- [Handout: HTML basics](#)

- [Ink tutorials](#)

Link to module materials:

https://bit.ly/fa25-Kemp-LCWRI5250-Inky

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Thank you!

– Taught by by Emily Sullivan & Claire Lavarreda

– Developed by Emily Sullivan

- For more information on the DITI, please see: https://bit.ly/diti-about

- Schedule an appointment with us! https://bit.ly/diti-meeting

- If you have any questions, contact us at: nulab.info@gmail.com

- We'd love your feedback! Please fill out a short survey here: https://bit.ly/diti-feedback

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