

Digital Repository Analysis

Materials Needed

- Students will need a laptop or tablet to explore websites and repositories

Preparatory Work

- Select a number of digital repositories maintained by archives, museums, or other memory organizations for analysis, equal to the number of groups of participants. Ideally select a variety of repository types, including collections of finding aids, digitized materials, exhibits, or other platform types that focus on providing access to cultural heritage materials to encourage richer discussion.
- Select a topic likely to appear in all repositories, such as women, Black Americans, Appalachians, etc.

Instructions

- Divide your class into 3-5 person groups and assign each a repository.
- Without context, have students become the “five-minute expert” and share with the class the following information about their repository:
 - a. What is collected in the repository?
 - b. Who collected or created the materials?
 - c. Why did they collect or create the materials?
 - d. How are the materials described?
- Have groups share their responses to the questions. Serve as a note taker and ask students what commonalities and differences there are between the repositories, emphasizing the differences between types of institutions and materials housed in the repository.
- Have students conduct searches using the topic you identified in the “Preparatory Work” section to answer the following questions. Be sure to have them record their search process and how and why they made decisions about using the site.
 - a. What information is used to describe materials? How are materials described?
 - b. Invite student comment on the differences in language, such as whether controlled vocabularies or free text is used to describe materials.
 - c. Next, zoom out to inquire about usability and accessibility. Is the site easy to use? Are you able to understand what you are searching for and find what you need?
 - d. Who do you feel this repository is designed for? Are there any populations excluded based on the language used, the usability of the site, or the resources available on the site?