You Must Choose … But Choose Wisely

Selecting Digital Tools for Your Project

ILiADS 2021

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Digital Humanities

What my colleagues think I do

What my boss thinks I do

What faculty think I do

What students think I do

What I want to do

What I really do

PDF
百科事典
Is this DH?

https://www.ctcumc.org/bishops-post/passion-and-wisdom-14115308

Image: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VA7J0KkanzM&ab_channel=Movieclips

Image: https://stephenthelawyer.com/2018/04/30/he-chose-poorly/

Image: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/712132378336910 16/

I am not a Developer ...

Things I know about coding:

- HTML
- How to hit F12 and figure out what CSS is doing what after 30 minutes
- ~~Stealing~~ Borrowing from stackoverflow.com is easier than writing it yourself
- PHP solves all your problems (except when it makes them worse)
- Python and R are things that DH folks use to do things
- `SELECT * FROM *;`

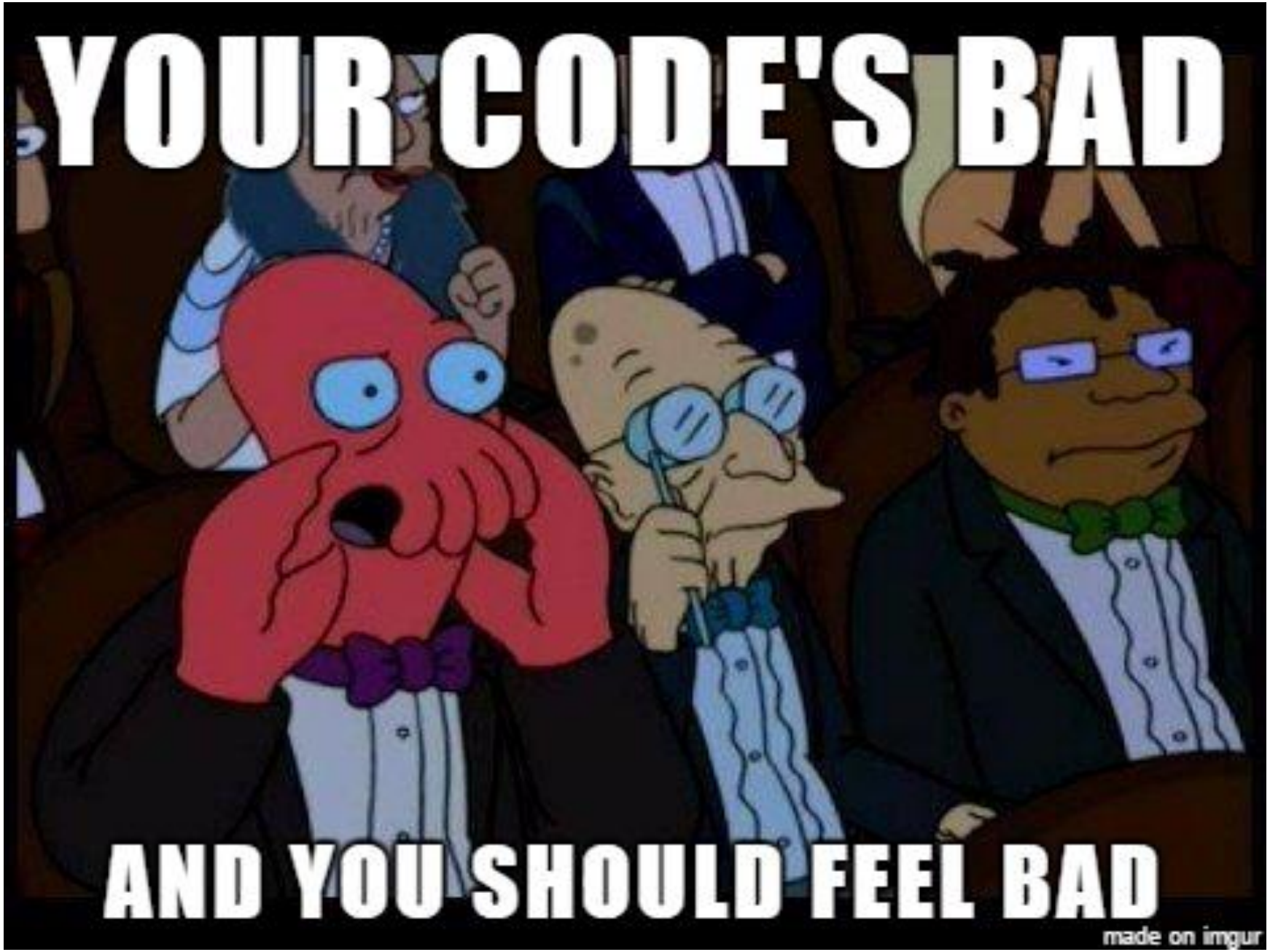


Image: https://twitter.com/iconodule/status/626726284165541889?s=20

Miriam Posner's Elements of Digital Projects

- Sources – digital assets, primary/secondary sources, data
- Processes – organizing, editing, digitizing, enhancing, metadata-ing
- Presentation – visualization, interactivity, accessibility

From "How did they make that?" by Miriam Posner

Semantics and Structures

Semantic is the idea of what makes your work meaningful. Structure is the development of the systems and foundations that support meaning. Sometimes a tool can do both.

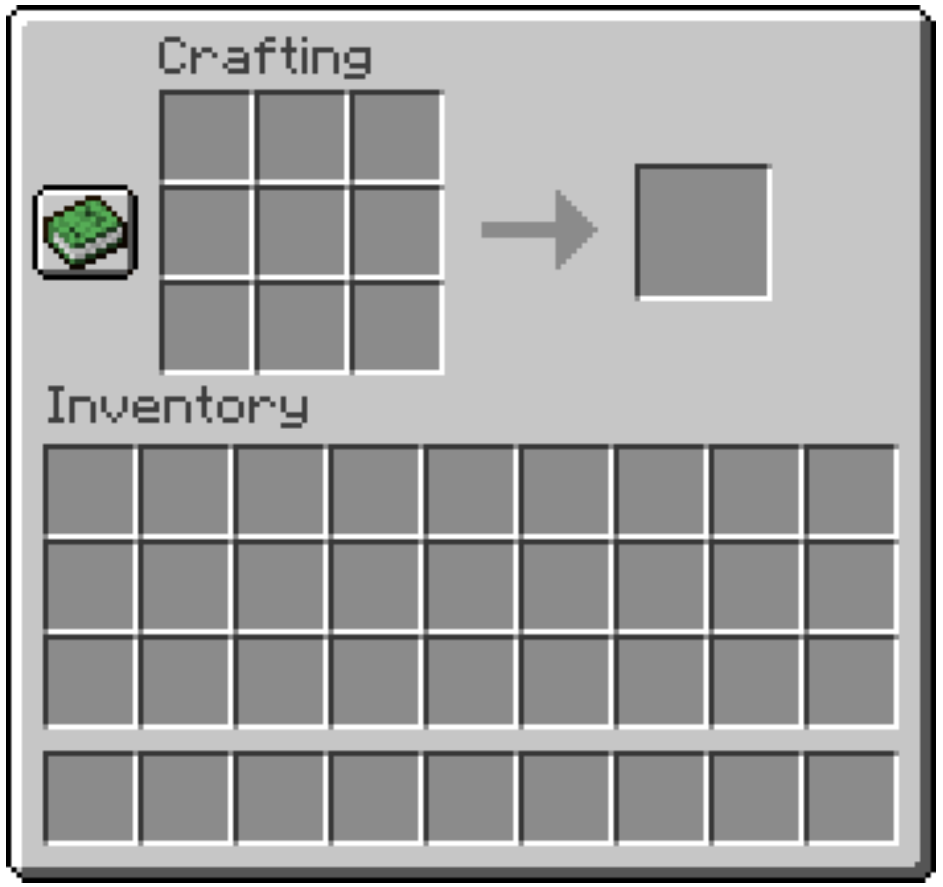


Image: https://minecraft.fandom.com/wiki/Crafting

Metadata and Migration

- What metadata do you have?
  - Administrative, Descriptive, Structural
- Where is the metadata being stored?
- What kinds of digital assets do you have?
- Where are your digital assets being stored?
- What happens when you need to move things?

Log Cabins vs. Castles in the Sky

Dreaming big is important to DH, but being realistic is good as well. Sometimes a prototype using digital tools at a smaller scale helps get your idea across.

Another way of saying this is, “approximate functionality, deal with aesthetics later”

- https://tuinderlusten-jheronimusbosch.ntr.nl/en
- https://storymap.knightlab.com/examples/bosch-garden/

“If the only tool you have is … ”

Sometimes it is tempting to just use what you know … but sometimes you have to learn something new to do the project.

Image: https://minecraft.fandom.com/wiki/Breaking

Digital Tool Triforce

Image: https://www.pngegg.com/en/png-tacrn

Pick Two ...

Free?

May not be easy to use or have lots of features

Easy?

May not be free or have lots of features

Features?

May not be free or easy

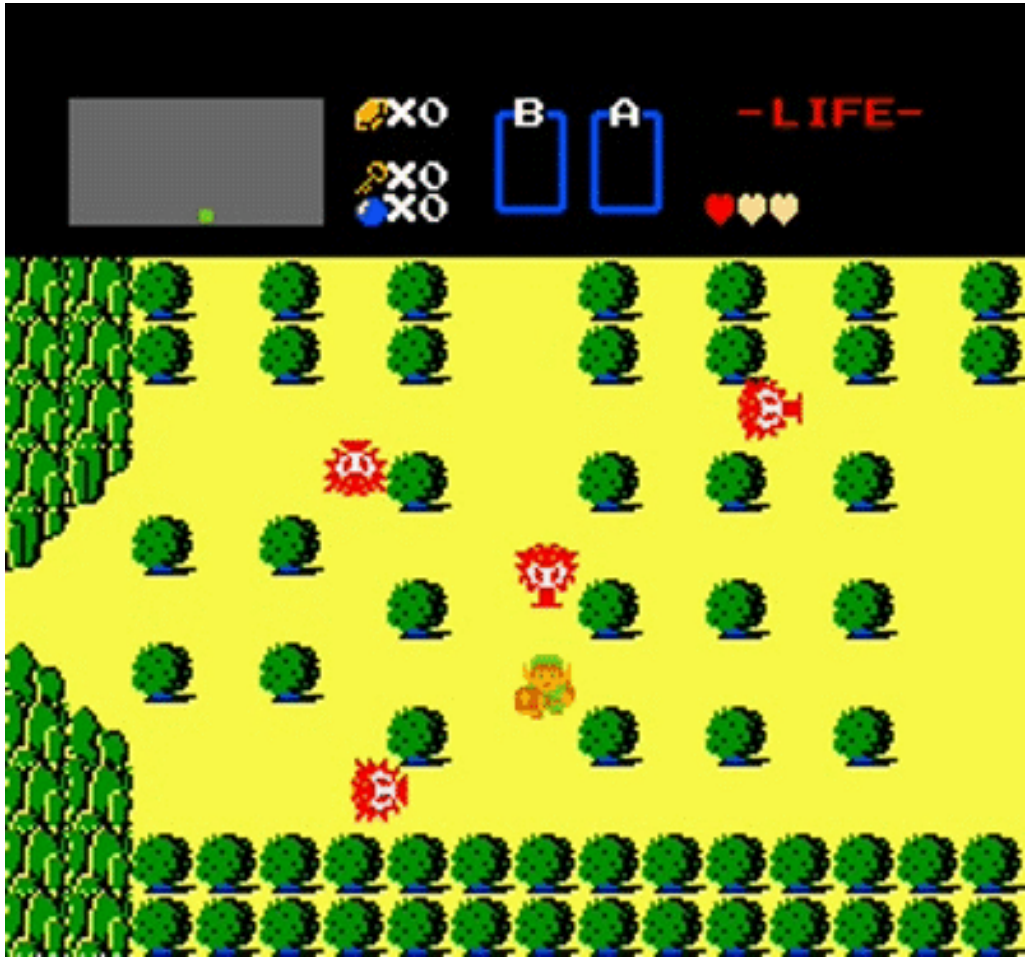
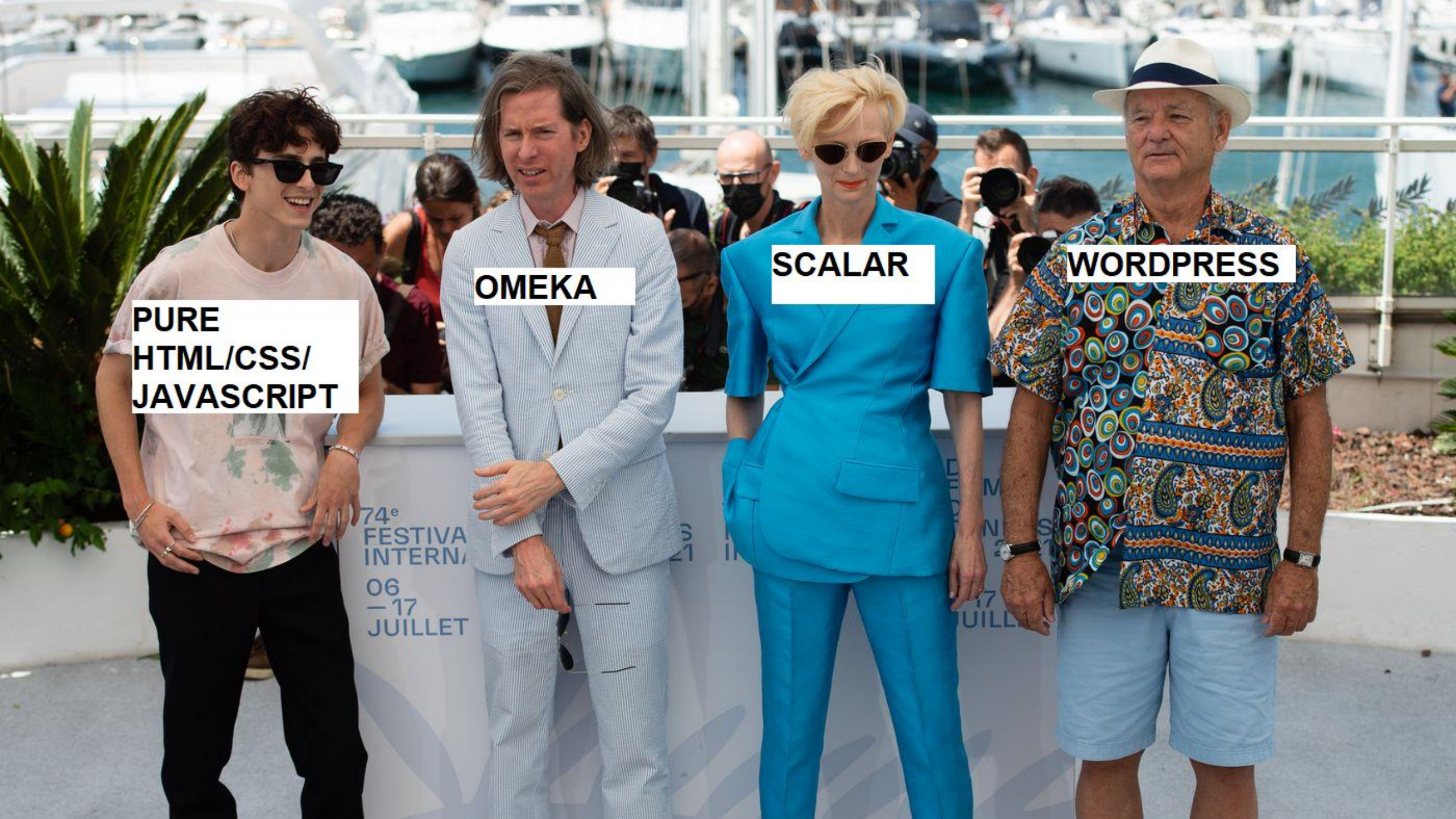


Image: http://www.defunctgames.com/rip/15/rest-in-pixels-this-is-how-link-dies-in-the-legend-of-zelda


PURE
HTML/CSS/
JAVASCRIPT
OMEKA
SCALAR
WORDPRESS
74e
FESTIVA
INTERNA
06
—17
JUILLET

Survey the Landscape

- Analyze range of tools available and documentation
  - ~~DiRT Directory/Project Bamboo~~
  - Hackastory
  - Gettysburg DH Toolkit, SDSU TeachDH

Evaluate the Tools

- Evaluate capabilities and requirements of the tools
  - Do I have time to learn it? Implement it?
  - Do I have to pay? Is it “free”?
  - Who gets my data?
- When was the last time anyone updated the code?
- What biases are implicit/explicit in the tool?
- Can you work with the limitations/biases and address them?

Consider your Project Goals

- Measure what the tool does, vs. the goals of your project:
  - Does it fit the scope?
  - Does it enhance the users' understanding of my research?
  - How will my users interact with the tool?

Open Source Doesn’t Solve All Things

- Advantages
  - You are able to peer inside the black box
  - Modifiable and usable by the greater community
  - Usually don’t have to pay to grab the code
- Disadvantages
  - Support may be limited
  - Open =/= free
  - If it breaks, you might be out of luck

Do I Need a Database?

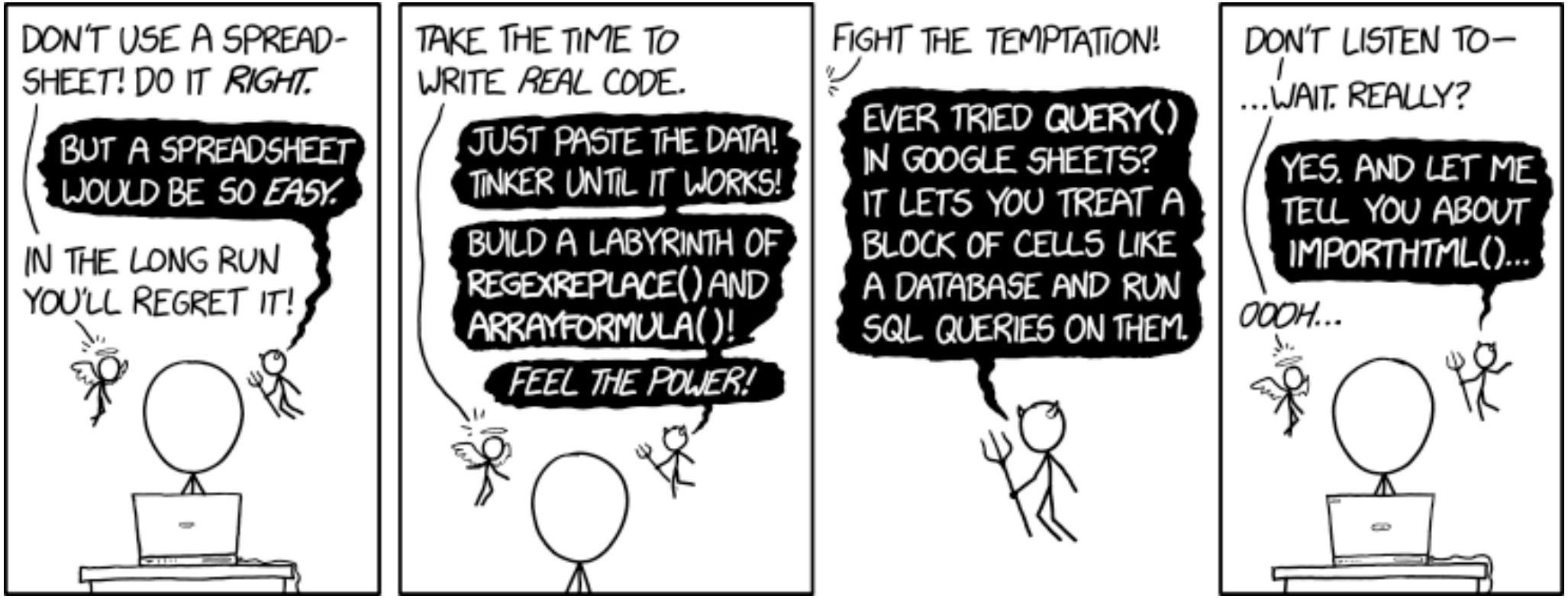


Image: Spreadsheets by Randall Munroe, https://xkcd.com/2180/ CC BY-NC

Preservation

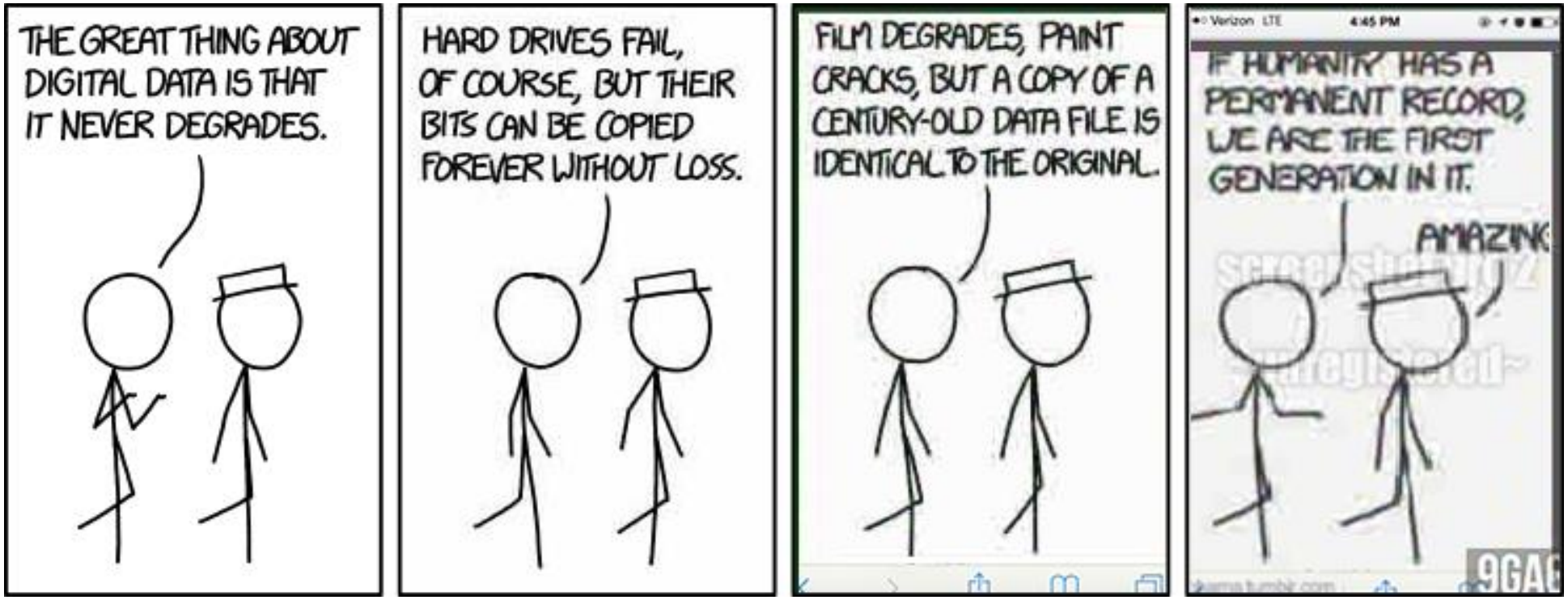


Image: Digital Data by Randall Munroe, https://xkcd.com/1683/ CC BY-NC

Preservation Plan

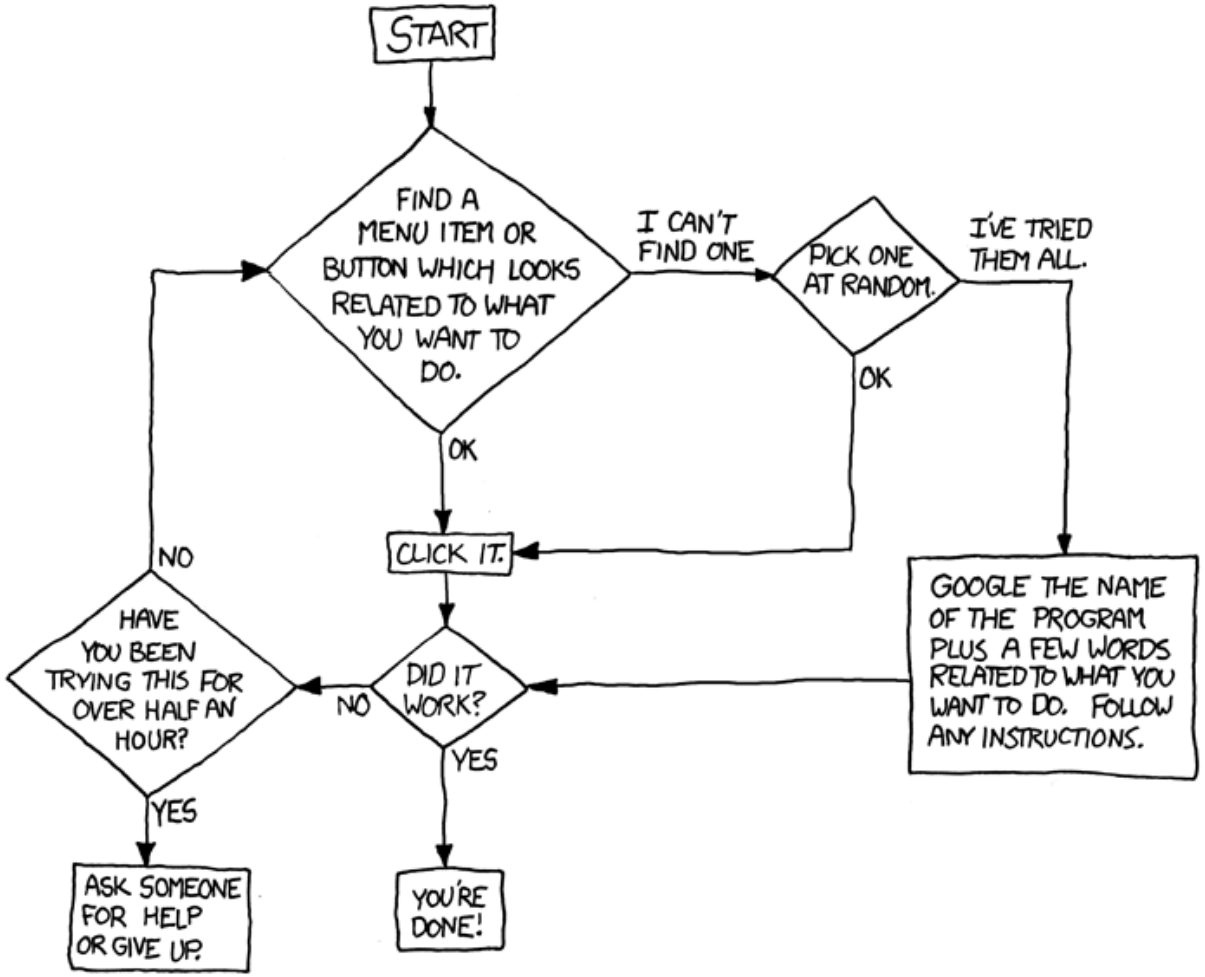
- Snapshots
  - Screenshots
  - Videos
  - Data dumps
- Emulation/recreation
  - Internet Archive/Wayback
  - Confier/WARC files
  - Virtual machines
- No plan?
  - Talk to your archivist … ;)

How to Teach Yourself Digital Tools

1. Assume what you're doing is difficult
2. What kind of tool do you need?
3. Why are you picking this tool?
4. Try it!
5. Show your work
6. Have a support group
7. Understand your timeline

Adapted from "How to Teach Yourself Digital Tools" by Claire Cahoon

How to Teach Yourself Digital Tools (illustrated)



Tech Support Cheat Sheet by Randall Munroe, CC BY-NC

Image: Cat in a box by Robert Couse-Baker, CC-BY

Document All the Things

- Processes
- Data and asset processing
- Logins/passwords
- Locations
- Interfaces
- Customizations