Start your own local DS Training Programme

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2025-03-11

A short guide provided by the British Library Digital Research Team with tips on how to set-up a local training programme.

Introduction

The Digital Research Team at the British Library has been providing training to our staff for over a decade through our bespoke British Library Digital Scholarship Training Programme.

This Topic Guide shares a few things we've learned along the way about establishing an internal community of practice and training programme, with pointers for how to practically use the materials presented here to start your own localised and sustainable digital scholarship and data science training programme at your own institution!

Relevance to the Library Sector (Case Studies/Use Cases)

You only need to take a look at a few of the Topic Guides, **Relevance to the Library Sector (Case Studies/Use Cases)** for useful real-life applications of new technologies being put into action to understand the importance of supporting the development of digital skills amongst Library professionals. Nothing compares to individual staff digital transformation stories though, and at the British Library we've started to capture these which help to demonstrate the tangible value such training has for individuals and institutions.

> *"The Digital Scholarship Training Programme has introduced me to new software, opened my eyes to digital opportunities, provided inspiration for me to improve, and helped me attain new skills"* -Graham Jevon, British Library

Read more about Graham Jevon's digital transformation journey on the British Library Digital Scholarship blog or have a look at this series of videos we created to mark the 10th Anniversary of the British Library Digital Scholarship Training Programme in 2022. It highlights specific transformative experiences for staff who took time out to engage in our Digital Scholarship Training Programme over the years.

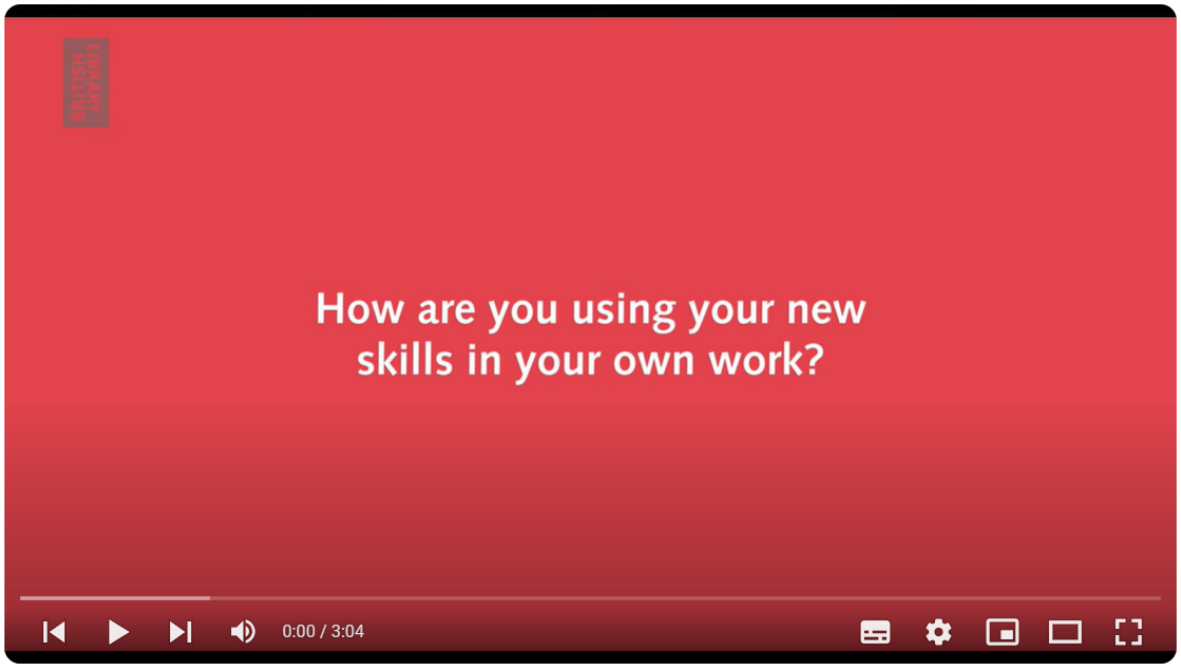

Figure 1: How are you using your new skills in your own work?

Hands-on activity and other self-guided tutorial(s)

If you've been thinking about getting your own local training programme up and running, whether a small casual interest group or a full-blown digital transformation initiative, the following practical steps can be used to help you on your way!

Identify shared needs

What are problems you and your colleagues at your institution are facing (cataloguing backlogs? fear or lack of understanding of AI? etc.), and how might a new fledgling interest group help you collectively navigate and solve these? By framing digital scholarship/data science skill training as an investment, as a helpful tool for colleagues to resolve long standing issues, you will find a more willing audience for your efforts. Quick wins in the digital realm (for instance in learning a tool like Open Refine to normalise and analyse catalogue records) can often build confidence very quickly and open the door to trying out new technologies. A decade ago at British Library we realised we had little practical knowledge around the field of Digital Humanities, so our shared need was to gain an overview of what those researchers were up to, and what they needed from the Library.

Find your people

Get a small group of willing colleagues at your institution together and set up a way for them to communicate regularly, preferably asynchronously/remotely. We use a corporate wide MS Teams channel for this at British Library but you could also set up things like a slack channel or even a whatsapp channel depending on where people your institution tend to gravitate. Focus on your purpose of bringing people together, think about the messaging and keep it light, "learn new stuff together that can help make your job easier" usually suffices! Try not to be too targeted, cast the net wide as people of all interests/academic disciplines/job profiles, abilities and backgrounds will undoubtedly have something to contribute: digital scholarship and data science is a collaborative affair and your group will be all the better for its diversity.

Get Buy-in (if you need to!)

In some cases you may need buy-in from managers to allow staff time and space to dedicate to learning these new skills. It can be difficult to convince managers sometimes of the value of learning skills now which may take some years to truly embed or come to practical fruition. Spending time building ones "awareness" of the landscape is not always deemed a strong enough basis for approving time away from more immediate tangible deliverables, but awareness is the first step on the learning ladder and is essential for transformation. This resource, Digital Scholarship & Data Science Topic Guides, contains loads of evidence to share with your management for why investing in digital scholarship and data science staff skills and awareness is key to sustainable digital transformation over time. Have a look at the Getting Started in DS Topic Guide, particularly the section on Relevance to the Library Sector for the latest supporting reports and competency & skills frameworks on this.

Try running a monthly "Hack & Yack"

Establishing what we call a regular Hack & Yack style meeting is a really nice way to learn something new with other colleagues and removing the planning and expectations around a formal training offering. At the British Library our Hack & Yack's are once a month for two hours on a set day and time. It is a casual, hands-on session where colleagues from across all departments of the institution come together to understand a current topic or digital method by working through an online tutorial or demonstration at everyone's own pace but with support of each other.

We use our Hack & Yack's as an opportunity to explore new tools/techniques/applications relevant to digital research and keep our own skills up to speed. It is not a formal training session, and attendees know that we're all learning together and everyone will be coming to the tutorials with a variety of experience/knowledge/skills.

Each Hack & Yack usually starts with one person, which may or may not be the organiser, giving a high-level view of the topic of the day, and then sharing one or more tutorials that the group can try out, either stepping through one online activity together as a group or providing time for everyone to explore individually at their own pace and chat about how it's going as they work through the steps. These sessions aren't recorded so that attendees can be open and frank about their experience!

Within each of these Topic Guides is a **Hands-on activity and other self-guided tutorial(s)** section that would make a perfect start for your first Hack & Yacks!

Start a discussion/reading group

Whether you call it a 'reading group', a discussion group, a lunchtime series - the point is to provide regular opportunities for people to get together, and learn and support each other through discussion. You might set an article, blog post or chapter, a video or podcast.

Things we've found useful:

Begin each session with quick introductions - name and department, or name and another useful piece of information. Why? Hopefully you'll have a range of folk and they mightn't all have met before, and it means that everyone has spoken at least once right from the start.

Make it ok for people not to have finished reading, watching or listening to the thing you're discussing. You could do a show of hands to see who's finished it or not finished it. Why? There's something about 'confessing' that lets people ask questions without worrying that it was covered somewhere towards the end. It can also be useful to understand why people didn't finish (unless they just ran out of time, which is highly relatable) - did the piece get complex, jargony, boring?

Each Topic Guide has a **Recommended Reading/Viewing** section and you can also find some good starting points under Recommended Reading Lists.

Put together a regular talk series

Did you go to a conference and were inspired by something you heard? Did someone on Bluesky say something interesting about the intersection of cultural heritage and data? Is someone coming by your Library for a visit and they're working in digital scholarship and data science? Don't be shy! Reach out and ask them if they'd be willing to share their knowledge with your group. At British Library we call our talk series "21st Century Curatorship talks" and it's been a wonderful opportunity to learn from the best in the sector, while also growing interest in the wider training programme. When colleagues feel they only have an hour to spare, or are not yet ready for the hands-on of a hack & yack, offering talks are a great way to lower the barrier of entry to complex topics. We often use these talks to gauge interest in a topic

and then plan our reading group and hack & yack topics around deepening knowledge of the topic.

Create an identity

After your group of the willing has been running for awhile it's useful to create an identify for yourselves. Perhaps you consider yourselves a network, or an interest group or maybe you'd like to start formalising your gatherings under a "training programme" moniker. Whatever you decide, it helps to bring in new folks when there is an established identity and even maybe a logo in advertisements.

Recommended Reading/Viewing

Finding Communities of Practice