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Using Digital Humanities in the Classroom

A Practical Introduction for
Teachers, Lecturers, and Students

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B L O O M S B U R Y

Introduction

When we think about using new technologies in the classroom, the hardest part is getting started. This is not because of a lack of available tools and methods, but rather a surfeit: when there are so many possibilities for activities, platforms, and resources, it can be tremendously difficult to separate the useful from the useless and the time-saving from the time-consuming. Meanwhile, the digital humanities (DH)—an interdisciplinary field that uses digital technologies and quantitative methodologies to further humanistic research—has opened new possibilities for teaching but does not always share the nuts-and-bolts, on-the-ground, day-by-day advice you may need. Where can you find a good mapping tool? How do you organize your digital files? What's the best way of encouraging student discussion outside the classroom? Why might you choose a particular software application over another? These kinds of questions can take a lot of time and energy to answer and, therefore, can present a barrier to trying new instructional methods. *Using Digital Humanities in the Classroom* is meant to help you answer these questions, provide you with a number of shortcuts, and point you to the new resources and frameworks you'll need in order to confidently incorporate more digital approaches, methods, and tools into your classroom.

Because digital technologies are increasingly central to the way we do our work as humanists, we all have a responsibility to keep pace with the information technologies that are changing the landscapes of higher education. We wish this book to serve as an introductory guide to digital tools you can use in your teaching, so we avoid technical jargon that may be prohibitive to you or your students. Instead we use plain language to introduce and discuss DH approaches that can enhance what we are already doing as we teach using databases, search engines, and sophisticated library and information systems. Although there are certainly kinds of projects in this book that seem most immediately accessible to those with some formal training or prior experience in computer programming, *Using Digital Humanities in the Classroom* shows that there are many more that require

nothing more (beyond the basic, everyday computer competencies that we more or less all possess) than simply an openness to new strategies.

We see DH not as an exclusive or unified discipline, but rather as a constellation of practical ideas, technologies, and tools that can be incorporated in a modular fashion into your own classroom practice. And all of them can relate to your existing interests, passions, and goals as a teacher. Your expertise in, for example, Shakespeare studies or Socratic thought is more important in your classroom than your competent use of bibliographic management software or your ability to create fancy network visualizations, but there's no reason why the thoughtful and judicious application of that software can't facilitate and enhance your teaching of early modern drama or Greek philosophy. In other words, whether or not you intend to become an expert in the digital humanities, you should be able to benefit from some of DH's offerings, finding not only exciting possibilities for new classroom activities and assignments, but also inspiration to reconfigure your vision of your own discipline and its relationship to new media and technologies.

Who is this book for?

We intend for this book to help anyone who would like to increase, rethink, or complicate the ways they incorporate technology in the classroom. Perhaps you currently use PowerPoint for your lectures; work with students virtually through your university's internal grading, chatting, and work-sharing systems; or collect assignments through Turnitin. These familiar technologies allow us to easily incorporate images, share notes, and communicate simply and quickly with our students. They also, of course, cause their share of frustration (this book cannot, alas, entirely prevent such glitches, though it does offer practical tips and tricks for solving common technical problems). And, yet, even those technologies that work flawlessly can become a source of problems as we become habituated to them—to the point of feeling uninspired or using these tools uncritically.

To recapture an inspired and critical use of technology in the classroom, perhaps you would like to know more about technologies, resources, and software that have not yet become quite so familiar or ubiquitous. Perhaps you want to learn about new kinds of assignments and learning outcomes that digital platforms can enable. Perhaps you suspect that there are new online resources and digital projects that your students might find useful in their research essays, but you do not know where to find them. Perhaps you would like to know the latest thinking on the sometimes-thorny issues of copyright, privacy, integrity, and labor that arise in digital contexts. Perhaps your students have expressed interest in using digital tools, or perhaps they have come to expect from your own institutional culture that there will be some sort of technological integration in every classroom. Whatever the case may be, we hope you use this book as a primer designed to enhance

your teaching in the humanities classroom by integrating digital tools and methods that fit with your pedagogical goals. The book is not designed for digital humanities specialists; in fact, it requires no existing knowledge of the field at all, but instead offers an introduction to the digital humanities through and for the classroom. In other words, this book will not explain how to teach the digital humanities, but rather, how to teach *with* the digital humanities.

You do not need any specialized technical skills in order to use this book, and neither do your students. Where some training is necessary we provide brief, practical explanations of how to go about using a tool, or we provide resources that will allow you to undertake further advanced training later if you so wish. For now, all you need is an interest in digital developments in pedagogy and a desire to think about how your teaching might be enlivened with some new tools, tricks, and ideas.

What are the digital humanities?

Before we get any further, there are two crucial questions to address: What exactly are the digital humanities (commonly abbreviated to DH, as we will do throughout this book), and why do they matter to teachers of humanities courses? Like many newly emerging and rapidly changing fields, the digital humanities are full to bursting with definitions. Like many foundational disciplinary queries ("What is literary studies?" for example, or "What is criticism?"), defining the digital humanities is at once fundamental and complex. Ideas about the nature of DH range from the broadest and simplest of definitions—humanistic research of any kind that uses digital methods or tools—to more specific disciplinary constructions that see participation in the field as something that requires a standard set of technical skills. Since scholars in the field have grappled with this question at length in other venues, both print and digital, we'd like here to suggest that there are so many ways of defining this field that there is bound to be something of use in it for just about anyone who teaches today in a university classroom.

In a suitably digital answer to the proliferation of definitions for the field, a website by Jason Heppley, whatisdigitalhumanities.com, generates a random new definition every time you refresh the webpage in your browser. One click might get you a broad definition that stipulates any cross-fertilization between technology and the humanities, while another might reference particular technologies (such as data mining or visualization). Another might be pointedly inclusive (by mentioning nonacademic institutions and members of the general public, for example), while another might focus on DH as a field of research. The spirit of that multivoiced generator is something we'd like to maintain here in our own thinking about DH. For us, digital humanities simply represents a community of scholars and teachers interested in using or studying technology. We use humanities techniques to

study digital cultures, tools, and concepts, and we also use computational methods to explore the traditional objects of humanistic inquiry. This book is not concerned specifically with teaching DH itself as a subject field, though we do provide some resources for that purpose. Further resources on the definition of digital humanities and the many debates about the boundaries of the field can be found in our Web Companion (www.teachdh.com), categorized with the materials associated with the Introduction and organized under the heading “Debates and Conversations.”

Key concepts

Each section of this book addresses a separate topic but invokes a few central motifs and recommendations that we return to again and again. For example, we emphasize that you always need to know precisely what you are using digital humanities methods *for*. Rather than engaging with new tools for their own sake, we recommend that you ground all your experiments and exercises in your course content. This will allow you to design your course carefully, on a case-by-case basis, so that particular exercises are suited to the particular course topic or text. For example, it is for good reason that mapping some region or aspect of London—an activity that was popular in many humanities classrooms when only paper maps and atlases of London were available—continues to flourish as a popular (and useful) digital humanities assignment. You will have more success if you choose activities on a day-by-day basis so they make sense for the particular readings at hand. However, we suggest that you also be willing to return to activities that a particular class has enjoyed and may want to revisit. Likewise, you should be willing to drop plans for a new activity if students are struggling with course content.

The purpose of combining specificity, clarity, and flexibility is to ensure that your digital content always connects to course objectives and can adapt in case of equipment failure or miscommunications. In fact, you may want to begin an exercise by explicitly telling your students how this tool or method relates to the learning objectives you have stated on your syllabus. Although you may rely on implicit learning objectives that guide you through each semester, you should consider devoting quite a bit of your syllabus-construction time to drafting course objectives. Connecting digital activities or assignments to these objectives can help to persuade a resistant student (or fellow instructor), and also provide insurance in case an exercise or assignment doesn't quite go to plan. If the students' efforts meet stated course objectives, then the activity is a success regardless of the outcome on the screen.

Clearly stating these course objectives, despite the drearily bureaucratic connotations they might have for some, provides you with a powerful safeguard. Some DH skeptics worry that teaching with the digital humanities

can quickly shade into a dubious use of student labor. This ethical concern matters; it may not, for example, be wise to ask students to perform, on a regular basis, crowd-sourced labor for a project you are personally connected to. Yet there *are* some digital scholarly projects that students can usefully contribute to—and learn a lot from—so you can use your course objectives as guidelines to gauge the appropriateness of any assigned tasks.

Beyond placing course objectives at the core of your activities in order to emphasize the humanistic aims behind digital experiments, you can also assign reflection papers. Whether as short as a few sentences scribbled during the last minutes of class or as long as a formal essay that represents a noteworthy chunk of their final grade, these reflection papers should ask the students to connect their digital work explicitly with the other assignments and texts in the course. Even the most eager or digitally savvy student might otherwise complete the task without considering its purposes beyond creating a graphic or producing statistics. And even the best-designed activity will not automatically result in students considering its broader implications for the entire course. Asking students to weigh in on the advantages (and disadvantages) of using DH in the classroom not only allows them a context for articulating their victories—and for venting their frustrations—but also helps you revise the course prompt or assignment sheet for the next time around.

Reflection is particularly crucial with DH approaches because frustration is a common feeling attendant on digital humanities experiments. In DH, certain kinds of failure are not only understandable: they are *expected*. Hypotheses or research questions that generate ambiguous or statistically insignificant results might never be fully proven or disproven. Faulty equipment or messy data can prevent students from finding any results whatsoever, as can inadequate instructions or poorly formed teams. And, as with any class activity, a whole constellation of constraints, from time to space to material resources, could limit your students' success. With enough forethought, with a creative use of available resources, and with tips from this book, you can solve many of these problems. Still, even the most well-prepared activity can fail, and when that happens, you will want to minimize the negative effects on students by giving them credit for their efforts. And, perhaps more importantly, you can productively turn the conversation to diagnosing the sources of that failure, using it to find new ways to solve the problem, whether by identifying a technological solution or by approaching the problem through other humanistic skill sets.

Many activities in the digital humanities similarly require adaptability, creativity, and openness. Indeed, a resolutely cheerful and optimistic attitude animates our approach to the digital humanities. We value the unforeseen, accidental, and contingent. So long as you continue to be guided by your course objectives, this openness need not be a weakness or a distraction. Indeed, it can foster opportunities for reassessment and revision. Remember that you can rely on your subject knowledge and that your students will learn

valuable skills if you are willing to model problem solving and resilience. Sometimes, you will be compelled to make these revisions in the middle of a semester—or in the middle of a class session—but, with the tools we give you, you can minimize any potential negative effects for your students.

How to use this book

Just as your own digital humanities activities and assignments will be subject to revision, all of the material that follows in this book is similarly customizable. Mixing and matching the assignments and activities suggested here will greatly increase the book's usefulness. At their core, these sample prompts, guides, assignment sheets, and rubrics are simply *techniques*—approaches, not rigid formulas, that work best when tailored to fit a particular course. For example, we arrange our suggestions for activities and assignments by the length of time they require (or, sometimes, by cost), but you can revise these suggested templates to suit any particular technique into virtually any length or type of assignment. Most activities can be configured to be executed remotely or in class, completed by a group or by a single student, or finished over the course of a week, a unit, or a semester.

We have organized the book into short chapters, each one divided into small, clearly identified sections, so that you can easily dip in and out. Chapters have been designed as freestanding units that can be read on their own, in any order. Suggestions for further reading are given separately for each chapter so that you can find further resources quickly and easily. We have privileged practical advice over theory—not because theoretical approaches to pedagogy are uninteresting (and indeed, you will find relevant theoretical arguments in the further reading sections), but because this book is meant, first and foremost, as a hands-on introductory guide. As you build more confidence with designing assignments and activities, the book will also provide signposts for ways to reinforce and diversify your use of digital humanities in the classroom.

Chapter 1, “Overcoming resistance,” explains how to overcome the fear of failure that often threatens our creativity as we contemplate technologically experimental pedagogy. It then debunks common myths about DH, focusing first on your own misgivings, followed by those of your students, and ending with those of your colleagues. Chapter 1 closes by discussing the preventative habits that will reduce the number of times that you experience technical glitches in the classroom, as well as strategies for overcoming any unavoidable issues that crop up during a class session.

At the core of a DH-inspired class is its digital resources. Chapter 2, “Finding, evaluating, and creating digital resources,” shares practical tips for finding the digital texts, files, and other assets necessary for innovative DH pedagogy. We first explain the advantages of using digital resources,

then discuss how to find and evaluate them, ensuring that you choose the most robust resources at your disposal. For instructors who cannot locate suitable digital resources, we provide instructions for creating them for your students, as well as advice for creating them alongside your students. The chapter ends with a discussion of citation and copyright issues.

Chapter 3, “Ensuring accessibility,” applies concepts from Universal Design to recommend ways to make your class work optimally for all of your students. It explains technologies, such as text-to-speech and multimodal recording, that maximize the accessibility of your lectures, then turns to strategies for universal interactivity, which will give your students the tools to participate fully in each course session. Much of this information is organized into tables to make information tailored to particular issues (e.g., student presentations, late work, assignment design) easy to find. Finally, Chapter 3 turns to issues of safety, privacy, and economic inequality.

These accessibility issues will affect all of the decisions you make for your course, including your syllabus construction. Chapter 4, “Designing syllabi,” opens by arguing in favor of providing online syllabi and course websites and by suggesting simple but effective means to construct them. We then discuss the prospect of teaching a course specifically on the digital humanities before explaining the ways in which you can incorporate DH in a “light,” “medium,” or “heavy” dosage. It then provides detailed suggestions for writing the necessary components of a syllabus—such as contact information, course descriptions, and learning objectives—in ways that account for the DH elements you are using.

Chapter 5, “Designing classroom activities,” begins by theorizing in-class activities as exploratory operations that emphasize play, failure, and skill acquisition over mastery or “results.” Next, it discusses the necessity to maintain a balance between flexibility and consistency so that you can respond productively to last-minute problems or ideas while not introducing too much chaos in the classroom or departing too wildly from your carefully laid plans. It then catalogs a dozen sample in-class DH activity options, arranged by the amount of time they require, and ends with advice for writing effective prompts.

Because the execution of a well-planned activity also requires a good deal of thought, Chapter 6, “Managing classroom activities,” explains how to facilitate these activities. It first advises using free or already existing resources at the core of your activities so that resource difficulties are less likely to disrupt your plans. Still, not all DH activities are free, so we then discuss how to secure facilities, equipment, and other resources to which you might not normally have access, all arranged from least to most costly. To help you react to the many problems that may crop up during activities, we share techniques for troubleshooting and strategies for rescuing a class session—even when your planned activity is irrevocably pushed off course.

In Chapter 7, “Creating digital assignments,” we first share general tips for designing technologically innovative assignments, making sure

to foreground principles that derive from the values and practices of the DH community, so that your assignments are clear, useful, and exciting for both you and your students. The bulk of the chapter catalogs a set of assignment ideas, arranging them from the least to most complex and linking them to sample assignment sheets and rubrics in the Web Companion (as we also do in Chapter 5 on activities). Chapter 7 ends with a detailed discussion of how to write effective assignment sheets and an exhortation to provide examples of previous student work or to complete the assignment yourself.

The peculiar demands of DH-inflected assignments will influence your grading processes as much as they do your construction of assignments, so Chapter 8, “Evaluating student work,” explores the ways in which you will want to clarify and modify your approach to assessment. It begins by discussing the significance of sharing explicit criteria with your students, and then walks through the construction of analytic and holistic rubrics. We share some approaches that have developed within the DH community and some ideas for involving your students in the evaluation process. Finally, we discuss alternatives to rubric usage, and end with advice for helping your students (and you too!) cope with failure.

Chapter 9, “Teaching graduate students,” turns to the particular issues at hand when teaching graduate courses and advising graduate students. It considers the differences between undergraduate and graduate students from the vantage point of the digital humanities, then it elaborates the many ways in which DH can be incorporated into a graduate course. A detailed table provides advice for graduate students and for their mentors; it is tailored to each stage in a grad student’s progress toward degree. Next, graduate mentors are encouraged to connect graduate students to external opportunities, such as conferences and fellowships, that center on DH. Chapter 9 ends with advice for helping graduate students in the job market to leverage their DH experience.

Chapter 10, “Finding internal support communities,” and Chapter 11, “Finding external support communities,” stress the importance of reaching out to others as you experiment with DH in the classroom. Chapter 10 focuses on finding (and giving) help within your own institution, from the faculty and staff in your own department and other humanities departments to those in STEM and computing fields, and from administrators throughout your institution to librarians and special collections. It also discusses how best to interact with information technology (IT) staff, as well as how to find the material and financial resources you need to pursue your DH pedagogy. Finally, Chapter 10 ends with an extended meditation on the ethics of collaboration so that your attempts to receive support are mutually beneficial.

In contrast, Chapter 11, “Finding external support communities,” moves outward. We begin with a consideration of social media, as it is an extremely user-friendly and quick way to build a community of DHers.

An in-depth discussion of Twitter befits this platform’s significance as a primary disseminator of DH news and scholarship. To gesture toward the many ways to interact with the global DH community, we survey the academic organizations, conferences, and events that have emerged around the digital humanities, including DH’s range of institutes, workshops, and seminars. Chapter 11 concludes by sharing digital humanities journals and summarizing grant-funding opportunities.

Chapter 12, “Connecting to your research,” lays out options for making your efforts in DH pedagogy work double for you by contributing to your scholarship. We first discuss using DH methods and tools to make your existing disciplinary research more efficient and reliable. Next, the chapter explores options for publishing works about your DH teaching experiences, before considering how current scholarship in the digital humanities can transform your research by broadening its content and scope. Chapter 12 ends by considering possibilities for bringing your students into this research process by using DH methods. It stresses the significance of bringing your students in as collaborators rather than workers and shares ways for acknowledging your students’ efforts.

Whereas this Introduction has acquainted you with the features and information offered by this book, the Conclusion offers suggestions for moving forward, beyond the confines of this book and our suggestions. In our conclusion, we exhort you to experiment and, by responding to the needs and interests of your particular student body, to forge your own approaches to DH pedagogy. Throughout this collaboratively written volume, when we use the third-person plural, we refer to ourselves, Shawna Ross and Claire Battershill, and when we have distinct opinions or anecdotes about our individual teaching, we distinguish ourselves by our initials: S and C.

The Web Companion

To provide more inspiration beyond the confines of the chapters described above, and to situate this book in the digital context from which it arose, we have also created a Web Companion (www.teachdh.com), which we reference throughout. This companion includes a curated, annotated bibliography of relevant sources for each chapter. Each chapter’s annotated bibliography in the companion is organized into categories (such as software tutorials, sample syllabi, and digital pedagogy theory) and then described in paragraph form (rather than presented as a list, which sometimes can be overwhelming and uninformative) to provide a supplemental 2,000-word bibliographic essay for each chapter. The websites mentioned in each chapter here are also reproduced in the digital companion, providing convenient clickable links to important resources. Beyond providing a list of links, though, the annotated bibliography for each chapter also provides short essays on important debates, issues, or concepts that we could not address

in the book itself. To provide a few examples, “Does digital scholarship count?” provides a consideration of the value of DH-inspired research that is paired with Chapter 12, “Connecting to your research”; “Digital humanities and social justice,” which introduces the reader to one strand of DH research, is matched to Chapter 3, “Ensuring accessibility”; and “Experimental grading methods” are shared in the bibliographic resources for Chapter 8, “Evaluating student work.”

In the Web Companion, we also provide activity sets and assignment sets for methods that we have particularly highlighted in this book, such as maps, visualization, text capture, and text analysis. The sample classroom activity sets are downloadable and customizable; each consists of a slideshow tutorial, a prompt to share with students, and a detailed explanation of how to prepare and manage the activity. This tripartite activity set structure ensures that you have the resources to learn (and teach) the methods that you can then ask your students to learn. We also provide a cluster of sample assignment sheets that you can download, then either distribute with no additional work or customize according to your needs. Finally, we include some examples of actual student work to use as samples. These sample student assignments, all produced by our own students from a single course, demonstrate the broad range of student uses of social media, infographics, flowcharts, listicles, timelines, surveys, quizzes, and other artifacts that use interactive media or visualization techniques.

To make the best use of these supplementary materials, we suggest that you read this book with a smartphone, laptop, or other internet-enabled device close at hand. This will be particularly useful as you read Chapters 5 and 7. That way, you can refer to the digital materials as they are referenced in the book. (Alternately, you could, of course, download the materials in advance.)

Developing your own digital pedagogy

We encourage you, essentially, to use this book in whatever way you find it most helpful. In *Using Digital Humanities in the Classroom*, we have deliberately designed a primer that supports a variety of approaches and suits a variety of purposes. We recognize that we all teach with our own motivations and with our own styles, and this eclecticism is what makes conversations about the classroom so exciting. Hopefully, what motivates you to teach in the first place, and what drives you to be bold and try new things in the classroom, will also be what leads you to engage with digital humanities in a way that suits your own ideals and your own classroom philosophy.

For C, having students work with authentic forms of digital media has allowed them to do some of their most creative work. They have done everything from building their own holograms that represent the transitional

nature of the bildungsroman to inhabiting the characters of contemporary fiction through the use of social media to using digital images and timing tools to discover the relationship between typography and reading time. Working with collaborative digital publishing projects has allowed her students, some of whom have had graphic design and arts backgrounds, to see the links between their own artistic disciplines and the literary texts they study in English classes and write in creative writing workshops. Since imaginativeness, risk taking, and innovation are at the core of C’s teaching philosophy, her students’ use of digital technologies has brightened and diversified the creative classroom.

For S, digital humanities methods allow her to ask students to approach questions of style, textuality, history, and philosophy in unexpected ways. Wading out to strange new regions—of graphs and visualizations, numbers and algorithms—destabilizes the literary concepts and texts that her students often regard as all-too-familiar. The inevitable “return to” traditional modes of humanist inquiry is thus meant to defamiliarize the humanities while humanizing the technologies with which our students live so intimately.

These are our own values in the classroom, but the digital has the potential to adapt itself to nearly any philosophy. Whether you believe strongly in collaboration among your students and creating a dialogic environment or you favor rigorous individual student work, each of these needs can be specifically addressed with reference to digital methods and tools.

Conclusion

As proponents of using digital humanities in the classroom, we do not recommend the use of technology for its own sake. Rather, in this book, we hope to show the many ways in which it cannot only introduce new lines of inquiry, but also help answer the cultural, historical, literary, philosophical, or anthropological questions that you and your students are already posing in your courses. We hope that some of the assignment suggestions, prompts, and reflections in this volume will provide opportunities to reflect on what matters most to you in your teaching. Trying new methods can also bring us back to our own truest and most important pedagogical priorities and remind us (and our students) of what humanistic inquiry is all about. The digital humanities, as a landscape full of experimentation, openness, and newness, can spark new approaches to our most important problems and questions. Using new technology won’t change the purpose of your teaching or substitute for your other activities as a teacher. Nor does it stand in for or replace the values you currently hold. It *does*, however, give you new ways to see those goals, facilitate them, and share them with students.

Creating Digital Assignments

This chapter covers evaluated, take-home digital assignments. These assignments can supplement in-class participation, they can comprise a component of the course's formal evaluation, or they can reinforce skills acquired through in-class activities. Whereas Chapter 8, "Evaluating student work," gives advice about how to grade digital work, here we focus only on designing successful assignments. The chapter begins by explaining the basic principles behind sound assignment design. In the next section, which makes up the bulk of the chapter, we provide a catalog of the many options available for creating digital humanities (DH) assignments, including a description of the work involved, recommendations about particular platforms or applications to use, and ideas for pairing assignments with classroom activities. Finally, we share practical tips for designing assignment sheets (including a breakdown of "must have" pieces of information) to help you communicate your goals for the assignment to students and give them the confidence to succeed. These principles are all modeled in the Web Companion materials related to this chapter, so consider consulting the seven sample assignment sheets and matching rubrics uploaded there.

General principles for creating digital assignments

We have formulated a short set of concrete recommendations for assignment design that responds to the specific challenges of going digital. First, as we stressed in the introduction, we strongly suggest that you ally your own and your students' fears about new kinds of assignments by requiring short reflection papers for graded work that use new digital skills. Not only does this reinforce the humanities values and skills that are being taught across your students' degrees (including the skills to

think critically, communicate clearly, argue persuasively, and analyze thoughtfully), but it also helps to balance any tech disasters students might encounter that might affect the actual product of their assignment. If students are able to write brilliant reflection papers about what *didn't* work in, for example, their topic models or their digital maps, they will likely have amply demonstrated the skills required of the assignment and the course, and therefore might merit a good grade nonetheless. These kinds of papers also allow for reflection on broader issues around technology and its educational and social effects; by thinking about how and why we use digital tools and platforms, students can begin to articulate their own nuanced and critical relationships with the technologies that surround them in university and in their lives.

Second, we recommend limiting your students to one (new) particular tool or platform per assignment. Ideally, this will be the same one for each student. Staying focused on a minimum number of platforms allows you to give your students better, more focused “tech support” and encourages students to gain platform mastery so they can help one another. C learned the importance of tool streamlining when she assigned a broad creative assignment in a contemporary fiction class and some of her students chose to work with a variety of social media platforms. It was a fourth-year course with particularly strong students, so she didn't want to limit or inhibit them by mandating a specific platform. One student chose a complicated Facebook project, but no one else did, and she spent a lot of time dealing with the tiny little problems that continually bubbled to the surface. She could have easily tackled this bundle of eminently solvable obstacles—if she had not simultaneously been providing tech support for five other platforms and a variety of other media. A more focused, minimal approach (such as the one outlined in the Twitter tutorials in the Web Companion) would have made this kind of situation more manageable.

This one-platform principle does not only make instructors' lives easier, though; many students prefer not to have to make so many decisions before they even begin their work. Indeed, C has found that openness is both the best and the worst aspect of creative assignments, at least as far as students are concerned. They are excited to be given the chance to make something different than the standard essay, but often it takes a lot of encouragement and reassurance to help them through the difficulty of choosing both a medium and a method for themselves. If you have students who genuinely dislike the tool or platform you have chosen, especially when your assignment is flexible, you can always allow deviations on a case-by-case basis. Still, it is worth explaining to those students the limits of your own competence with specific platforms so that they know when you can help with troubleshooting and when it will be their responsibility (not yours) to ensure that this platform allows them to fulfill the goals of your original assignment.

On a similar note, we would suggest that with digital assignments there is a fine balance between openness and structure. Be flexible, but not *too* flexible. Adapting to your particular students' needs and to events in the news is good practice, but it can be taken too far. In an introductory course in college writing, S had students who were dismayed by recent changes in a user agreement for a very popular software application, so she substituted an activity based on this for a regularly scheduled assignment (and its satellite activities). Students rewrote the user agreements into vernacular, “user-friendly” language over the course of two weeks. It could have been an admirable class activity, even for one that took place over a few course sessions, but, as S soon realized, it should not have taken the place of a major assignment worth 20 percent of the students' final grades. In her excitement over her students' initial enthusiasm, she overestimated their willingness to maintain the rigorous attention to detail that this assignment required, and she was not able to produce, at the last minute, a well-composed, well-thought-out suite of materials that would bolster the students' motivation. This new assignment ended up siphoning valuable course time away from a tried-and-true activity that she had developed over a decade of teaching composition. In other words, be flexible, but remember that flexibility does not require disregarding hard-won pedagogical knowledge or devaluing well-formed assignments simply because they do not boast that new, shiny DH appeal. Not every assignment in every class needs to be technologically advanced to be useful for students.

Moreover, even when you do add a DH element to an assignment, it does not always have to be particularly complicated or avant-garde. Encouraging students to post their work publicly by making it available online is, for example, a very simple way to incorporate DH in your classroom, but that does not mean it is not valuable. In fact, we would argue that public writing is at the very heart of the digital humanities. In this provocative passage, Mark Sample explains the purpose and power of assigning public writing (and other types of public scholarship beyond the production of text):

I don't believe that my mission as a professor is to turn my students into miniature versions of myself or of any other professor, yet that is the only function that the traditional essay serves. And even if I did want to churn out little professors, the essay fails exceedingly well at this. Somehow the student essay has come to stand in for all the research, dialogue, revision, and work that professional scholars engage in. It isn't. (87)

Although there *are* often good reasons to assign an essay, Sample asks us, at the very least, to explore making this private activity public and to consider alternatives—like those listed below—that might better reflect the broad range of activities we engage in as scholars.

Common types of digital assignments

The following assignments are ordered (roughly) from simple projects—uncomplicated or relatively fast assignments suitable for beginners or as building blocks for a bigger project—to complex projects that are more suitable for long-term assignments, group work, or end-of-semester projects. With careful thought, though, each one could be adapted into a shorter or longer assignment.

Using and evaluating digital editions and archives

Assignment description: Once you have facilitated in-class activities around digital archives—in which your students have explored the different features offered by various institutions and websites—you might consider an assignment that more specifically invites students to dive in and actually use a digital archive for a research paper or presentation. You could approach this very conventionally, simply by asking students to write a traditional essay using a digital archive as a repository of primary texts or research materials. Alternatively, you could have students complete a multistage assignment in which they first digitally annotate a resource, then write critically about the digitized object they are working with. If you yourself are involved in making a digital archive, you can also involve your students in the creation of specific aspects of the archive by assigning them (for example) a specific archival object for which they might produce metadata and written analysis. Be alert to opportunities that would allow your students to submit their work for inclusion into the archive itself. As we suggested earlier, a reflection paper on the archive's merits and failings is a worthy addition to any such assignment. Students might consider such crucial issues as the digital remediation of real-world objects, the curatorial decisions made by digitizing initiatives, and the user experience of the archive, or the politics of open access—or lack thereof—regarding the history of a given resource.

Tips and tricks: For a list of digital archival resources and more information about using digital archives in the classroom, see the Web Companion for Chapter 2, “Finding, evaluating, and creating digital resources.”

Course-specific social media groups or streams

Assignment description: Using social media allows you to adapt platforms that your students are likely already using. Social media in the classroom works best when you know for sure which platforms are preferred by your particular collection of students. Their preferences may not be what you think they are, and it's helpful to ask students what they would be comfortable using. Students perceive some platforms as intimate (making your requirement to use it feel like an imposition), while others are considered

fair game for course instruction and teacher interaction. We recommend creating a custom hashtag on Twitter (#YourNearClassTopic), then asking each student to write one or two tweets per course day that respond to the course readings. You would begin each class day by projecting the new content from your social media streams; simply type your hashtag into the Search bar on Twitter to see your custom “stream.” Beginning class this day both reduces your time for course prep (as students can produce talking points or questions through their tweets) and allows you to respond directly to your students’ interests. If you choose a platform that you already use, consider creating a new account for your classroom so that you can keep your personal account clear of student interactions.

Tips and tricks: Participation in a Twitter stream makes a great homework assignment or replacement for daily or periodic quizzes; simply adjust the rigor and frequency of their required participation so that it matches the effort required for homework or quizzes. For detailed instructions, refer to the Twitter activity and assignment sets in the Web Companion.

Most-frequent-word analysis

Assignment description: In Chapter 5, we discuss using most-frequent-word (MFW) analysis as an in-class activity during which the instructor leads a discussion about MFW visualization platforms like Voyant (voyant-tools.org). There are a number of further steps you can take to adapt MFW into a method for completing evaluated, take-home work. Ask students to complete traditional research on the text being analyzed and write a comparison-and-contrast paper that ends with a reflection on the particular uses or shortcomings of both new and traditional modes of scholarship. Alternatively, ask students to compare MFW analysis results from multiple texts, or have them translate MFW lists into more than one kind of visualization (such as charts, figures, clouds, or animate images) by using a spreadsheet program or the included options of comprehensive platforms like Voyant. Students might also experiment with adjusting stop-word settings or comparing results from the same texts when submitted to different MFW visualization platforms. Finally, do not overlook the possibility of using MFW analysis as a supplement to an existing assignment or method that you already teach. C, for example, tells students to use MFW to locate relevant passages to perform close readings on as they plan and execute “traditional” literary critical essays.

Tips and tricks: Link this up to the Voyant activity set and Style Lab assignment set.

Wikis

Assignment description: Wikis—simple, collaborative websites that are easily and publicly editable from any internet browser—require knowledge of

only a minimal number of “tags” (snippets of encoding markup) and coding conventions. A wiki provides not only a great way to become acquainted with markup languages in general, but also is one of the very quickest and easiest ways to construct a website. Back in 2005, S, for example, taught her students how to use wikis to write and host their writing assignments after she herself had only known of the existence of wikis for a week! Wikis work well as a platform for enabling the sharing and revision of written assignments. Use them to allow students to view one another’s work, as well as edit one another’s work (or simply make suggestions for revision). A wiki can also be used as a platform for blogging (see the blogging assignment below). For students who would like to share information with the class but not with the public, and who would not like to use pseudonyms, use a service that enables password-protecting your wiki. Even if the content is not made publicly available, wikis offer one particular advantage over using in-house tools integrated into your Learning Management System (LMS): by learning how to contribute to a wiki, students still gain useful skills that are transferable beyond a closed, proprietary LMS.

Tips and tricks: As you might expect, the most famous wiki, Wikipedia, boasts a very good page that defines wikis. Search for “free wiki hosting” to generate your own free course website. Wikispaces are free for educators, whereas PBWorks wikis are free for noncommercial purposes. For easy integration with your Google accounts, try Google Sites.

Blogging

Assignment description: Blogging offers students the chance to practice writing with a different voice and tone than they might use in a traditional essay. This option also allows you to ask students to explore the multimedia possibilities offered by a digital platform as they write and publish their blog posts. We would recommend showing your students examples of scholarly blogs in order to establish a tone that fits with academic practice in your field. Blogging foregrounds some of the key writing skills of thinking about audience, style, and tone, and encourages students to think beyond course content and more deeply into stylistic exploration and the actual communication of ideas. Assignments based on blogs can be smaller graded affairs that occur throughout the term, serving the purposes of a reading journals or reflection space for students as they work through course material. In that case, they can either be graded for completion or for more specific features of quality or effort. Alternatively, blog posts can be one-off graded pieces of writing that individual students contribute to a group blog run by the whole class. In the cases where blog posts are used to replace more traditional term papers or research papers, one of the major advantages is the unfettered ability to use video, images, or sounds to augment the written materials.

Tips and tricks: For the easiest blogging platform, we suggest WordPress (more detail about which can be found in the Web Companion materials associated with Chapter 4). Your university may also have its own custom blogging platform, so if that’s the route you would like to go, it’s worth checking with your department or information technology (IT) services.

Mapping

Assignment description: Digital mapping platforms are some of the most user-friendly applications in the world of DH pedagogy, which is why asking students to create maps online is a classic and popular choice for graded digital work. Spatial trends underlay all humanities fields, not just history and geography, and digital maps can embed all sorts of data (images, videos, links, even spaces for public commentary) beyond pinpointing and connecting important locations. The most important question to answer is whether your students will create only the interactive, multidimensional map, or if they will also submit significant supplementary research and writing—for example, an essay that interprets the map and furthers a particular thesis. We recommend that, for your first foray into assigning digital maps, you restrict the students’ attention to the map alone, though you might, as always, supplement this with a short written reflection. After you assess the quality of your first round of student maps and revise your tutorials and assignment sheets to reflect their successes and shortcomings, then you can design an appropriate matching research or written assignment.

Tips and tricks: In addition to trying out Google products, explore some other digital mapping platforms, such as MapBox and, if you’re feeling ambitious, Neatline for Omeka. For out-of-the-box ideas, look at the mapping activity and assignment sets in the Web Companion, as well as the links to other instructors’ assignment sheets in the Web Companion materials related to this chapter.

Multimedia timelines

Assignment description: As you have no doubt already guessed, digital timelines are exciting ways to present information that is somehow chronological in nature (that is, it has concrete times and dates associated with it). But timelines can also be used for any body of research or any argument that becomes clearer or more persuasive if is ordered in a linear fashion—it can be divided into component parts that can be labeled first, second, third, fourth, et cetera—and presented visually. Use a multimedia timeline, in other words, as an alternative to an essay exam, research paper, or other traditional research project. Students define a specific, narrow topic that they want to conduct research about; conduct research about the topic; organize the fruits of their research into a timeline format, dividing their

topic into subtopics to make the timeline easier to read, and incorporate multimedia (such as images, video, and audio clips) as well as interactive components (such as quizzes and discussion questions).

Tips and tricks: In the sample assignment sets in the *Web Companion*, we've provided all you need to assign a multimedia timeline using the HSTRY platform (<http://edu.hstry.co>). Browse this website to see examples of scholars using timelines to present any type of research or argument in a linear fashion. If this platform does not support the features you need, look in the annotated bibliography associated with this chapter in the *Web Companion* for a discussion of other digital timeline applications.

Natively digital genres

Assignment description: Asking students to produce scholarly materials written in natively digital genres can be a fun introduction to the digital humanities and to public writing. Listsicles, quizzes, Tweets, Facebook posts, Pinterest boards, Tumblr blogs, Instagram accounts, and even web comics provide opportunities for students to mobilize skills they already have and to be able to share their academic work with their friends and family members. In Chapter 5, "Designing classroom activities," we refer to related activities as "social media activities," but here, we want to emphasize that graded assignments using social media (or otherwise interactive or peer-driven platforms) ask students to think carefully about how their everyday activities online are forms of writing that are structured by audience expectations and genre conventions. Classroom activities using these platforms often emphasize interactivity, immediacy, and spontaneity, but graded student work based on them should be well planned, well executed, well written, and well edited. It should be cannily pitched to the platform's audience and attuned to its characteristic conventions.

Tips and tricks: We recommend polling your students to discover which particular platform interests them the most before you spend too much time creating tutorials and assignment sheets. Look at sample student work in the *Web Companion* to see a wide variety of student work produced by S's students in her Virginia Woolf course.

Textual annotation

Assignment description: This homework assignment allows your students to contribute collaboratively to a shared, annotated version of a course reading or other relevant text. This course reading must, of course, be available online (see Chapter 2, "Finding, evaluating, and creating digital resources," for directions about making a text available online if your chosen text is not already available). With group annotation, instead of each student underlining relevant passages and writing remarks in the

margins of the pages of their own, single copy of a physical text, all of your students "mark up" the same digital text. Because students can see one another's comments, these tools facilitate asynchronous class discussion and can inspire synchronous, in-class discussion as well. Most of these tools are plugins for browsers, so your students will have to download the (free) software and create a (free) account. Group annotation exercises are great as quiz replacements and fabulous for sparking class discussion. Moreover, many people find it easier to retrieve and revisit their previous annotations on these platforms than it is to locate their past interactions on social media platforms.

Tips and tricks: Encourage students to respond to one another's annotations, especially by asking and answering questions, thus creating a peer-learning environment. Try *Hypothes.is* for a popular, easy group annotation tool.

Image annotation

Assignment description: Similar to text annotation and digital mapping, image annotation allows you to anchor various kinds of data (text, links, other images) onto a particular section of a digital image. Recall what happens when you hover your cursor over a captioned image—you will see a description of the image—and then imagine planting various "hoverable" points on an image, each one of which will provide rich, new detail about its history, provenance, or relevance. Students could either annotate found images or create an image that they then themselves annotate. For a larger project, ask students to assemble galleries of multiple annotated images, not just one image; or ask students to annotate images that were generated by their fellow students. For an even more complicated project, which requires students to reflect on platform choice and audience shifts, ask students to migrate finished images to Tumblr, Pinterest, or another public platform of their choice.

Tips and tricks: We recommend Flickr because of its large user base (which means that you can easily search for answers to almost any question you might dream up) and its generous amount of included storage (up to 1 terabit—that's 1,000 gigabits—of storage for a free account). For a different approach, though, try *IdeaMâché* (ideamache.ecologylab.net), which combines the look and feel of digital maps, animated slideshow software, and annotated digital image platforms. If your institution uses *Canvas*, you can experiment with its native *AnnotationsX* tool.

Digital edition creation

Assignment description: "Putting a text online" involves quite a bit more thought and effort than highlighting some text, pressing copy, and then pressing paste. And it's not, on the other end of the spectrum, merely an

endless tedium comprised of adding tags and markup language. Digital editions require a broad range of skills, from the creative tasks of design to the theoretical analysis of deciding what the text actually consists of, from the scholarly work of creating apparatuses and annotations to the technical work of choosing platforms and tools, and from the precision and accuracy of adding HTML tags to the organizational prowess of keeping track with files, personnel, and complete or incomplete tasks. If students choose small texts, such as a single poem, you might have success with asking individual students each to create a single digital edition, but we prefer forming students into groups of four to five, each of which will be responsible for a single text. Unless your students have considerable experience in encoding or web publishing, determine beforehand a limited suite of tools and platforms that students will be required to use. Avoid overemphasizing the technical minutiae of this activity so that students do not breeze over important editorial decisions. Emphasize that these editorial tasks—such as the selection of text, the sourcing of their text, their imaging or transcription of the text, and their choice of scholarly apparatuses, such as introductions, biographies, annotations, translations, and explanations of historical context—are just as important as learning how to digitize a text, encode it, and host it.

Tips and tricks: As with the digital archive assignment mentioned in the next section, carefully sequence this assignment after students build up, step-by-step, the skills that will be used to create a digital edition. We advise, as a minimum, using both the ScannerPro activity set and Digital Edition assignment set, although you could certainly substitute both of these with ones geared toward the platforms and tools of your choice, so long as you spend some time on the method of capturing your plaintext, as well as some time on the encoding scheme and software that your students will use to design and display the edition.

Digital archive creation

Assignment description: As we discussed in Chapter 2, digital archives are web-accessible repositories of surrogates (digital images, scans, or transcriptions) of any material considered of cultural importance. Some are collections of digital editions of important texts, whereas others are primarily visual. Still others are multimodal, containing a wide variety of digital objects in many different file formats. As a result, a digital archive could form the basis of a public history project, a fieldwork project, a literary or visual culture project, a genealogical or family history project, or a curatorial project focused on your own institution's brick-and-mortar archives or special collections. Technically, you can create an archive from any digital platform—even WordPress could be used to host and design a digital archive—but in the DH community, content management systems (CMSs), such as Omeka, Drupal, and Scalar, are considered standard. These

platforms, especially Omeka, are easy to use and free for most users. Archives can be created by individual students, by small groups, or by the entire class. We recommend this latter, communal option, as it allows students to choose roles that suit their skills and tastes; some may focus on object acquisition while others on graphic design, on metadata collection, or on the technical nuts-and-bolts. By working as a team, your class will more likely create an archive that is successful, comprehensive, attractive, and durable.

Tips and tricks: Collaborate with local librarians and archivists to cultivate a project that will be useful for the broader community. Consider prefacing this assignment with the ScannerPro activity in the Web Companion (so that students learn how to digitize physical texts), a wiki-based assignment (so that students learn rudimentary markup), or a blogging assignment (so that students learn how to use the same platform that will later be used to host the digital archive).

Writing effective assignment sheets

As we mention in Chapter 5, “Designing classroom activities,” assignment sheets should contain more information than activity prompts. This is true not only because they involve more work, but also because they are typically subject to formal evaluation and can therefore prompt more anxiety in your students. With students’ grades on the line, and with more work taking place out of the classroom, your knowledge, your vision, your authority, and your power to reassure need to animate every phrase in this document. It is, in other words, your surrogate, and the more precise and detailed it is, the more your students will feel confident in approaching their tasks, will encounter fewer unforeseen or avoidable obstacles, and will not have to contact you at every stage in the project for clarification or help. As David Gooblar has written,

offering students a clearer and more transparent picture of their assignments before they start can lead to better results, particularly among student populations that typically perform poorly. That means explaining the overall goals you have for the assignment (what knowledge you want students to gain, what skills you want them to practice), the particular steps you expect them to follow in completing the work, and the specific criteria you will use to evaluate them. Putting in extra work at the outset to make sure that students fully understand what’s being asked of them can save you work when it comes time to grade. (par. 6)

Ensuring this transparency, as Gooblar intimates, does take extra time, as you will need to put yourself into your students’ shoes to imagine what kinds of information you yourself would need. You can make ample use of the resources linked to in the Web Companion for this chapter; it will

not obviate the kind of work necessary for preparing a “transparent” assignment, but it will provide shortcuts for brainstorming assignments, choosing platforms, finding tutorials, and sourcing sample materials to give to students.

When you craft your assignment sheets, design them so that they share a great amount of detail with students and yet avoid information overload. To do this, carefully organize your assignment sheet to introduce the right kind of information, in the right amount, at the right level of specificity, at the right time. Stipulating evaluation criteria before providing step-by-step instructions, for example, may induce anxiety and emphasize your grading process over their learning process. Each assignment sheet should therefore begin with a brief, broad overview. This overview should contain a concise summary as well as a rationale for the assignment. Now is the chance to convey “big picture” ideas, not become bogged down by technical minutiae. To explain why students are completing this work, link the digital skills required by the assignment with your course objectives, with major themes and questions that have recurred throughout your class, or with the research goals and methods of your discipline. In our seven sample assignment sheets, for example, we begin with a bullet-pointed “at a glance” list that explains what students will learn and then proceed with a more discursive “Description” section.

After you have described the “what” and “why” of the assignment, move to “how.” Provide detailed technical instructions that move chronologically through all the actions they will need to take, ideally numbering each action step-by-step to ensure clarity. You may also wish to walk students through these tutorials in person during class in cases where a new technology or tool is crucial to the success of the assignment. As with activity prompts, you may be able to outsource *some* of this technical information by providing copies of or links to documentation and tutorials, and in fact, all DH-inflected assignment sheets should contain these links. But be aware of any information that is not included in ready-made tutorials but that your students will need to know. For example, you will have to provide explicit instructions for how to submit their work (is a URL via e-mail enough?) and, in the case of group work, instructions for how groups should communicate and keep track of who did what work. If the assignment requires special equipment, tell students how to source it within your institution; if it requires students to import data, tell them where they will source this data and how to tell if the data is reliable or not. Supply these missing links for your students in your assignment sheet, or, if possible, tweak an existing tutorial to make it work better for your students. This is why our tutorials in the Web Companion are downloadable and licensed under a CC BY-SA (“share alike”) license: so you can revise them to meet your specific needs. This license allows you to use and remix our materials, so long as you also provide attribution and allow others to use and remix the materials you have made from ours. (Refer to Chapter 2, “Finding,

evaluating, and creating digital resources,” for more information about this license.)

You should also provide explicit evaluation standards that explain to students the criteria you will be using, as well as how each criterion is weighted (e.g., 20 percent of the final grade) and the signposts for or characteristics of student work that will be judged as exceeding, meeting, or falling to meet these standards. Check that the relative weights assigned to each criterion match your stated learning objectives for the course in general and for this assignment in particular. If a skill, task, or concept is important to you, it should be reflected not just in your explanation of course work, but also in your students’ grades as well. To ensure the consistency between your grading policies and your goals for the course—which will help you convince students of the appropriateness of their grades—you might even write your grading rubric or evaluation standards *before* writing the rest of the assignment sheet. As we discuss further in Chapter 8, “Evaluating student work,” your students will greatly appreciate it if you are perfectly explicit and consistent in your grading criteria for DH-related assignments, and rubrics are a tried-and-true method for making standards explicit and for establishing this consistency.

Finally, where possible, provide examples of successful work. Ideally, this sample work will be from your own former students who were completing the same assignment, so when you try out a new assignment, ask your students for permission to share their work with future students. (Written permission is best, and make sure you know if the student prefers to be named or left anonymous.) If you make it a policy to add a maximum of only one *new-to-you* type of assignment for every course section that you teach—and we are enthusiastic proponents of this policy!—you will be able to reuse older assignment materials from a prior semester in every case but the single new assignment you have designed. You can also search online for student work completed for a similar assignment in another institution. If none are available, point your students toward professional or scholarly examples, but make sure to allay any fears by discussing with them the differences between novice work (i.e., what your students will turn in) and the expert work you have shared with them.

Many pedagogy experts (including Gooblar, cited earlier) suggest that even if you do have sample student work to circulate, you should also complete the assignment *yourself*. Not only will doing so allow you to check for gaps or problems, but also this process should produce at least one piece of sample work that is perfectly tailored to your context. If you do not think you have the time for this, consider that putting in the effort now will likely, in the long run, save you time that you would spend answering student questions and troubleshooting for them. This sort of preparation may therefore save you from incurring unnecessary frustration or embarrassment along the way, or from making last-minute revisions to the assignment structure itself, or from having to relax your grading standards

in ways that you are uncomfortable with. This exercise is useful even if you only partially complete the assignment. Go through the motions of signing up for an account or downloading software, beginning the project, saving it or converting your data into a more useful or durable format, and brainstorming ways to translate your initial findings into a mature argument or final product. If you ask students, for example, to create fifteen to twenty points on a digital map, just try creating five yourself, and if you ask them to then write a five-to-seven-page paper based on the map, just try writing one body paragraph and a thesis statement.

We do have one final piece of advice for preventing student difficulties in assignment completion that will allow you to circumvent the need to produce your own sample work. Asking students to complete in-class activities, such as the ones we described in Chapter 5, or brief homework assignments that use the same tools as the assignment, will provide “dry runs” for the students. Last-minute technical issues or conceptual problems will be minimized because students will have already experienced them during a low-pressure classroom activity, when they can ask fellow students and you for help. This is exactly why, in the Web Companion, we match each activity set with a particular assignment set that requires the same digital skill or uses the same platform. Using activities as a rehearsal for an assignment will have the bonus effect of motivating students to take the activity seriously; what’s more, allowing students to reuse data, visualizations, or hypotheses from these class activities for their assignments will reinforce this effect.

Conclusion

A well-designed assignment sets the stage for your students to shore up previously acquired skills, to practice new skills and concepts, to explore course content in new ways, and to produce original research in your discipline. When the assignment involves digital humanities components, it will, in addition to these goals, ask students to understand course content in relation to digital cultures and apply it to digital platforms and technologies. Whether or not you adopt the specific assignments described in this chapter and in the Web Companion’s sample assignment sheets and rubrics, the general principles behind designing challenging yet achievable DH-inflected assignments and writing effective assignment sheets remain the same. And whether the assignment is the centerpiece of a class that is routinely engaged in DH methods or a special case in a more traditionally designed humanities course, it should inspire you and your students to understand your discipline in new ways. No matter what, you will undoubtedly zero in on your own pedagogical style in adapting digital tools to your discipline, and we only hope that you will apply the concepts of Chapters 11, “Finding external support communities,” and

12, “Connecting to your research,” to expand and share your new ideas about DH-inflected assignments.

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Evaluating Student Work

Evaluation can be complex for digital assignments. Indeed, one of the major anxieties facing any instructor who wants to try something new, whether it's a creative assignment or a digital project, is how assessment will work. We are comfortable grading conventional exams, essays, and writing assignments because these more traditional projects tend to have familiar assessment standards for humanities instructors and many of us have had some formal training or mentoring for grading academic written work. But what if our students begin handing in original computer games or digital photo collages? How, then, does one assess a digital project using humanistic evaluation methods? What are the criteria for digital assignments, and how do these differ from more conventional humanities assignments? And how do you grade students who have encountered difficult technological obstacles or glitches that they could not have foreseen?

In this chapter, we outline some suggestions for maintaining fair evaluation practices even as you and your students take exciting risks in the classroom. We offer advice about clearly communicating evaluation standards by crafting logical rubrics or other systematic approaches to grading to help your students approach digital work with confidence. (Consider having the Web Companion open as you read this section, as it is paired with the seven sample rubrics we have provided to complement the seven sample assignment sheets provided in conjunction with Chapter 7, "Creating digital assignments.") Next, we discuss how to involve students in their own evaluation processes, and briefly introduce the concepts of iterative learning, process-oriented evaluation, and multiliteracies. Finally, we discuss how to help students cope with failure, and make suggestions for *you* so that you can cope with any shortcomings in your assignment construction that are revealed during the process of evaluation. By consciously crafting your assessment policies and methods, you can overcome one of the biggest fears students have about digital work: that they will fail assignments because they believe they are not "good with computers." Your students will not only be more comfortable with digital work when they know exactly how they're

being graded: they will also produce *better* work. Time spent thinking over assessment strategies will therefore be time very well spent.

The importance of explicit assessment criteria

Digital humanities (DH) pedagogy can be so exciting that it's easy to lose sight of your course objectives and assignment sheets. You may find yourself so charmed by a student's Instagram feed curating Byzantine art or an Omeka installation about an underappreciated Indian anthropologist that you want to give the student full credit for its sheer boldness, novelty, or aesthetic attractiveness. Or you may be tempted to change gears in the middle of an assignment if you find a new tool, or if students seem more interested in a different platform or medium than you have identified. But when it comes to assessment practices, despite the virtues of flexibility in assignment design, you will normally achieve better results by adhering closely to the course materials and evaluative criteria that you have already communicated to students. Fortunately, if you have already crafted careful policies, you may find it simple to adapt your existing policies in ways that both you and your students find fair.

In other words, being thoughtful, clear, and careful about your own assessment practices (and honestly, reflective about how well they're working) can help you avoid confusion among your students. Remind your students—and yourself!—that course objectives and assignment sheets are created for the mutual benefit of instructor and student. Clear rubrics allow you to check the consistency and objectivity of your judgments, while also showing students where their efforts are best directed to succeed in an assignment. Consequently, you can emphasize that your evaluative criteria are not there to find a way to trip up a student, take off points, or find fault in unproductive, nitpicky ways, but rather are there to guide their work and clarify the purpose of the assignment. And we strongly believe that adventurousness in assignment creation can actually be facilitated with the use of structured and stable evaluation criteria.

Even more importantly, rubrics will show students that your primary motivation while grading is process, rather than product—in other words, that the purpose of this assignment is to help them reflect on course content, gain digital skills, and think critically about humanist content in unexpected ways. If you have created a detailed rubric or evaluation checklist to guide your grading process, share this beforehand with your students and encourage them to keep this rubric or checklist somewhere visible to guide them as they work. Better yet, set up in-class or virtual peer-review sessions (or self-review) before students turn in the final project, and require each peer reviewer to use the same rubric you will be using. Providing a

sample, filled-out rubric—one filled out by you, including a grade, so that students can see a firm link between the rubric and the grade—will ensure that this process does not lead to students simply praising one another or underestimating how many points will be taken off for underperformance on certain aspects of the assignment.

Anatomy of a rubric

A rubric is a formal guideline used to evaluate student work. It often comes in the form of a table whose rows correspond to a particular criterion for judgment (some quality or skill being graded) and whose columns correspond to the degree of success achieved by the work in each criterion (either with labels, such as “competent” or “not yet competent,” or a numerical value, such as a scale from 0 to 4). Some instructors dislike formal rubrics because they do not appear to give the instructor an opportunity to judge each piece of student work on its own terms, making grading feel too mechanical and impersonal. Others have had bad experiences with rubrics that seem to trap them into giving an entire class grades that seem artificially high or low. Indeed, a poorly written rubric—one that does not reflect the true pedagogical value of a particular assignment, together with the labors necessary for success—leads to a kind of assessment gerrymandering as the instructor raises or lowers scores for various categories until the score that seems fair is reached.

Despite these caveats, a well-formed rubric will make your grading both faster and fairer, and those who feel trapped by *analytic rubrics*—rubrics in which the instructor separately scores each grading criterion—can experiment with *holistic rubrics*, which still explicitly identify grading criteria and describe how the student has performed in each category but do not assign point values to each one. Instead, in this case, the work is considered (and allotted a numerical or letter grade) as a whole. Figure 8.1 displays a holistic rubric, whereas Figure 8.2 is an analytic rubric that weights each criterion and specifies a point value range within each criterion.

No matter which style you choose, any effective rubric will communicate to students five basic aspects of the evaluation process: the evaluation criteria, the numerical grading scheme, the characteristics of work that meets the evaluation criteria, the stakes of error, and the role that effort plays in assessment. First, explain which criteria are under evaluation; that is, which skills, knowledge sets, or learning objectives are being measured. Carefully check that proportion of identified criteria that are associated with humanities disciplinary knowledge to those associated with digital humanities achievement. Make sure this proportion accords with your vision of their relative significance. Ideally, they should reflect the learning objectives you have outlined on the assignment sheet as well as (perhaps in a looser way) on the syllabus. Use “subcriteria” (subheadings or bulleted lists)

MAPPING ASSIGNMENT

Rubric and Grade Sheet

	Sophisticated (S)	Competent (C)	Partly Competent (PC)	Marginal (M)	Not Yet Competent (NYC)
Quality of research into spatial information of text	Each "pin" is well-chosen, thoroughly described	Pins are accurate, with interesting descriptions	Pins are accurate, each one has a description	Not enough pins or not enough description	Inaccurate pins or descriptions
Quality of thesis about role of space in given text	Thesis is original, specific, debatable, compelling	Thesis is clear, persuasive, and interesting	Thesis is accurate but not original or specific	Thesis has many problems with it, is vague or unclear	No thesis or particular argument made
Correspondence between map and essay	Map and essay are so consistent that map proves thesis	Map and essay argue same thesis, use same examples	Some information in map is not relevant for thesis	Most of the map's information is not relevant for thesis	Map refutes or does not reference essay's argument
Quality of map design and appearance	Map is designed so well that thesis is seen at a glance	Map uses design tools well: color-coding, layers, lines	Map is organized well but does not exploit design tools	Design choices seem to follow no rationale	Map is confusing or haphazardly constructed
Thoughtful incorporation of course content	Many prior course readings and concepts invoked	A few references to course concepts and texts	One text or concept from class is discussed	Connections to course content are vague or inaccurate	No evidence of learning from course content
Professionalism	Beautifully written, proofread, follows all instructions	Well-written, follows all instructions	Some minor typos or deviations from assignment sheet	Turned in late, in the wrong format, or full of typos	Late (without permission) or in unacceptable form

Spatial Information: S C PC M NYC
 Thesis/Argument: S C PC M NYC
 Map-Essay Matching: S C PC M NYC
 Map Appearance: S C PC M NYC
 Course Content: S C PC M NYC
 Professionalism: S C PC M NYC

Name: _____
 Grade: _____
 Comments: _____

FIGURE 8.1 A holistic rubric.

MAPPING ASSIGNMENT

Rubric and Grade Sheet

	Sophisticated (S)	Competent C	Partly Competent (PC)	Marginal (M)	Not Yet Competent (NYC)
25 pts: Quality of research into spatial information of text	Each "pin" is well-chosen, thoroughly described (22-25)	Pins are accurate, with interesting descriptions (17-21)	Pins are accurate, each one has a description (10-16)	Not enough pins or not enough description (5-9)	Inaccurate pins or descriptions (0-4)
25 pts: Quality of thesis about role of space in given text	Thesis is original, specific, debatable, compelling (22-25)	Thesis is clear, persuasive, and interesting (17-21)	Thesis is accurate but not original or specific (10-16)	Thesis has many problems with it, is vague or unclear (5-9)	No thesis or particular argument made (0-4)
15 pts: Correspondence between map, essay	Map and essay are so consistent that map proves thesis (13-15)	Map and essay argue same thesis, use same examples (10-12)	Some information in map is not relevant for thesis (6-9)	Most of the map's information is not relevant for thesis (3-5)	Map refutes or does not reference essay's argument (0-2)
15 pts: Quality of map design and appearance	Map is designed so well that thesis is seen at a glance (13-15)	Map uses design tools well: color-coding, layers, lines (10-12)	Map is organized well but does not exploit design tools (6-9)	Design choices seem to follow no rationale (3-5)	Map is confusing or haphazardly constructed (0-2)
10 pts: Thoughtful incorporation of course content	Many prior course readings and concepts invoked (9-10)	A few references to course concepts and texts (7-8)	One text or concept from class is discussed (4-6)	Connections to course content are vague or inaccurate (2-3)	No evidence of learning from course content (0-1)
10pts: Professionalism	Beautifully written, proofread, follows all instructions (9-10)	Well-written, follows all instructions (7-8)	Some minor typos or deviations from assignment sheet (4-6)	Turned in late, in the wrong format, or full of typos (2-3)	Late (w/o permission) or in unacceptable form (0-1)

Spatial Information: S C PC M NYC /25 pts
 Thesis/Argument: S C PC M NYC /25 pts
 Map-Essay Matching: S C PC M NYC /15 pts
 Map Appearance: S C PC M NYC /15 pts
 Course Content: S C PC M NYC /10 pts
 Professionalism: S C PC M NYC /10 pts

Name: _____
 Grade: _____ /100 points
 Comments: See back of page

FIGURE 8.2 An analytic rubric.

if you want to add a greater level of detail or greater number of requirements to one criterion without upsetting this proportion. In general, though, try to limit the number of these criteria so that students can clearly and quickly grasp your priorities. Remember that no individual assignment needs to reflect every single skill and concept that you want students to grapple with during the whole course.

Next, specify the number (or proportion) of points earnable for each criterion, particularly regarded in relation to one another. If you write a holistic rubric, you might suggest the relative weights of the categories through visual cues; the ordering of the criteria, the font size they appear in, and the use of emphasis, such as italics or bold, can all suggest a category's relative importance without tying you down to specific numbers. Again, check that you are comfortable with the total number of points a student can earn from their digital explorations versus those earned from demonstrating disciplinary knowledge. This proportion will likely vary from one class to another and from one assignment to another. For example, if multiple assignments make use of the same technology, gradually lower the total points possible dedicated to mastering that technology so that it is not overrepresented in their final grade.

To explain how these points are generated, provide benchmarks for identifying that each criterion is met. What are the characteristics of successful or unsuccessful performance for each criterion? Break down these characteristics with as much detail as you can, and refer to the sample rubrics in the Web Companion for examples of how to do so. Identify the characteristics of work classified as exceptional/distinguished, strong/proficient, competent, partially competent, and unacceptable/not yet competent work. You can, of course, pick a different set of words here, but the point is that you *do* specify some sort of continuum or scale. “Live grading” a sample project in front of your students can show them how you connect discrete traits to abstract criteria. With DH projects, you will likely find yourself accepting a broader range than normal of the acceptable characteristics that demonstrate the student has met the intended learning outcomes. If you have designed your assignment and your rubric well, this does not entail lowering your standards but instead emphasizing process over product. To encourage your students to turn in the best work possible even while emphasizing the process during evaluation, you can instead ask students to turn in a rough draft or first version and then revise it for formal evaluation after the student has a chance to iron out any difficulties.

Then, set the stakes of unprofessionalism and error, including your level of tolerance for late work, technical problems, formatting inconsistencies, misunderstandings of assignment requirements, or requests for extensions or revision opportunities. In most cases, for DH projects, you need not revise your policies regarding general issues of professionalism. However, we strongly advise rethinking your policies regarding technical glitches and equipment problems. Discuss with your students the difference between

avoidable and unavoidable tech issues. We like to emphasize that *avoidable* problems are unprofessional and do not merit leniency, though we will help the student in the event of a truly unavoidable problem. Decide in advance for each assignment whether certain types of technical issues are evidence that the student has not met the learning objectives *or* that the student has exhibited a lack of professionalism, and then assess the issue accordingly. Timing here is also crucial: technical meltdowns at 2 a.m. the night before an assignment is due are quite different from glitches that are discovered in reasonable time and therefore are more likely to be able to be overcome.

To avoid disappointment, you may want to clarify the role of effort, if any, including any signs of commitment (such as total time spent on the project, revisions, or visits to office hours), and how much emphasis it is accorded relative to judging the final product. You can, of course, judge the final product alone or account for effort only in special cases or emergencies. In the sample rubric we have provided here, as well as those in the Web Companion, “effort” is left implicit, and the instructor is meant to weigh effort into each category as necessary (See Figure 8.1), but you could certainly make effort its own criterion for evaluation or explain in the assignment sheet or rubric how effort will impact how student work is scored by the rubric. No matter how you choose to incorporate effort in the evaluation process, we want to stress that allowing effort to play some sort of role does provide a useful context for giving students credit for their projects’ dazzling originality, aesthetic attractiveness, or technological sophistication. It also rewards students for their bravery in tackling tech-heavy humanities work. If, as we recommend in Chapter 7, “Creating digital assignments,” you have asked students to write a short reflection paper about their project—one that candidly shares their process, that is, what they learned about course content, what failures or successes they had, how they engaged with DH methods—use it to help reconstruct the amount and kinds of effort the student made. This ensures that you do not simply guess how much effort the student has devoted to the project.

These five pieces of information—the evaluation criteria, the grading scheme, the qualities of work that meet the criteria, and the roles of error and effort in evaluation—are crucial for setting up your students’ expectations during *your* assessment process, as well as during *their* early stages of working on the assignment. If you do not have a strong preference for rubric-free grading, we recommend using them, and, more specifically, using an analytic rubric for DH work. (In the sample rubrics given in this chapter, Figures 8.1 and 8.2, we have shared both the simpler holistic style and the more precise analytic style to illustrate how adaptable rubrics are.) Even if you dislike rubrics, we urge you to experiment with a holistic or analytic rubric if you are trying an assignment that you have never before asked students to complete—at least until you have already graded at least one set of assignments of this new type. With their impartiality and specificity, rubrics boost student confidence as they approach the assignment,

show students where they have room for improvement when the graded assignment is returned to them, and ensure that a dazzlingly original, attractive, or technologically sophisticated digital project does not blind you to its potential flaws. Additionally, they can shape your course plans in the days and weeks before the project is due, as they provide you with a concrete list of skills you need to teach or concepts that you need to discuss.

Competencies: A language for indicating success

As we hinted in the section on benchmarks, now that you know what a successful rubric needs to communicate to students, you will need to decide how to indicate the degree to which each criterion has been met by a particular piece of student work. One assessment style that may work for you is the “competencies” approach, which is used in the workplace as well as in educational contexts. In their essay “Acculturation in the Digital Humanities Community,” Geoffrey Rockwell and Stéfan Sinclair have helpfully adapted this general approach into a system appropriate for the digital humanities. Rockwell and Sinclair define competencies as being “used to describe *what students can do*, not what you are going to teach” (187) and “to describe *outcomes as behaviors* . . . in accessible language” that students will easily understand (188, emphasis in original). They stress that this language of competencies, in addition to helping instructors “imagine authentic assessment activities” (188), can help students articulate their skills as they seek jobs after graduation or apply to graduate programs.

Even more helpfully, Rockwell and Sinclair distinguish three types of multimedia competencies: technical competencies, academic competencies, and other competencies. This final category includes social, theoretical, and applied skills, such as teamwork, interdisciplinarity, and awareness of broader theoretical or social issues. The first category, technical competencies, is further broken down into “core” and “elective” competencies; there are many ways to distinguish core from elective competencies. For example, you might decide that a certain skill or goal is necessary and must be exhibited in particular ways (the student must use a certain platform) whereas another skill is less significant or can be demonstrated in multiple ways (student has a choice of platform). Alternately, you might separate the mastery of a technical skill in the abstract from its execution in an actual assignment or digital context (for example, being able to *make* a Google Map versus using it to create a compelling argument about trade in ancient Phoenicia or the importance of the Thames in literature set in London). Finally, the dividing line between core and elective competencies might separate goals that each student must meet versus elective goals that students may choose, depending on their interests.

When you write up or verbally explain these competencies to give to your students, avoid giving the impression that you are judging whether or not *they*, as individuals, are “competent” or “incompetent.” Doing so may exacerbate students’ anxieties about technological skills. Beyond the question of managing students’ emotions about technological skills, however, judging the work instead of the student is important because DH is a very project-oriented, collaborative field: stress that it is the output, rather than a particular individual, that displays evidence of competency. Specify the degree to which the work submitted for evaluation displays or enacts these competencies. You can either indicate that, for each skill, the work is “competent” or “not yet competent,” or you can judge it along a continuum, rather than a starkly binary system.

In this case, you would select “sophisticated,” “competent,” “partly competent,” “marginal,” or “not yet competent.” A simpler set of these options would be “excellent,” “competent,” and “needs work.” We suggest that you select either the five-option or three-option continuum based on how many categories of evaluation you have specified; if you are judging quite a few skills, use the simpler, three-tier vocabulary; if the assignment is focused on only a few skills, use the more nuanced, five-tier scale. Though the sample rubrics in the sample assignment sheets we supply in the Web Companion direct the instructor to weigh student effort into the final grade, competency-driven evaluation does not always give credit for trying; if you decide not to include effort in the grade, we suggest that you offer students a chance to revise the effort and submit it for reevaluation. This is, in fact, one good reason why competency-driven evaluation prefers using the phrase “not yet competent” instead of “incompetent,” and why we emphasize that grading should be an iterative, process-oriented activity (described further later on in the chapter). To avoid putting yourself in a situation where you are spending a great deal of time grading revisions, set restrictions; each student can choose only one assignment per semester to revise, stipulate that only assignments below a certain grade may be revised, or set a firm deadline for revisions (such as a week after the initial submission has been graded).

If you do prefer competency terms that refer to a student—we do not recommend it, but you might find this language more humane and approachable—try using “novice,” “apprentice,” “practitioner,” and “expert.” If this language seems far too personal, but the above options seem too limiting, you could also try a simple number system, rating the effort from 0 to 4, with “0” meaning that the work displays no signs of competency for that criterion and then proceeding in proficiency until “4,” which represents the most successful work in that criterion. No matter what labels you use to describe a work’s competency in a particular skill, make sure to describe in detail the properties that will be characteristic of works that meet each standard (e.g., what it is that makes a work proficient, competent, partly competent, marginal, or not yet competent in each category).

Involving students in evaluation processes

One of the most important ways to ensure that your evaluation practices are working is to communicate clearly and frequently with your students throughout the process. Just as you yourself might harbor anxieties about introducing new digital assignments into the humanities classroom, your students might also share these worries about how their lines of code or their web exhibition will be evaluated in relation to the kinds of essays and assignments that they're accustomed to from other courses. However, if your students understand thoroughly how you are evaluating them, they will likely feel much more comfortable. Furthermore, if they actually contribute to and suggest evaluation criteria, they will feel even more confident about where they stand. By making your grading policies clear, and by sharing them openly with your students, you can embolden them to be open about evaluation and reframe assessment as a process rather than a punitive judgment.

One of the most useful tools to bring students into the evaluation process is a survey conducted at the start of the course in order to find out what experiences your students bring with them. This survey can be a printed-out form that students fill out, but we suggest that you host a digital form on Google Forms or another online form generator, as this will immediately signal to the students the kinds of digitally inflected activities they will be performing throughout the semester (and will automatically arrange the results into an easily readable spreadsheet). For example, one of the challenges in evaluating digital work is that you may have some students who are computer science majors and therefore have a lot more digital experience than, say, an economics major or a philosophy major. These preexisting backgrounds and skills are important for evaluation because if you have a good sense of a student's technical ability on encountering digital assignments, the more fairly you will be able to assess the work they do in your course. In DH it's important to evaluate each student based on what they learn and what they gain *in your course*, even if they begin at different levels.

The survey should ask a few key questions—listing five to ten questions should be sufficient for your purposes but not overwhelming for the students—about experience with particular technologies. For example, if the course involves an Omeka assignment, it would be worth asking if students have previous experience using content management systems in general and Omeka more specifically. You might also ask more general questions about the students' interest in technology and even in DH. For example, have they taken a course that uses digital tools? Do they know the term “digital humanities?” Do they have any technology-related hobbies? Do they have a favorite social media platform? Have they ever created a website or blog? Each course will likely demand a slightly different survey, and we believe

that the extra effort it will take to craft a new one for each course will pay off. In addition, if you do this survey on the first day, you give your students the chance to introduce themselves at a level that also helps you think through your evaluation criteria. It's also worth asking what students hope to gain from the course in terms of technical skills so that you can be clear about what you offer them and so that (perhaps) you can adapt your plans to better suit their interests and their level of experience. If you would like to see a real-life example of one of these surveys, in the Web Companion we offer a sample survey C has used.

In addition to the survey, one of the most powerful ways of ensuring that students feel they've been graded fairly is to give them some agency in determining the criteria by which they are evaluated. There are many ways of soliciting this feedback from students, but often the most effective way of producing grading standards is simply to hold a class discussion after you introduce course assignments. For advanced students, or for assignments toward the end of the term, you may be able to create an entire grading rubric “from scratch” collectively. However, in many cases, rather than opening up a general discussion about how students would like to be graded, without giving them any template or guideline to work from, it will be more productive to present students with a draft set of grading criteria. Explain your rationale, and then invite them to share their questions, reactions, and suggestions. By way of such a conversation, you can move collectively from a basic, skeletal model of evaluative criteria, which you yourself have created and approved, to a set of standards that are communally approved and revised but based on your core criteria and vision for the assignment. This option does afford students a good deal of agency in the assessment process, so it may be best to use this option at the end of the term (after you have already set the tone for evaluation) or for upper-level classes (so that the students are already enculturated into your department's expectations for majors).

If you are uncomfortable with this level of student involvement in your grading process, you may, instead, distribute your finalized rubric and then show students examples of finished work: existing academic Tumblr history projects, student maps of *The Sign of the Four*, or analytical essays based on word clouds or visualizations (the sample materials in the Web Companion for Chapter 4 may be useful here if you are giving digital assignments for the first time). Systematically discuss each section of your rubric and instruct students to grade it using your standards, asking students to put themselves imaginatively into the instructor's shoes. If you do like the idea of collectively determined assessment, you can ensure that the conversation is not a free-for-all in which students take advantage of your willingness to incorporate their suggestions by knowing in advance what aspects of assessment for which you are willing to show flexibility. Ensuring students' investment in assessment does not require that you adapt their every suggestion. Breaking down the elements of assessment may help you identify which elements

about which you are willing—or, more importantly, *unwilling*—to negotiate. Another strategy for facilitating an effective, controlled discussion is to limit students to offering feedback about only one or two of your grading criteria.

Thinking beyond the rubric

Once you have written a few well-defined rubrics, you will be able to tweak them as needed to make grading for your current and future classes simpler and faster. This should reduce the anxiety and mystery of grading digital humanities assignments. However, this does not preclude developing teaching philosophies that are inspired by theoretical or philosophical concerns as well as empirical and practical matters. And, if we have not convinced you that rubrics are right for your classroom, you may still be wondering about more general approaches to evaluation. We recommend thinking about three concepts: iterative learning, process-oriented evaluation, and multiteracies. Depending on your preferences, these can be used either as a supplement to or a replacement for rubrics.

Iterative learning emphasizes that education is a never-ending process. Even when a particular assignment is completed, the skills learned to complete it do not (and should not) become irrelevant for the rest of the course or for their college careers. Repeating techniques, platforms, and skill sets from one activity and assignment to another can emphasize lifelong learning—especially if you carefully determine the order of assignments so that they build on one another organically. Each learned technique should be ideally embedded into subsequent tasks, allowing students to practice and repeat operations so that they will remember them well past graduation. What does this mean for evaluating student work? It implies process-oriented evaluation, which focuses on what the student has accomplished over the course of completing the assignment. For example, in process-oriented evaluation, you would devote the lion's share of your labor giving students detailed, written feedback during the proposal and draft stages of an assignment, thereby giving them the greatest opportunity to improve their work before its final submission. Also, give *some* credit for continuing to incorporate skills from prior assignments and units; it does not have to represent a large proportion of the grade, but it should be enough to emphasize the significance of building on prior skills.

Another concept that will enrich your evaluative processes is what Tanya Clement has called “multiteracies.” Defining multiteracies as diverse modes of learning that are all “skills that require critical thinking, commitment, community, and play” (387), Clement maps out learning outcomes that can shift our criteria for evaluating student work. Drawing from the work of Henry Jenkins, Cathy Davidson, and others, Clement provides a helpful list of multiteracies that includes participation, collaboration, simulation,

performance, networking, self-knowledge, ethics, discovery, and assessment (385–86). Rather than focusing narrowly on particular “deliverables”—polished, complete projects that will persist over time—focus instead on the valuable multiteracies that you want your students to achieve to destabilize our norms of what constitutes student success. For a simple way to incorporate this value into the grading rubric, as shown in Figures 8.1 and 8.2, reserve a proportion of available points in the “other competencies” category for acknowledging some of these multiteracies. Tailoring this portion of the rubric to individual students is easy: simply list many of these multiteracies and indicate that students may satisfy this requirement with a certain number of these multiteracies. To allow students the maximum flexibility, require no more than two or three categories to fulfill this aspect of the assignment.

In general, all the approaches listed here for assessing student work affirm the value of the broader digital skill sets that you are introducing to them. After all, your primary goals may be to enhance your course content or improve their disciplinary knowledge, but you will find your students becoming more excited when they realize that these skills have a variety of conceptual and practical uses. Where possible, inform them of other applications for technologies that they are using in your classroom, whether these apply to their personal lives, to their professional goals, or to their other courses. Conversely, ask students to identify skills they have learned in other courses or as a part of their own extracurricular experimentation, and to apply them to assignments in your course. This is particularly fruitful for group assignments, as students can teach their peers techniques that you do not have time to teach. As suggested earlier, if you do not think it is appropriate to require these multiteracies as objectives for a particular assignment, then some of these learning objectives could instead be counted as a part of a student's attendance and participation grade.

Coping with failure during assessment periods

Because digitally inflected assignments are often complex and rely on technologies that are not always intuitive, reliable, or well documented, you may find yourself having to help students cope with failure more than you normally would. Sometimes, students do not allow themselves enough time for completing the assignment, even if you have emphasized that their time allotment for any assignment should *always* include room for contingencies, whether it's brushing up on the rules of a citation style they learned two years ago, proofreading a poorly written paragraph, or troubleshooting a technological problem. This is a relatively simple case, as your normal late

policies should serve well in this situation. Yet there are often unforeseeable problems with DH assignments, so we recommend assuring students that digital failure does not necessarily equate to evaluative failure. In a computer science course, this would certainly not be true. But in a digital humanities classroom, we evaluate student work by a number of criteria, only one of which is the mastery of a particular tool (and in some cases, even that could be replaced partly or wholly by the student's understanding of how the tool works and what it is meant to accomplish). Considered as one goal among many—for example, their mastery of humanistic methods, the depth of their understanding of humanities subject matter, their ability to connect the humanities and technology conceptually, and their ability to use technology to understand the humanities—their ability to execute certain commands on a specific device is only one of many skills under assessment. Of course, beyond the structure of assignment grading, another way to acknowledge effort and improvement is to consider it as a part of the attendance and participation portion of a student's final grade. And for many students, it will be enough if you write a few positive remarks at the bottom of your grade sheet, send a short e-mail congratulating a student for improvement, or, as they arrive to or leave the classroom, quietly praise them for their effort as well as their successes.

Addressing student failure is addressed further in the course policies section of Chapter 4, "Designing Syllabi," so we would like to address another type of failure: your own. Experimentation with the digital humanities will sometimes lead to a confusing or ambiguous assignment description, to a rubric that does not fully credit students for the efforts they thought were most important or laborious, or to an assignment that becomes nearly impossible once a tool disappears or updates beyond your ability to adjust the assignment parameters. Richard E. Bond, in describing his own pedagogical failures, concludes optimistically about our ability to make our failures teachable moments for students and ourselves:

Demystifying and diagnosing such failures can help students to improve their own work; not only can they see such failures are part of the educational process, but they can also think through how to overcome them, certainly a marketable skill. Happily, sometimes spectacular blunders lead to serendipitous results, and so I hope to keep failing, repeatedly, in the years to come. (par. 13)

We agree wholeheartedly with this approach. Modeling resilience—the ability to bounce back from failure—is one of the most valuable lessons we can impart to our students, even though being vulnerable in front of them is often uncomfortable.

You might also face a different sort of "failure" as you grade: the inability to write a perfect rubric or set up a perfect grading system. Barbara

E. Walwoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson exhort us not to worry too much about this; they advise us to "give up false hopes of a perfect, simple system. Accept that the grading system will have flaws and constraints. But focus on using the power and complexity of the grading process as a tool for learning in your classroom" (10). As a result, you should "establish the clearest and most thoughtful criteria and standards" while contextualizing your "judgment within the context of your institution, your students, and their future employers." Rather than fret endlessly about a particular assignment, so long as you have carefully established standards, all you must do is "[s]pend enough time to make a thoughtful, professional judgement with reasonable consistency, then move on" (11). No matter how carefully we have set up a rubric, grading calls for a certain amount of flexibility; although we should cleave closely to our pedagogical values, recognize that there are many ways for students to meet those objectives. That way, you will not risk particular students feeling that the results they *did* achieve went unappreciated—to a degree that their motivation will suffer in their subsequent course work.

We have found that clearly communicating precise goals and grading standards long before the due date minimizes student disappointment. Furthermore, assuring students that you believe in iterative learning and engage in process-oriented grading should help them place any single "low" grade into its proper perspective. Most of the time, if you express your own excitement for the possibilities for new knowledge inhering in digital humanities approaches, this enthusiasm is catching and will help students focus on the internal rewards of the assignment. As Michael Wesch explains, the digital humanities provide

new opportunities for us to create a community of learners with our students seeking important and meaningful questions. Questions of the very best kind abound, and we become students again, pursuing questions we might never have imagined, joyfully learning right along with the others. In the best case scenario the students will leave the course, not with answers, but with more questions, and even more importantly, the capacity to ask still more questions generated from their continual pursuit and practice of the subjectivities we hope to inspire. (76)

Foregrounding these subjectivities and the question-asking practices you want your students to learn can thus provide a powerful guiding light as you assess nontraditional assignments. Still, if none of these options make you excited to face your first batch of DH projects, and you would like to pair nontraditional grading techniques with your nontraditional assignments, visit the list of resources in the Web Companion, under Chapter 8, "Experimental grading," for information about contract grading and peer-calibrated approaches.

Conclusion

Grading is where we, as instructors, put our money where our mouths are. It's a serious matter that deserves careful consideration, and this is especially true in the case of DH, a field that champions experimentation to the point that it tolerates certain types of failure while nonetheless holding high standards for work in the field. We can therefore find ways to circumvent the punitive aspects of assessment—that is, the sense that grading is a process of finding fault and meting justice. We have also recommended in this chapter that, in the case of process-oriented evaluation, you should also ensure that in-class activities and homework assignments should count in a student's final grade, ensuring that their practice "counts" in a way that is tangible for the student because you have made it clear where it will appear in their final grade. We have also suggested allotting credit for some kind of reflection, whether it comes in the form of a short paper appended to a project, a class discussion, a one-on-one interview during office hours, or a survey students take after each assignment has been turned in. Finally, we have recommended acknowledging effort in some way, even if you do not believe these should contribute directly to the grade for that particular assignment. Above all, remember that if the points for an assignment truly reflect our pedagogical values, carefully apportioning point values will be an affirmative process rather than an arbitrary one.

Further reading

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