

Getting Started with Digital Humanities

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For additional resources and tutorials, visit www.usmcdh.org



What is Digital Humanities?

Digital Humanities is an interdisciplinary, collaborative effort among humanities scholars who integrate the application of digital methods and technologies into their research and teaching. According to DH scholar Josh Honn, Digital Humanities scholarship encompasses work that is:

1. Presented in digital form
2. Enabled by digital methods and tools
3. About digital technology and culture
4. Experiments with and is built by digital technology
5. Critical of its own digital nature¹

Digital Humanities includes a variety of skill areas like data analysis, digital mapping, text analysis, digital archiving, coding, 3D modeling, virtual reality, network analysis, web development, and audio/video production. Digital humanities scholarship is often public-facing in nature, utilizing methods to make research more accessible and engaging with broader audiences.

¹ Josh Honn, "Never Neutral: Critical Approaches to Digital Tools & Culture in the Humanities," Presented at the University of Western Ontario's "Digital Humanities Speaker Series" on October 16, 2013, Accessed October 13, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.21985/N2SV08>

Tips for Beginners

You do not need to have a background in coding or computer science to become a practitioner of Digital Humanities. In fact, many Digital Humanities scholars are self-taught! A good place to start is to think about your sources, and then consider the tools that would raise new questions and perspectives about the scope and scale of your content.

Your project does not need to be complicated or complex in order to be valuable. It is about how you use the tools and skills available to you (and at your comfort level) to bring a *new perspective* to your work. A strong Digital Humanities project asks creative questions, uses digital methods in argumentation, and delivers a product that can be used, shared, and replicated by others.

Introductory Tools

All of the tools below are free, open-source, and/or open-access for you to use. Microsoft Sway requires you to log in with your Knox username and password.

Digital Storytelling: There are a variety of web-publishing platforms available (such as Wordpress or Google Sites— both of which have free versions) that can allow you to make your narratives more public-facing and accessible.

- **Microsoft Sway:** sway.office.com (access using your Knox username/password)
View a Sway on [“How to Sway”](#)

Data Visualizations: An ideal option if you are working with quantitative data. Useful for census information, demographics, statistics, and other numerical forms of data.

- **Flourish:** flourish.studio (create a free account)

Text Analysis: The use of computers to “read” text-based documents. Often used to evaluate large quantities of text for word frequencies, topical themes, and changes in text/word usage over time.

- **Voyant:** voyant-tools.org
Read their [documentation for Getting Started](#)

Timelines: Timelines are a great way to visualize events and narratives to examine causation, change, and continuity over time.

- **Timeline JS:** timeline.knightlab.com (includes step-by-step instructions)

Story Maps: Tells narratives that integrate both time and geography. This can be a scrolling narrative panel “side-car” attached to location points on a map, or a self-guided “map tour.”

- **StoryMap JS:** storymap.knightlab.com
- **ArcGIS StoryMaps:** [/storymaps.arcgis.com](https://storymaps.arcgis.com)

Podcasting and Oral History: Although the methods and techniques of podcasting and oral histories differ, both use oral storytelling techniques to produce, preserve, and share narratives. For tutorials, equipment, and space recommendations, see:

1. [Intro to Podcasting Guide](#)
2. [Intro to Oral History Guide](#)

Accessibility

User experience is a critical part of any Digital Humanities project. As DH scholars, it's important to be critical of the tools we use and consider how we can make digital tools work better for everyone. There are many resources available for evaluating and improving accessibility:

1. [Write helpful alternative text](#) (alt-text) for visuals so that they can be interpreted by assistive technology. Similarly, **use descriptive text for hyperlinks** and **make transcripts available** for video and audio content.
2. [WhoCanUse](#) is a browser-based tool for evaluating color and text contrasts for people with a variety of visual impairments.
3. [Coolers](#) is a color palette generator that includes checks for contrast and color blindness. It's also a great tool for creating brand colors!
4. The [Photosensitive Epilepsy Analysis Tool \(PEAT\)](#) is a free, downloadable software that identifies the seizure risks of video and animations.
5. The [Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool \(WAVE\)](#) is a way for website creators to evaluate their content and make it more accessible to people with disabilities. You can either enter in your website and review its accessibility, OR there is an option to install a browser extension to regularly evaluate web content.

6. The [Color Blindness Simulator \(COBLIS\)](#) is a free tool to evaluate the color blindness accessibility of still images.

Protect (but share!) your work: Creative Commons Licensing

<https://creativecommons.org/> is a non-profit organization that provides free, easy-to-use copyright licenses. Creative Commons licensing establishes a simple, standardized way to give your permission to share and use your creative work on the conditions of your choice.

Includes options for allowing adaptations of your work to be shared as well as for commercial and noncommercial uses. Also requires giving appropriate credit to the licensor.

Where to Find Digital Sources Online

General

- Google: [Advanced Search](#) | [Refining Results](#) | [General Support](#)
 - Google images advanced search, Creative Commons licensing
- [The Library of Congress](#)
- [Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers](#)
- [Digital Public Library of America](#)
- [Smithsonian Collections Online](#)

Maps

- [David Rumsey Map Collection](#)
- [New York Public Library Map Division](#)

History

- [The National Museum of the American Indian](#)
- [The National Museum of American History](#)
- [The National Civil Rights Museum](#) (Smithsonian Affiliate)
- [Presidential Library System Wiki](#)
- [The National Museum of African American History and Culture](#)

- [Civil Rights Movement Archive](#)
- Search for local history sites: National Park Service, State Museums, State Historical Societies

Digital Art, Photographs, and other Imagery:

- Art History Resource: [smarthistory.org](#)
- [The British Museum](#)
- [MFA Boston](#)
- [The Getty](#)
- [Met Open Access](#)
- [National Gallery of Art](#)
- [Google Cultural Institute](#)
- [Creative Commons](#)
- [Wikimedia Commons](#)
- [Flickr](#)
- [Pharos](#)

Audio

- [Free Music Archive](#)
- [BBC's Sound Effects Library](#)

Citing Sources

- [Purdue OWL – citation style guides](#)
- [USM Libraries Citation Guides + Manuals](#)

Additional Resource: [“Planning and outlining your story: How to set yourself up for success” Blog](#) (this is specific to making story maps, but has useful information for any storytelling project!)