



Book review: Battershill. C. and Ross. S. (2022) *Using digital humanities in the classroom: a practical introduction for teachers, lecturers, and students*. 2nd edn. London: Bloomsbury Academic

Bridging literature and technology

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Although principally aimed at humanities educators, *Using Digital Humanities in the Classroom* offers valuable insights for educators teaching across higher education. Battershill and Ross explore how digital tools enrich research, teaching, and student engagement, stressing how digital humanities (DH) is a method rather than a distinct field. They highlight DH's role in fostering critical thinking, collaboration, and innovative learning. As the authors note (p.xii): 'DH is not intended to represent a monolithic critical edifice but rather a very broad term to cover any and all intersections of humanistic work and digital tools and infrastructures'.

The first edition of Battershill and Ross's guide, published in 2017, was written for those wary of DH or anxious about using digital tools, rather than DH enthusiasts. Since its publication, DH has evolved rapidly, especially due to the sector's move online during the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift challenged traditional views on teaching and learning, revealing how online education relies on the same core values as in-person teaching, particularly in lesson design and planning.

This is not a book for those interested in DH's relationship with equity, diversity, and digital poverty. Readers interested in such critical debates should turn to Croxall and Jakacki (2023). Instead, Battershill and Ross focus on helping educators to integrate digital tools into their teaching. They explore how to use DH, rather than critiquing who has access to these resources or the impact of digital divides on students and educators.

Using Digital Humanities in the Classroom is structured as a series of short chapters, each ending with suggestions for further reading. More than just an introduction, it acts as a practical guide to incorporating DH into higher education. By combining digital scholarship with everyday teaching, it helps educators promote critical thinking, interdisciplinary learning, and digital skills across disciplines. A new web companion (www.teachdh.com) also provides a searchable database of resources to support teaching and learning.

The book opens with a discussion on 'Finding, Creating, and Using Digital Resources' (pp.15–30), offering an overview of the advantages of digital tools, where to locate them, and how to assess their credibility. Although this chapter is primarily practical in nature, much of its discussion connects to established conversations in DH. The authors champion a participatory model that imagines students not just as users of digital materials but as active contributors to the DH landscape. That said, greater reflection on the ethical and epistemological implications of digital-resource creation — particularly regarding issues of access, authorship, and bias in digital archives — would have enhanced this discussion.

The second chapter, 'Ensuring Accessibility' (pp.31–52), focuses on using universal design to create inclusive classrooms. The authors highlight specific tools — including text-to-speech software and interactive platforms — whilst emphasising that accessibility should be embedded into course design. Though useful, much of the discussion covers familiar ground, as inclusive learning is well-established in pedagogy. A deeper analysis of systemic obstacles to accessibility, especially digital poverty and inadequate access to technology, would have added a more critical dimension to the chapter.

In 'Designing Your Syllabus' (pp.55–72), the book moves into a more reflective space, urging educators to consider how DH methodologies can shape course structures and assessment strategies. Rather than promoting the digitisation of existing syllabi, the authors challenge educators to rethink their approach altogether to ensure digital tools are integrated with intention rather than simply for novelty. Whilst engaging, this discussion

would have benefited from greater engagement with case studies to show how DH has been adopted across disciplines.

Whilst the opening chapters provide a practical introduction to DH in the classroom, the discussion of approachability and syllabus design largely cover familiar territory. The book's real strength lies in its ability to place these well-known debates within a DH framework, encouraging educators to rethink their practices through digital scholarship. By offering practical advice, the authors convincingly argue that DH is not just an addition but a transformative force for teaching, learning, and knowledge construction.

Chapter Four, 'Designing Classroom Activities' (pp.73–94), explores how in-class DH activities should foreground the opportunity to try things out. The discussion of balancing flexibility and consistency in DH activities is valuable because it addresses a fundamental pedagogical challenge: how to integrate innovative, technology-driven learning without losing the coherence and structure needed for effective instruction. Digital tools can promote collaborative and non-linear learning experiences that are tailored to students' needs. Yet the authors caution that without a careful framework, such an open-ended approach can make it difficult for students to see the bigger picture of their learning journey. Battershill and Ross encourage educators to strike a balance by ensuring digital activities remain engaging and adaptable whilst maintaining a framework that provides students with clarity. This discussion is particularly useful for educators navigating DH for the first time, as it acknowledges the opportunities and the challenges of integrating technology into traditional learning spaces. Such issues of facilitation are pursued further in Chapter Five, 'Managing Classroom Activities' (pp.95–118), through the inclusion of a troubleshooting guide for when things go wrong.

Chapters Six, 'Creating Digital Assignments' (pp.119–138), and Seven, 'Evaluating Student Work' (pp.139–154), focus on the crucial issue of assessment. The authors provide a set of assignment ideas that respond to DH principles (making good use of the web companion) and then examine how DH assignments may require modifications to traditional assessment strategies. The authors acknowledge that DH assignments often push beyond traditional essay-based formats, incorporating multimodal, collaborative, and interactive elements that demand new criteria for evaluation. By providing a range of assignment ideas and engaging directly with assessment strategies, Battershill and Ross offer practical strategies to help educators navigate this evolving pedagogical environment.

The rise of AI-driven tools has generated deep questions about originality, creativity, and reliability in student work. Whilst DH assignments encourage innovation, educators must now rethink how Gen AI fits into this landscape. Does AI challenge the authenticity of digital assignments, or can it enhance DH pedagogy? How should assessment frameworks adapt to differentiate AI-generated content from genuine critical thought? This book offers a valuable approach, prompting reflection on what we assess and how learning is demonstrated in a digital world. Future editions could further explore AI's influence on assessment, ensuring evaluation remains demanding and adaptable.

Chapter Eight, 'Teaching Graduate Students' (pp.155–176), explores how DH can be integrated into postgraduate education, supporting digital tools with the research objectives of graduate students. It highlights how developing DH skills — such as digital research, data management, and multimodal scholarship — can enrich employability inside and beyond the academe. A clearer distinction between DH's role in master's coursework versus doctoral research would strengthen this discussion, given their differing requirements. Chapter Nine, 'Collaborating' (pp.177–192), emphasises DH's natural fit for collaboration between teaching and research teams, whilst Chapter Ten, 'Contributing to Your Research' (pp.193–210), explores how DH can support academic research. Finally, Chapter Eleven, 'Teaching in a Digital Classroom' (pp.211–240), reflects on how the pandemic brought DH into sharper focus across the higher education sector.

This thoughtful and engaging book is a practical resource for both DH questioners — including lecturers and students — and those new to the field. With a strong emphasis on approachability, engagement, and assessment, it provides practical ways to help students develop their digital literacy, independent learning, and research skills. By moving beyond traditional classrooms, it presents DH as a flexible and inclusive approach. For those working in countries marked by digital poverty, certain aspects may appear futuristic due to their resource requirements, but technology changes rapidly. Learning the basics of DH is a sensible precaution for whatever the future may hold (as COVID-19 sharply taught us).

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