

Evaluating Digital Scholarship for Critical Thinking in the Undergraduate Classroom: Appendix (Sample Handouts)

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Sample Handouts Introduction

This sample document is based on previous handouts for students in a Medieval Architecture course. It contains three separate sections for instructors to adapt as needed. The sections should be distributed to students as separate handouts.

Part I: Environmental scan (homework prompt)

Part II: Homework worksheet

Part III: Essay Assignment sheet

Part I: Environmental Scan

Spend about half an hour exploring each of these projects for homework. Feel free to use an annotation tool such as Hypothes.is or Perusall to keep track of your questions or observations.

- **Dura Europos: Excavating Antiquity** <http://media.artgallery.yale.edu/duraeuropos/>
- **ORBIS: The Stanford Geospatial Model of the Roman World**
<http://orbis.stanford.edu/>
- **Manar Al-Athar** <http://www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk/>
- **Mapping the Jewish Communities of the Byzantine Empire**
<http://www.byzantinejewry.net/>
- **Mapping Gothic France** <http://mappinggothic.org/>

If you have technical problems, try using a different internet browser. (For instance, some sites don't run well in Safari, so try Firefox or Chrome). This project will require you to spend time with the digital resource, so plan on several trips to the computer lab if necessary.

Part II: Homework Worksheet

Your homework after the last class was to spend 20–30 minutes exploring **each** of these digital resources:

- **Dura Europos: Excavating Antiquity** <http://media.artgallery.yale.edu/duraeuropos/>
- **ORBIS: The Stanford Geospatial Model of the Roman World**
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- **Manar Al-Athar** <http://www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk/>
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Now choose **one** of the sources above and answer all of these questions about it. You will use these reflections as a basis for your review essay.

- Title and URL of the resource.
- What kind of resource is this?
- What kind(s) of data does it use? Can you download and reuse the dataset yourself?
- What's the main feature or argument of this resource? (i.e., what is its scholarly purpose?)
- What are the parameters or limitations of this resource?
- Who wrote/created it (and what are their credentials)? Is there an institution involved? Is it crowd-sourced?
- Who was the intended audience?
- What sorts of research questions might this project be used to answer?
- How were the creators successful? What might you have done differently, and what would that require in terms of research or resources?

Answer all of these and make other notes about your experience as a user. Note anything you find particularly good or frustrating about the site.

You will use this list of questions and observations to brainstorm so that you can edit your ideas into a cohesive essay in Part III of this project. Your essay will need to make an argument about this resource and will use examples to back up that argument.

You may have read critiques of art exhibitions or reviews of books. Your review essay will be a similar type of assessment. (Additional assignment sheet to follow).

Part III: Essay Assignment Sheet

Essay: assessing a digital resource

After completing the homework questions about one of the resources below (see previous worksheet), use your answers to draft the final essay.

- **Dura Europos: Excavating Antiquity** <http://media.artgallery.yale.edu/duraeuropos/>
- **ORBIS: The Stanford Geospatial Model of the Roman World**
<http://orbis.stanford.edu/>
- **Manar Al-Athar** <http://www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk/>
- **Mapping the Jewish Communities of the Byzantine Empire**
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Introduction to the Assignment

We learn about medieval architecture through sources. Primary sources include medieval buildings that still exist, medieval objects in museums, or texts that were written in the Middle Ages. Secondary sources include books or articles written about those sources, or photos of the monuments. Our experience with the Middle Ages, then, is mediated by the available sources and how those sources present information. Some scholars now use digital projects (in addition to books and articles) to present those sources. For instance, they may use multimedia content (such as video) or functionality (such as a customizable map) or search features for a particular subject or keyword. Over the course of your college education, you need to become more comfortable with assessing the vast amounts of information available online, and whether that information is useful and appropriate for your own research needs. To that end, this assignment requires you to think about resources that convey information about Late Antiquity or the Middle Ages in a non-traditional, digital format.

In the previous homework assignment, you chose one of the digital resources (listed above) to explore further; you will now assess it as a way to study Late Antiquity or the Middle Ages. Questions you should ask yourself are: what (if anything) does this resource provide that a printed book would not? And what kind(s) of historical evidence and/or data does this project utilize?

Instructions for the Assignment

The introductory paragraph should introduce the project and give an **overview**. (Think of the journalist's questions: who? what? when? where? why? how? Some of this information may be in the "About" page.) Give the title of the project and the URL (website address) in the first paragraph. What is the project—is there a particular function or kind of information it provides? Be sure to note the people/organization/institution involved in its creation. The introduction should also incorporate your argument. Your paper must make an argument about the value or qualities of the resource. This should be more nuanced than "it's good" or "it is bad." A better

example would be something like, “This website is an excellent online textbook for an undergraduate course on ancient Roman architecture.”

Subsequent paragraphs should include **evidence** from the site itself to back up your **argument**. Be specific. For instance, I might write, “There are seventeen short video clips interviewing prominent scholars of Rome, and there are six articles with captioned photographs providing additional information on Roman monuments.” Your evidence may include screenshots or a screen-capture. Each image should have a caption with the website and page; within the essay you should briefly describe the image and state explicitly how it serves as evidence for your argument. Some examples: does your screenshot capture a particularly informative juxtaposition of images and text from the website? Does it show how overwhelming the search results can be?

The **body of the essay** should also address parameters or possible shortcomings of the resource. For instance, “Although this resource provides a good overview for a survey-level student, its text is too introductory for a dissertation writer. Essays do not have footnotes, and specialists in Roman architecture would need more in-depth analysis of primary sources.” Or “Although this website’s section on Ancient Rome is a useful online survey textbook, its information on Ancient Greece is quite sparse.” (And then you would provide some evidence to back that up.) You might look at the project’s parameters in terms of the geographic area or time period it covers. Is there something you would expand on or do differently? Constructive criticism is fine; no project is perfect. But do consider that the project has an intended target audience, and consider whether the scholars’ goal was met. You should reflect on ways this project could help your own research or what sort of scholarship it would be useful for.

The essay’s **conclusion** should summarize your findings.

General checklist:

- Give the title of the project and the URL (website address) in the first paragraph.
- Have an argument and back it up with specific evidence/details.
- Length: 3–4 pages, about 750–1000 words, no more. (This includes an Introduction with argument, supporting evidence, a strong conclusion).
- Format: double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12-point font, 1-inch margins.
- Number your pages.
- Upload your final paper to [content management system] (no need to print).