

Documentation

Current standards in the digital humanities and social sciences, as well as recent reviews of our own projects, place strong emphasis on the importance of documentation in digital work. Recording the processes of development, the technologies employed in that process, the technical and system requirements on the user’s end, and the reader’s experience of interacting with the project ensures that the type of information needed for proper use and archiving remains available for all stages of the project’s development, publication, and preservation. We ask that you maintain detailed notes on all aspects of your project’s technical formats, dependencies, and updates and that you develop this information for inclusion in the project or its archive.

# What to Document

### Development

The processes and choices undertaken during the development of your project represent important information for digital humanities scholars and computational social scientists. By elucidating your development processes, you provide aspiring authors a valuable resource and contribute to the growth of digital scholarship. To that end, you may wish to include the following information in an “About” page or sub-page of the project:

* Native development environment, including operating system, interfaces, programs, code libraries, and languages used;
* Browsers and browser versions in which you tested or built the project;
* Software and software versions used;
* Datasets queried, consulted, or employed;
* Server specifications and licenses if hosted elsewhere before production or publication;
* Reasoning for technological choices;
* Reasoning for design decisions;
* Reasoning for file naming structures;
* Collaboration and consultation;
* Results of tests run

### User Experience

Assuming all web-based work is to some extent ephemeral (see “Archivability” guide), it is important to mitigate any project’s decay with a variety of resources that convey and describe the intended functionality of the work. In addition to a list of technical and system requirements, this kind of documentation may include video of a user interacting with the project; narrated screencasts showing and describing the project’s content, features, and functionality; visual blueprints of the content structure or project architecture; spreadsheets of the content files and their relationships; and narrative description of the user experience. A reader’s map or instructions on suggested project navigation can also be very useful. You may choose to an extent whether to include any combination of this material within the project itself or as supplementary material to be stored in the repository with the project’s archive.

# Where to Document

All projects should include an “About” section that is prominently linked from the landing or index page that lists, at the very least, the technical specifications for optimal performance of the project and an explanation of the rationale behind the project’s design and delivery in a digital, as opposed to print, medium. It might be helpful to consider this section part of the meta- or para-text of the project. This area might additionally include, if desired or appropriate, any of the assets mentioned above.

Any assets listed in this document that you choose not to include in the “About” section should be submitted to SUP as supplementary archival material so we may organize it as part of the permanent archive in Stanford Digital Repository.