

Digital Preservation at Oxford and Cambridge

A collaborative research project to evaluate and provide sustainable recommendations for our digital preservation programmes

Update on the training programme pilot

Posted on [6 June, 2018](#) by [Sarah](#)

Sarah, Oxford's Outreach and Training Fellow, has been busy since the new year designing and running a digital preservation training programme pilot in Oxford. It consisted of one introductory course on digital preservation and six other workshops. Below is an update on what she did for the pilot and what she has learnt over the past few months.

It's been a busy few months for me, so I have been quiet on the blog. Most of my time and creative energy has been spent working on this training programme pilot. In total, there were seven courses and over 15 hours of material. In the end, I trialled the courses on over 157 people from Bodleian Libraries and the various Oxford college libraries and archives. Many attendees were repeats, but some were not.

The trial gave me an opportunity to test out different ideas and various topics. Attendees were good at giving feedback, both during the course and after via an online survey. It's provided me with further ideas and given me the chance to see what works or what doesn't. I've been able to improve the experience each time, but there's still more work to be done. However, I've already learned a lot about digital preservation and teaching.



James Mooney
@JamesMooneyUK

The next digital preservation training course about digitization run by @DigitallySarah gets underway @Oxford with a quick brainstorming session #DP0C

6 09:13 - 28 Mar 2018

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Below are some of the most important lessons I've learned from the training programme pilot.

Time: You always need more

I found that I almost always ran out of time at the end of a course; it left no time for questions or to finish that last demo. Most of my courses could have either benefited from less content, shorter exercises, or just being 30 minutes longer.

Based on feedback from attendees, I'll be making adjustments to every course. Some will be longer. Some will have shorter exercises with more optional components and some will have slightly less content.

While you might budget 20 minutes for an activity, you will likely use 5-10 minutes more. But it varies every time due to the attendees. Some might have a lot of questions, but others will be quieter. It's almost better to overestimate the time and end early than rush to cover everything. People need a chance to process the information you give them.

Facilitation: You can't go it alone

In only one of my courses did I have to facilitate alone. I was run off my feet for the 2 hours because it was just me answering questions during exercises for 15 attendees. It doesn't sound like a lot, but I had a hoarse voice by the end from speaking for almost 2 hours!

Always get help with facilitation—especially for workshops.

Someone to help:

- answer questions during exercises,
- get some of the group idea exercises/conversations started,
- make extra photocopies or print outs, and
- load programs and files onto computers—and then help delete them after.

It is possible to run training courses alone, but having an extra person makes things run smoother and saves a lot of time. Edith and James have been invaluable support!

Demos: Worth it, but things often go wrong

Demos were vital to illustrate concepts, but they were also sometimes clunky and time consuming to manage. I wrote up demo sheets to help. The demos relied on software or the Internet—both which can and will go wrong. Patience is key; so is accepting that sometimes things will not go right. Processes might take a long time to run or the course concludes before the demo is over.

The more you practice on the computer you will be using, the more likely things will go right. But that's not always an option. If it isn't, always have a back up plan. Or just apologise, explain what should have happened and move on. Attendees are generally forgiving and sometimes it can be turned into a really good teaching moment.

Exercises: Optional is the way to go

Unless you put out a questionnaire beforehand, it is incredibly hard to judge the skill level of your attendees. It's best to prepare for all levels. Start each exercise slow and have a lot of optional work built in for people that work faster.

In most of my courses I was too ambitious for the time allowed. I wanted them to learn and try everything. Sometimes I wasn't asking the right questions on the exercises either. Testing exercises and timing people is the only way to tailor them. Now that I have run the

workshops and seen the exercises in action, I have a clearer picture of what I want people to learn and accomplish—now I just have to make the changes.

Future plans

There were courses I would love to run in the future (like data visualisation and digital forensics), but I did not have the time to develop. I'd like to place them on a roadmap for future training. As well as reaching out more to the Oxford colleges, museums and other departments. I would also like to tailor the introductory course a bit more for different audiences.

I'd like to get involved with developing courses like [Digital Preservation Carpentry](#) that the University of Melbourne is working on. The hands-on workshops excited and challenged me the most. Not only did others learn a lot, but so did I. I would like to build on that.

At the end of this pilot, I have seven courses that I will finalise and make available through a creative commons licence. What I learned when trying to develop these courses is that there isn't always a lot of good templates available on the Internet to use as a starting point—you have to ask around for people willing to share.

So, I am hoping to take the work that I've done and share it with the digital preservation community. I hope they will be useful resources that can be reused and repurposed. Or at the very least, I hope it can be used as a starting point for inspiration (basic speakers notes included).

These will be available via the DPOC website sometime this summer, once I have been able to make the changes necessary to the slides and exercises—along with course guidance material. It has been a rewarding experience (as well as an exhausting one); I look forward to developing and delivering more digital preservation training in the future.



James Mooney
@JamesMooneyUK

The next digital preservation training session from [@DigitallySarah](#) at [@Oxford](#) begins! Today we are covering File Formats, Characterisation and Validation. [#DP0C](#)

12 14:08 - 15 Mar 2018

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