

## **Three Gifts of Digital Archives**

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***Abstract***

This article offers a contemporary re-visioning of the gifts of archival work presented in Susan Wells' renowned "Claiming the Archive for Rhetoric and Composition" in light of digital archives. It advances three new gifts of digital archives: integration, customization, and accessibility. The article argues that teacher-scholars in rhetoric and composition must understand these gifts to design, use, teach, and manage digital archives now and in the future. Literacy in a networked, digital world will increasingly involve the ability to ethically, critically, and effectively create, navigate, evaluate, and use digital archives.

*[E]lectronic archives are changing social relations, institutional policy, and even literacy: how we read, what we read, and even what we produce.*

– Galin and Latchaw (291)

*The digital era tools have not just begun to transform how we do research with archival sources, but they have also made us much more self-reflective about the meaning of archives. . . . At last, archives have a real opportunity to abandon the role of gatekeeper and invite user participation, interaction, and knowledge-sharing.*

– Cox et al. (“Introduction” “Archival”)

In two crucial moments during Ron Howard’s 2009 movie *Angels and Demons*, Tom Hanks’ character, Professor Robert Langdon, descends into the Vatican Archives. Though he had previously been denied access by papal authorities, when the lives of the *preferiti*, cardinals favored to be elected pope, are in danger, urgency prevails. Langdon is allowed to visit to consult Galileo’s *Diagramma della Verita* to find the locations of the churches along the “Path of Illumination” where the scheduled killings of the *preferiti* are to occur. Viewers learn how much the archive depends on digital technologies when papal authorities cut power to the archive as part of a systematic attempt to isolate the location of the killer. Langdon and the guard accompanying him are locked in the archive as door operation depends on digital switches and access codes. The oxygen level, electronically controlled for maximum preservation of textual artifacts, is cut. Because the archives are located so far underground, cell phone service does not work. They cannot call for help. They are trapped.

While *Angels and Demons* is hardly a movie about archives, these scenes illustrate the importance of attending to archival technologies. In this movie archival technologies play a key

role in determining what Langdon and other characters do and what happens to them. Langdon's life and the lives of others literally depend upon his success in navigating the archives. If he does not quickly find the information he seeks about church locations, the *preferiti* will die. If he does not manage to escape being locked in the oxygen-deprived archives, he will die.

Rhetoric and composition<sup>1</sup> researchers' success in using digital archives is hardly as dramatic in the real world as it is in *Angels and Demons*. It is, however, likewise marked by a certain urgency. The life of knowledge production, particularly in the academy, depends upon digital archives as the texts we study and produce—and that define the discipline—increasingly live in these spaces. While the Vatican Archives as depicted in the movie house print texts and artifacts controlled and preserved by digital technologies, I contend it is ever more *digital* archives that are a primary site of research and writing activity. Our pedagogy, scholarship, and disciplinary identity are inextricably bound up in the digital archives we use today and design for the future. If we view the Web itself as “the most important archive ever created” (Miller and Bowdon 594) or “the largest document ever written” stored in a digital archive (Gitelman 128), we and our students daily serve as archivists and archival researchers. Therefore, it behooves us as rhetoric and composition teacher-scholars to understand digital archives' potentials. This knowledge allows us to make informed decisions in using digital archives for our classes, institutions, and discipline.

### **Revisiting Wells' Gifts of Archival Work**

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term *rhetoric and composition* in this article to refer to the discipline also known as *composition studies* and *writing studies* because this is the term Susan Wells uses in her essay, and I build on her argument in this article.

In “Claiming the Archive for Rhetoric and Composition,” Susan Wells advances what she calls “three precious gifts” of archival work for rhetoric and composition: resistance, freedom, and possibility (58ff). Her discussion fruitfully raises our awareness of what archival work can mean for the legitimacy of rhetoric and composition research. However, like much archival scholarship in the field, which primarily focuses on archival texts, policies, and research practices, it does not explicitly consider archival *technologies*. Digital archives are playing an increasingly important role in the texts we access, use, and create and, in turn, are shaping the ways we think about, write, and research texts. Thus, we need to add to research on archival texts and practices studies of archival technologies. To that end, this article revisits Wells’ gifts to explore how they manifest themselves in digital archives. It then advances what I call three new gifts<sup>2</sup> of digital archives: integration, customization, and accessibility. The digital archive examples and tools I use to illustrate these gifts may change, but the gifts they evidence will likely characterize digital research spaces well into the future. These gifts, therefore, are crucial for us to understand to design, use, teach, and manage digital archives for years to come.

### *Resistance*

The first gift of archival work that Wells addresses is resistance. For Wells, the gift of resistance means that archives resist researchers’ initial hypotheses. They resist easy answers and force researchers to complicate (and thereby improve) their ideas about what arguments an

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<sup>2</sup> I call these digital archive affordances “gifts” to focus on their positive potentials. Certainly, these affordances have limitations. Visual perception theorist J. J. Gibson defines *affordance* as that which an environment provides for an observer’s benefit *or* detriment (127). Thus, I do not want to present an overly laudatory view of new computer technologies, as Andrew Feenberg, Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe, Susan Romano, and other scholars caution against. Adequately exploring these limitations, however, deserves more attention and is beyond the scope of this article.

archive supports (58). Wells presents the time-intensive nature of print archival work as what allows for the gift of resistance. For her, archives serve as “a counterweight to the headlong pace that the demands of pedagogy have trained us to keep” (59). That is, they encourage thoughtful reflection.

Digital archives likewise offer this resistance. What researchers think they will prove by accessing particular digital archives can change when they study the texts of those archives. Thus, they too can help researchers resist facile conclusions. Digital archives, however, arguably keep up a “headlong pace” (Wells 59) by lessening the time required for retrieving sought archival materials. Engagement with digital archives is usually not as time consuming as work in pre-digital archives. Though finding which search terms to use to yield sought texts can take time, the resistance of digital archives is borne less of time-intensive engagement and more of fast access. As of the time of this writing, for example, JSTOR includes over 3.2 million full-length articles available for viewing. Adding reviews, editorials, and editor introductions, that totals over 37 million pages accessible at a few keystrokes (“JSTOR by the Numbers”). In digital archives researchers do not have to work as hard to find relevant materials; instead they have to work hard to determine which available materials are useful.

This new kind of resistance changes how scholars at all levels, particularly students who are digital natives, think about and approach research. Research becomes less about finding particular texts and more about sorting, assessing, and vetting them. As a result, our research-writing pedagogy needs to shift away from the assumption that we can—and should—control the textual resources students consult. Instead this pedagogy should help students determine the appropriate use of different kinds of texts in different rhetorical contexts. Concomitantly, our

disciplinary view of scholarship needs to shift away from the belief that rarer, difficult-to-access, gate-kept texts (both objects of analysis and published scholarship) are inherently more “scholarly.” We should no longer hold resistance to finding, accessing, and publishing materials as a necessary precondition to rigor. Instead the discipline needs to consider, assess, and value publication and delivery decisions as components of the rhetorical choices scholars make. Like Wells, we should see resistance to our initial, comfortable assumptions about archival contents and scholarliness as a productive element of scholarly work.

In addition to challenging researchers’ preconceived suppositions about available materials, digital archives offer another kind of resistance. Digital archives, through their classification systems and search and retrieval functionality, can resist multimodal texts. With few exceptions (e.g., Google Search by Image), words remain the requisite search criteria, and texts require linguistic metadata to maximize search and retrieval possibilities. The renowned William Blake Archive, for instance, has a rather robust image search, but it relies solely on linguistic tags. Researchers need to rely on words for figure types, characters, postures, and attributes rather than sketches or drawings of image elements (“Search Images”). Researchers, in other words, can search *for* images but not *using* images. Such functionality subtly reinforces a hierarchy between these modes, placing words above images. As a result, image and video texts can be more difficult to store and retrieve in digital archives.

This kind of resistance may not seem to be a gift, yet it offers an opportunity for renewed attention to textual materiality and multimodality. It asks us to consider what kinds of scholarship and scholarly activity are privileged by existing textual storage and retrieval systems. English studies’ privileging of print scholarship arguably comes partly from—and is exacerbated

by—archival technologies that make easier storing and retrieving monomodal print scholarship. New digital technologies, such as virtual and gaming worlds where video and audio dominate, might allow for models that accommodate other kinds of scholarly texts and activities, particularly if we can move sentiment away from associating these technologies primarily with play. Gaming systems and virtual worlds that emphasize and rely on embodiment, like the Nintendo Wii and Second Life, make immersive engagement in digital archives conceptually feasible.<sup>3</sup> To exploit the possibilities of such technologies, we need to resist the work-play and scholarly-non-scholarly binaries that structure much of our research instruction and methodology. We need to resist our assumptions not only about what digital archives might prove, but also about what digital archives themselves might be.

### *Freedom*

According to Wells, the second gift of archival work is freedom, more precisely, the opportunity to be free from resentment. Rather than get angry at others' (negative) misperceptions of the field of rhetoric and composition, researchers can point to rhetoric and composition's archives to validate that the field indeed has a history and is legitimate (59). This gift is evidentiary—archival proof that justifies claims that the study of writing has historical roots, follows accepted scholarly protocols, and has rigorous scholarship. The underlying idea

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<sup>3</sup> This argument is not entirely new. The 1994 movie *Disclosure* offers one vision of what such interaction might be; however, it continues to use print as the organizing metaphor. Michael Douglas's character, Tom Sanders, puts on virtual reality paraphernalia to replicate the experience of going to a physical archive. He (or, more accurately, his avatar) opens filing cabinets and pages through file folders. Such a model hearkens to familiar experience, but it does not embrace non-print or audio and video texts (at the same time that it relies on them to facilitate the virtual reality immersion).

here is that archives provide evidence that scholars outside of rhetoric and composition are more likely to accept as trustworthy and reputable.

Digital technologies have certainly facilitated the creation of archives for rhetoric and composition, allowing for larger, more visible, and more comprehensive collections of texts that can legitimize and extend the work of the field. Over ten years ago, in fact, John Brereton lauded the growing rhetoric and composition archive made possible with digital technologies as opening up such opportunities (574ff). These archives are more numerous today and include but are not limited to:

- The National Council of Teachers of English's password-protected online collections of articles from its scholarly journals, including *College Composition and Communication*, *College English*, *English Journal*, and *Research in the Teaching of English*
- Subscription-based archival services like JSTOR, Project Muse, and Science Direct that provide access to full-text articles from scholarly journals in the field
- Open access digital scholarly journals and presses like *Composition Forum*, *Computers and Composition Online*, *Enculturation*, and *Kairos*; and *Computers and Composition Digital Press* and *The WAC Clearinghouse*, respectively, that serve as their own digital archives and provide searchable collections of the webtexts, book chapters, reviews, and interviews they publish
- Collaboratively compiled public archives, such as the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives hosted at Ohio State and the National Gallery of Writing hosted at NCTE, which collect textual examples of people's literacy development in multiple media

- Academic publishers' web sites that provide access to instructional materials contributed and used by rhetoric and composition professionals (e.g., Bedford/St. Martin's)
- Scholars' individual web sites and blogs that provide records of scholarly activity and ongoing conversations surrounding the teaching and study of writing (e.g., Culture Cat, Digital Digs, Virtual Politik)
- Transcripts of conversations from discussion boards devoted to advancing knowledge in the discipline and its subfields (e.g., techrhet, wcenter, wpa)
- Collections of materials discovered, assembled, and studied by rhetoric and composition researchers to support claims about writing, its past, and its future (e.g., H. Lewis Ullman's "The Letters of William B. Anderson to Mary Louisa Anderson, 1862-1864").

These multiple and varied archives provide substantive—and substantial—evidence of the scholarly work of the discipline.

At the same time, they ask us to rethink what constitutes scholarly production as they blur the lines between academic and non-academic texts. In digital spaces, the boundaries around these categories become fluid and texts move more freely between them. At what point, for instance, do blog posts like those of Alex Reid's "Digital Digs" or Claire Potter's "Tenured Radical" transition from personal reflection to scholarly writing? (See Purdy and Walker for more on the scholarly features of such blogs.) This new kind of freedom troubles the easy distinctions that we sometimes draw between scholarly and non-scholarly texts in our research-writing pedagogy and tenure and promotion decisions where we categorize texts as one or the other. Decisions about whether texts "count" are often based on whether texts fall on the appropriate side of the scholarly-non-scholarly binary. To redress this situation, we need to

conceive of the evidentiary function of Wells' gift of freedom as freedom to include and value multiple kinds of evidence in our frameworks of scholarly activity. Doing so will help us be free not only of the resentment that others can misunderstand our work, but also of the resentment that others will de-value our work.

### *Possibility*

The final gift Wells advances is the possibility of using archives to reconfigure rhetoric and composition as a discipline, to use archives "to rethink our political and institutional situation" (59-60). She, in other words, offers archives as a means to inspire productive change in the field. In citing Jacqueline Jones Royster's *Traces of a Stream* as a model of archival work illustrating this gift, Wells presents this possibility for reconfiguration as arising from the inclusion and incorporation of multiple, varied voices in our archives (63). When we create and study archives of "other" voices, according to Wells, we can learn something about ourselves and shape our disciplinary identity in useful ways.

Digital archives continue to enact this possibility. Not only do they allow researchers to more readily access collections of artifacts that represent "other" voices; they also allow for people representing those other voices to contribute to archives. In digital spaces, people can become both users and producers of archives.<sup>4</sup> Three collections in the Digital Archive of

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<sup>4</sup> Axel Bruns argues that one of the distinguishing features of Web 2.0 is the opportunity for people to be what he calls *producers*, users of digital content who, by interacting with others, actively take control of creating the content they use (21ff). Other scholars call this role *prosumer* (Anderson n. pag., Toffler 233). In my study of Wikipedia, I signal this possibility for audiences to create content by referring to people who engage with Wikipedia as *author-users* (Purdy "When"). For consistency with my earlier work, I use the term *author-user* in this article. Whatever term is used, all point to an important shift in the role people can play in digital archives.

Literacy Narratives (DALN), for example, include texts created by African American women university professors, deaf and hard-of-hearing people, and undergraduate students of color, three groups whose archives have traditionally been less visible and less studied (“Community List”). People from these groups can contribute their own literacy narratives to this archive so that their voices can be heard—in the DALN’s case, literally heard because the archive allows for uploading audio files. In digital archives other voices not only have the opportunity to be included, but also to include themselves.

The possibility for reconfiguration of rhetoric and composition extends still further in digital archives. The legacy of rhetoric and composition as a discipline is inextricably bound up in what we choose to archive and who is responsible for maintaining those archives. Indeed, as Alex Reid, Bradley Dilger, and Derek Mueller pointed out in their 2010 CCCC presentation—and as Gary Hall explains for cultural studies in *Digitize This Book!*—archives shape the identity of a discipline, both for itself and for external audiences. We must, therefore, consider carefully what texts we save, how we organize them, and to whom we make them available. Scholarship in rhetoric and composition is currently archived by a number of different sources depending upon where it is published. These sources include rhetoric and composition professionals (e.g., academics who edit and publish open access journals or maintain their own blogs) and proprietary third-party entities (e.g., NCTE, Elsevier, Ithaka). As digital archives become a (or even the) site of disciplinary formation, the field must make decisions about which of these models to embrace. Because, as Wells reminds us, the archives we study and produce allow us to “rethink our political and institutional situation” (60), these decisions have significant influence. We can choose to be inclusive or exclusive, open or closed, or some combination of these

options. The affordances of digital archives offer us possibilities to conceive of and conduct our research and teaching in ways that broaden our notion of scholarly activity and include students as researchers. Knowledge of digital archives' new gifts is a fundamental step in embracing these opportunities.

### **Digital Archives' New Gifts**

In addition to extending and modifying the gifts of archives Wells identifies, digital archives also give new gifts that arise from the affordances of digital technologies: integration, customization, and accessibility.<sup>5</sup> Understanding these gifts is crucial to recognize, shape, and advance scholarly activity in rhetoric and composition. In this section I explain and provide brief examples from the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN) and Wikipedia<sup>6</sup> to illustrate each gift. As with Wells, the gifts I identify come from use of digital archives. That is, just as resistance, freedom, and possibility arise from engaging with pre-digital archives, so too do integration, customization, and accessibility result from engaging with digital archives. These gifts are not simply inherent characteristics of digital archives. They are potentials to be exploited, and exploiting them allows for moving our perceptual lens from one that privileges scholarly *form* to one that recognizes scholarly *activity*. This desire coincides with that of archival scholars Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan, who argue for seeing archival work as lived

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<sup>5</sup> See Purdy "Changing" for a discussion of these gifts in a different context.

<sup>6</sup> I chose DALN as an object of analysis because this archive was created by rhetoric and composition professionals to exploit digital archive capabilities. Digital technologies, in other words, are precisely what allow it to function and exist. I chose Wikipedia as an object of analysis because it is one of the world's largest archives and it, too, was created specifically to exploit digital writing and researching capabilities. While not always thought of as an archive, Wikipedia saves each version of an article and the discussion surrounding the writing of that article. Thus, it serves as an archive of the creation of articles for the world's largest encyclopedia.

activity (and vice versa) (2ff). While digital archives are not their explicit focus, attending to digital archives can reinforce their call to broaden our understanding of what constitutes archival research.

### *Integration*

The first new gift of digital archives is integration. This integration happens in two primary ways. First, digital archives allow writing and researching to occur together in the same virtual space, which frames these activities as integrated parts of knowledge production rather than as separate and separable steps. In DALN, for example, step 3 in the submission process is for author-users to annotate and describe the items they are submitting to the archive. In Wikipedia this integration is even more extensive: author-users can change and offer responses to articles and save these contributions as part of the archive. In both of these spaces, author-users write in the very same spaces where they research. This combination can help us teach research-based writing as responding to (instead of regurgitating) other sources. Integrated archival spaces can help students feel that they have a voice in what may otherwise seem like a limitless quantity of texts without room for a new perspective.

This integration is a gift because in pre-digital archives writing spaces are often physically separated from research resources, which disconnects researching and writing processes. Archivists often understandably discourage writing on (or sometimes even touching) print archival texts because they fear doing so will damage the original texts.<sup>7</sup> Thus, researchers need to write elsewhere (if not in another location, at least on a different surface). Most libraries

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<sup>7</sup> This stance is illustrated by another scene in *Angels and Demons* where Robert Langdon is cautioned not to, and then admonished for, tearing a page out of Galileo's *Diagramma della Verita*.

now have computer labs where patrons can write, an arrangement which begins to connect writing and researching activities, but these labs are typically located away from print sources. Digital archives' spatial integration of writing and researching conceptually links these processes, challenging the idea that knowledge production comes from their separation, research and then writing.

Second, digital archives integrate possibilities for collaboration. They facilitate the co-construction of meaning by offering possibilities for connecting with many other people. In Wikipedia, for instance, author-users can participate in conversations with other contributors on an article's discussion page to question, explain, and justify revisions to that article. Though less explicit in DALN, collaboration is also afforded; author-users can create their own storehouse for submissions, which, along with their comments and annotations, they can share with their students and other researchers. With such spaces, research becomes interactive and communal rather than isolated. In explaining the "I Remain: A Digital Archive of Letters, Manuscripts, and Ephemera" project, Megan A. Norcia provides an elaborated example of how digital archives can facilitate cross-disciplinary collaboration with students and faculty. She asserts, "this collaborative approach, drawing on technology and the richness of primary resources, presents a paradigm shift from the lone scholar model and offers rich fruit for students engaged in literary studies" (92-93). I would argue this fruit extends to student researchers from all fields as well as to professional academic researchers.

This integration of collaborative possibilities is again a gift because research and writing activities in pre-digital archives are more solitary. While researchers can, of course, go in groups to an archive, share their written notes with colleagues, or submit queries and suggestions to an

archivist, these possibilities are not integrated like they are in digital archives. They require extra effort. By presenting collaboration as a standard part of research-based writing activity, digital archives like Wikipedia and DALN oppose Romantic notions of the solitary genius author and isolated researcher, thereby privileging alternative (and more accurate) models of knowledge production that can empower a broader range of researchers, including students in our classes.

### *Customization*

The second gift of digital archives is customization. Digital archives allow for the creation of personalized research spaces and classification systems, which can make researchers, particularly novice researchers like our students, more likely to see research-based writing as feasible and productive. As Library and Information Science Professor Richard J. Cox and the University of Pittsburgh archives students put it, “The personalization of the reference service is changing from what used to be a broad service into a directed service” (“New”). Author-users, that is, can tailor finding aids directly to their needs and predilections rather than rely only on generic assistance. In DALN, for instance, author-users can assemble, upload, and save their own personalized collections of documents, images, and sound files that they describe and tag as they wish. In explaining step 3 of the submission process, the DALN web site indicates, “Describing each item will provide others a way of finding your literacy narrative in our index once it has been uploaded” (“Step 3”). In this way users themselves determine the terms under which their texts are classified for searching. In Wikipedia this customization extends to existing article content, which author-users can change as they desire. They can add to, delete from, or revise the text displayed on an article’s “Read” page as well as provide their own summaries of these

changes on the “Edit” page. Though changes may not last on the “Read” page, they are forever part of the Wikipedia archive, accessible under a topic’s “View history” page.

Though archival customization is not foreign to pre-digital archives, the customization of digital archives is a new gift. Researchers were not previously able to save search results accessible from multiple locations, create personalized classification systems, or influence the generation of search results. Pre-digital archives require researchers to work within categorical frameworks others established, such as Library of Congress subject headings and Dewey Decimal System book classifications; thus, searches for materials depend on figuring out the keywords, associations, and terminology that make sense to other researchers. In discussing the limits of these imposed, externalized classification systems (both in libraries and Yahoo’s directory), Clay Shirky asserts, “If you want something that hasn’t been categorized in the way you think about it, you are out of luck” (“File”). Certainly, some standardization has merit in bringing consistency, but researchers, especially novice researchers like our students, often find challenging deciphering what can be non-intuitive systems. By applying frameworks that they devise themselves, they can benefit by finding more relevant materials, retrieving sought materials more quickly, and seeing research as an open system to which they can contribute. This customization provides a way for them to deal with the huge quantity of materials available in digital archives, which might otherwise be overwhelming.

### *Accessibility*

The third new gift of digital archives is accessibility. Digital archives eliminate many temporal and spatial obstacles to archival research. In digital archives, researchers can access materials quickly on demand. Retrieving sources can take seconds and searching is possible

outside particular business hours. The resulting temporal convenience can make archival work more attractive to both experienced and novice researchers because they can conduct research at times most suitable to them. It can, though, also change expectations for what constitutes successful research. For example, researchers can see faster research as better, which can make them discouraged by what may ultimately be productive time-intensive research endeavors.

Researchers using digital archives can access texts from any networked computer. They need not travel to different physical locations or possess special academic credentials to view archival contents. As a result, researchers can consult archival materials more easily. While digital archives may require passwords for login and have contents protected from viewing for copyright reasons, they are arguably less gate-kept than pre-digital archives. For instance, researchers can access in DALN literacy narratives from deaf and hard-of-hearing people, undergraduate students of color, African-American university professors, and community literacy partners as well as access in Wikipedia the history of development of articles on a very wide range of topics. This spatial convenience makes using and teaching digital archival materials more feasible as doing so need not entail traveling or taking students to distant locations. Such accessibility is a gift because pre-digital archive contents are generally less accessible. They are visible only to researchers with requisite qualifications who travel to the physical archive during prescribed times.

Because both getting to and creating archives is easier with digital technologies, this gift of accessibility extends to production as well as consumption. In digital archives, author-users can play a role in producing the archive itself. They can freely contribute content, as in the case of DALN, where author-users are explicitly encouraged to submit literacy narratives. They can

also shape existing content, as in the case of Wikipedia, where author-users are explicitly encouraged to re-write existing articles. Indeed, neither archive would exist were it not for contributions of the larger public. DALN content is comprised entirely of author-user submissions and Wikipedia articles are all written and edited by the public. As Cox et al. explain, digital technologies allow people “to create new kinds of archives,” such as the September 11 Digital Archive, which includes contributes from over 30,000 people from all across the United States: “By making the archives a Web-based one, the entire country can feel they had a role (appropriately so) in establishing this archives [*sic*]” (“Web”). In Wikipedia’s case the entire world can play a role in creating a repository of general knowledge. Such opportunities to produce archival content and make it public can lead to a greater sense of participation and ownership in knowledge production, a common goal of research-writing instruction in composition and other classes.

Though the possibility to contribute content certainly existed for pre-digital archives, this accessibility is a new gift because with digital archives such opportunities are more widespread—as are occasions to access contributed materials. In other words, the scale of access is much greater in digital archives. In turn, author-users can more readily draw on this digital content in creating new texts. As scholars who examine the prevalence of and possibility for citation and cut and paste practices online remind us, easier access to textual material can increase the likelihood that that material will be cited (Hall, Tenopir and King) and used (Johnson-Eilola and Selber, Perkel). Digital archives, then, can facilitate not only artifact accessibility, but also conceptual accessibility. Practices of research, rather than being protected, closed, and hidden, are more shared, open, and visible, which makes our publications more

accessible to audiences both in and outside rhetoric and composition. This visibility also makes the research-writing enterprise more accessible to novice researchers like our students.

### **The Future of Digital Archives**

Seen through the lens of Wells' "three precious gifts" of archival work (58), digital archives ask us to think in new ways about resistance, freedom, and possibility. In particular, they challenge our assumptions about the pace and rigor, evidentiary options and scholarly potentials, and inclusive opportunities and disciplinary influence of archival work. A renewed look at these gifts can help us recognize the value—and knowledge-making potential—of digital practices. Taking into account affordances of digital technologies reveals that digital archives also offer three new gifts: integration, customization, and accessibility. We need to understand these gifts in order to connect researching and writing activities, personalize research spaces, and access and produce more and more diverse textual collections. Further research will need to explore more fully ways in which these gifts manifest themselves in individual digital archives.

Taken together, Wells' gifts seen anew and the three new gifts of digital archives signal that digital archival work is a foundation of knowledge production for researchers at all levels. Such work is not (and should not be viewed as) an isolated activity that is the purview of only a specialized set of researchers. Millions of daily Internet users, including ourselves and our students, are crucial players in digital archives. Literacy in a networked, digital world, then, will increasingly involve the ability to ethically, critically, and effectively create, navigate, evaluate, and use digital archives.

As teacher-scholars with expertise in the study and production of texts, those of us in rhetoric and composition need to take a leadership role in determining policies and best practices surrounding digital archives. To do so, I suggest we

- Teach digital archives as writing spaces. If we explicitly frame digital archives as locations of writing, we can help connect research and writing processes and situate both as integral parts of knowledge production.
- Emphasize the rhetorical and technological nature of archives. The changes brought by digital archives allow us to highlight for students and the larger public how all archives are rhetorical technologies, shaping as well as preserving texts and artifacts.
- Exploit the collaborative potentials of digital archives (e.g., tag, annotate, respond, converse). Doing so can present research as dialogic.
- Give wide audiences, including students and non-academics, access to digital archival content, including our scholarship. Drawing on Gary Hall's suggestions to create (and recognize as legitimate) open-access journals, we can establish a repository of preprint journal articles per the Harnad/Oppenheim Preprint and Corrigenda Strategy. This strategy asks authors to post online preprints of their articles and note corrections to be made in the final published versions so that they make their research broadly available but do not violate copyright (23, 45-46, 53-54).
- Work with for-profit journal publishers and database services to devise cost-effective university subscriptions and individual article or journal orders.

- Allow author-users to tag archival contents with their own keywords so that searching is more intuitive and not solely dependent on figuring out the classification systems of others.
- Save archival contents in multiple formats (e.g., .doc, .pdf, .tiff, .jpg) to accommodate different computer systems and technologies.
- Assign each archival text a stable URL. Follow Bradley Dilger's advice to strive for link permanence and approach links as foundational units of discourse in databases.
- Allow for searching via linguistic, visual, and (when technology makes it feasible) audio means. That way author-users will have multiple options to retrieve texts and can retrieve multimodal texts more easily.
- Facilitate inclusion of multiple textual modes (e.g., video, audio) so that researchers are encouraged to use and produce multimodal texts. That way archives can include the full range of texts researchers are increasingly consulting and creating.

These actions should be undertaken in conversation with colleagues in library and information science, computer science, history, and related disciplines who also have a vested interest in digital archives. If we wait for archival policies to be imposed on us by others, we will miss the opportunity, in Wells' words, to truly "claim" digital archives for rhetoric and composition.

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