

DH1004 · INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL HUMANITIES · SESSION 1

What is Digital Humanities?

什么是数字人文？

Dr Shawn Day · Monday 12 October 2026

WELCOME

Who we are

PART 1 · OCTOBER – NOVEMBER

Dr Shawn Day,

PhD (Geog), MA (Hist), BA (MEcon)

Spatial Humanities

Information Visualisation

Economic and Social history

History Health & Medicine

Digital Project Management

Entrepreneurship and Innovation



ResearchGate



PART 2 · NOVEMBER – DECEMBER

Dr Xiao Shuang

[Dr Xiao introduces herself]

Two lecturers, one course: Part 2 builds on everything you do in Part 1.

Seven sessions, two threads

WEEK 1

12–13 Oct

What is DH? · Global DH

WEEK 2

19–20 Oct

What is data? · Data
modelling

WEEK 3

26–27 Oct

Cultural data · Visualisation

WEEK 4

3 Nov

Forms of visualisation

Your portfolio

Every session adds an entry: a reflection, a video or something you build.

Your dataset

From Session 3 you build one dataset of your own: model, collect, critique, visualise.

TO BEGIN

What happens when a computer reads a book it cannot understand?

60 seconds: write down one thing you think “digital humanities” means. Keep it — it becomes your first portfolio post after the break.

DEFINITIONS

Two directions, one field

METHODS

Digital → humanities

Using computers to ask humanities questions: counting words, mapping places, linking people across archives.

CRITIQUE

Humanities → digital

Asking humanities questions about the digital: how platforms, data and algorithms shape culture.

COMMUNITY

A big tent

A community of people who build, study and critique — scholars, librarians, programmers, artists.

There is no single agreed definition — and that is part of the story.

TODAY

The story as it is usually told

1949

**Humanities
computing**

Counting words

1990s

**The archive and the
web**

Publishing sources

2004

A new name

Becoming a field

2000s

New methods

Reading at scale

Keep asking as we go: whose story is this?

01

Humanities computing

1949 – 1990s

1949

A priest, a punch card and IBM

The Jesuit scholar **Roberto Busa** (1913–2011) persuades IBM's Thomas J. Watson to help him index every word of Thomas Aquinas.

The result, the ***Index Thomisticus***, covers around 11 million words of medieval Latin: printed in 56 volumes (1974–80), then on CD-ROM (1992) and online (2005).

The concordance — find every instance, count, compare — is still DH's DH's first move.



[Image: Busa with IBM punch-card equipment]

A SECOND LOOK

Who did the work?

Busa's project depended on teams of young women operating punch-card machines — for decades, largely uncredited.

Whose labour does a digital project make invisible today? Think of scanning, tagging, transcribing, moderating.

Source: Melissa Terras & Julianne Nyhan, "Father Busa's Female Punch Card Operators" (2016)

1966 – 1987

Building a field

Year	Milestone
1966	Computers and the Humanities journal founded
1973	Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing (Europe)
1978	Association for Computers and the Humanities (North America)
1984	Academia Sinica begins digitising the Chinese classics (Scripta Sinica), Taipei
1987	Humanist mailing list starts; the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) begins a shared standard for encoding texts

Fields are built by journals, societies and standards — not only by ideas.

02

The archive and the web

1990s – 2000s

1990s – 2000s

The digital archive becomes scholarship

1987– · Gregory Crane

[Perseus Digital Library](#)

Greek and Roman texts with translation and linguistic tools.

1993– · Edward Ayers

[Valley of the Shadow](#)

Two communities, North and South, through the American Civil War.

1994– · British Library & partners

[International Dunhuang Project](#)

Manuscripts from the Silk Road, scattered worldwide, brought together online.

2003 · Hitchcock & Shoemaker

[Old Bailey Online](#)

Nearly 200,000 criminal trials in London, 1674–1913, searchable.

2004

From “humanities computing” to “digital humanities”

2004

A Companion to Digital Humanities

Schreibman, Siemens & Unsworth
popularise the new name.

2005

ADHO

The Alliance of Digital Humanities
Organizations links the societies.

2008

NEH Office of DH

A US funder creates a dedicated
office.

A new name signalled a shift: from computing as a service to digital work as scholarship.

03

New methods, new scales

2000s – 2010s

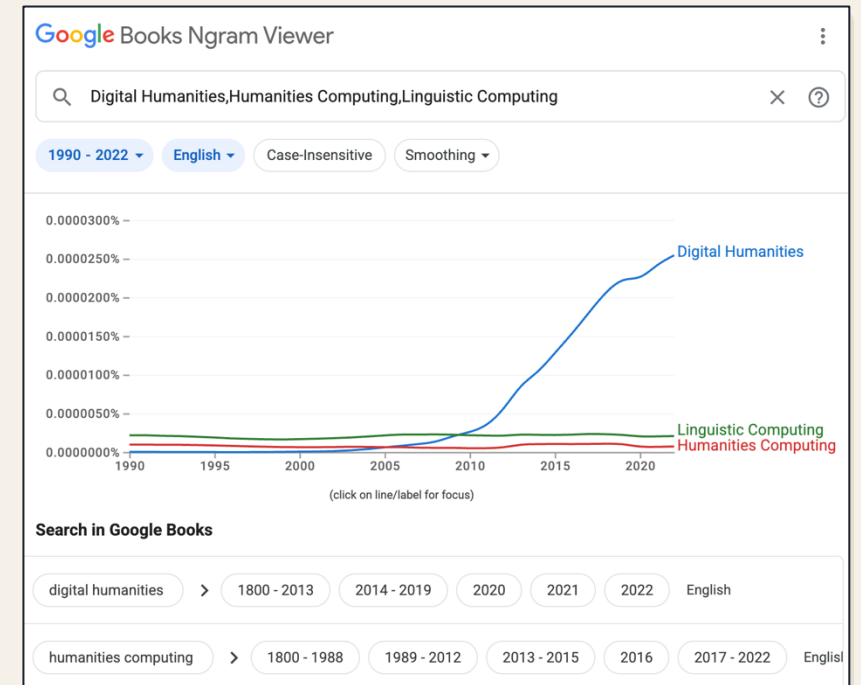
METHOD

Distant reading

Franco Moretti: instead of close-reading a few famous novels, read thousands through data — *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005), Stanford Literary Lab (2010).

Culturomics and the Google Books Ngram Viewer (2010) chart word use across millions of books.

Critique: which books were scanned, in which languages — and what does a word count miss?



METHOD

The spatial turn

2001– · Harvard & Fudan

China [Historical](#) GIS

Administrative geography of China from the Qin to the end of the Qing. Qing.

Stanford

[Mapping the Republic of Letters](#)

Networks of early-modern scholarly correspondence.

Open community

[Pelagios](#)

Linking ancient places across collections worldwide.

Place becomes a way to ask questions, not just a backdrop.

THIS SEMESTER

Five threads we will follow

Representation

What gets digitised?

[Week __]

Method

How do machines
read, map, count?

[Week __]

Access

Who can use it, and
and from where?

[Week __]

Power & labour

Who builds it, who is
left out?

[Week __]

Communicati on

How do we tell
stories with data?

[Week __]

TO THINK ABOUT

That was the story as usually told — from Europe and North America. *Whose story was it?*

Tomorrow: digital humanities as a global field.

AFTER THE BREAK · 09:00

Set up your digital portfolio and make your first post.

Create your space on
[platform]

Add a short profile

Post: “What I think DH
is”, revised from your 60
seconds

Add one image

Share your link

Thank you

谢谢

shawn.day@ucc.ie · [class contact channel]