What's a "digital project" and why are we doing one?

If you're asking these questions, your professor has probably required that your research project not be a traditional paper, but a "born digital" project that lives online and takes advantage of online affordances (links, embedded sound and video, etc.) and which are often multimodal (using more than one kind of communication, such as written and visual).

If your professor is asking students to create digital/multimodal projects, it probably means that they want you to build some skills they think you'll need for competent communication in the 21st century. These skills include proficiency in modes of communication beyond the traditional paper, including oral, visual, digital, and electronic media.

These projects can take the shape of podcasts, websites, digital timelines or story maps, videos, educational games, or animations.

Here is an example of a timeline written by a student in an English 1102 class at Georgia State University-Perimeter
College. It is the project that we drew from for Jorge’s* sample work earlier in this chapter.

Here is an example of a podcast, posted to a class website, for an English 1101 class at Georgia State University-Perimeter College: GSU EngL 1101 Research Podcast

Here is What you Need to Know

• The **research process** is the same: you still need to find reliable and relevant sources
• **Using research** is the same: you still need to use sources effectively, ethically, and efficiently
• The **composing process** is the same: you still need to craft a good introduction, body, and conclusion

Writing: all of these projects will take significant drafting, regardless of the end project. You need to figure out ahead of time what you want to say and how you will support it. In other words, just like in a paper, you need to have a clear argument and support for that argument. Whatever format you choose, you need to present that information by using rhetorical strategies that you think will be effective for your audience.

You should be **writing-writing-writing** from the beginning of your research process, even if you’re just writing a bunch of messy notes to start. Once you decide on your project format, you will then begin to edit and shape your writing to work for the format.

If your professor has assigned you a digital
All of these projects need to have:

1. An introduction/beginning that establishes your thesis and why (this is the road-map part)
2. A body/middle that follows the road map, that provides substantial research-based support for your thesis, that is ordered in a logical/sequential way
3. A conclusion/end that leaves your reader with a new take on the topic, a modification, or something to do.

How the different parts of the project are structured and their relationship to each other will depend on the project.

Guidance on the Specific Formats

Websites: This is one of the most writing-intensive of the formats because text-heavy websites look a lot like papers, but there are some differences—you have to think about order and visuals differently than you do with a paper. You will probably use parenthetical in-text citations and you’ll likely have a sources page/tab. You should have a home/introduction page and 2-3 substantial (150-300 words or more) tabs with textual, visual, and, if they support your argument, audio or video elements. Any images or sound you use needs to be sourced ethically and cited appropriately.

Podcasts: This format is only auditory, which means that you have to convey everything through sound. You won’t be able to provide visual cues. You should consider musical or other kinds of sound transitions between sections, but playing music throughout is not recommended. You need to have some kind of introduction, you need to make an argument, and you need to support that argument with evidence from your sources. In an audio format such as a podcast, you obviously won’t use citations. Instead, you would attribute your sources as you introduce them. If you’re posting a link to your podcast to a class website, you would provide a list of sources with the link that you post.

Videos: Videos allow for a combination of visual and auditory information that you can use to make your argument. You should find a combination that best expresses your argument and your support for it, and where your choice of audio and visual presentation supports your work. You need an introduction and a body and a conclusion. This can take the form of a narrated slide show, an interview, a set of graphics, or something else. You sitting in front of a camera and talking probably wouldn’t be the best option, because it doesn’t take advantage of everything a video could offer. Sources could be dealt with in two ways: you could have a slide with sources at the end of your video, or you could include the sources with your link, as in the podcast example.

Blog Post: This is one of the most writing-intensive of the formats because text-heavy blog posts look a lot like papers, but there are some differences—you have to think about order and visuals differently than you do with a paper. Like a paper, this should move sequentially and flow from beginning to end. Unlike a traditional paper, this format asks you to intersperse visuals/embed videos or links into this text in a way that enhances (but doesn’t interrupt) the text. You will probably use parenthetical in-text citations and you’ll have a list of sources at the end. Any images or sound you use needs to be sourced ethically and cited appropriately.
Where To Get Help

If your professor is asking you to create a digital research project, they probably have a list of resources or have worked with a librarian at your school to create a list of helpful resources and links. Here is such a list, housed at the Georgia State University Library website: GSU Library Digital Projects Resources.

If you're not part of a university community, you may have a subscription to a software and hardware self-teaching site such as Lynda.com that you (or your employer) has paid for. Remember that YouTube and other video sites such as Reddit have tutorials as well.

* Perimeter College students D. Charles and A. Mohammed contributed material that became part of "Jorge’s" examples throughout this chapter, and D. Charles was the creator of the timeline linked above.