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From Elements to Styles

Pedagogical Strategies for Digital Editing and Publication

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Introduction

It is perhaps an understatement to say that few college students have strong opinions on the long *s*.¹ If students are aware of this character at all, it is usually as a source of mild humor or confusion, one of many features that make early texts unreadable for twenty-first-century eyes. I knew, therefore, that I had succeeded in my pedagogical goals when I heard two undergraduates passionately arguing about whether to preserve or regularize the long *s* characters in their group's digital edition. While one student felt that the long *s* represented an essential feature of their archival documents, the other countered that it was not only unnecessary but confusing. For my purposes as an instructor, there was no "correct" choice in this debate: what mattered was that the students had developed informed editorial stances and were aware of how those would manifest in the decisions they made as they prepared their texts for publication. The assignment had succeeded because students had become invested in and able to make critical decisions about the process of developing a collaborative digital edition.

This article shares an approach to classroom digital editions that has two distinctive features. First, assignments are designed such that students work on the full process of creating digital editions: selecting their texts, transcribing and encoding those texts, documenting their editorial decisions, and publishing their texts online. And second, this approach uses a combination of individual and collaborative work such that students have ownership over their own decisions while making those decisions in an environment that requires them to take other texts and perspectives into account. Essentially, this frames classroom activities through the lens of the digital humanities project, treating student groups as editors of a digital publication. The aim is to provide students with the greatest possible range for making decisions and encourage them to articulate the critical thinking behind each of those decisions.

The article will offer three case studies to demonstrate the different contexts in which this approach can be adapted. In the first, students each select a brief archival document while working in groups to develop editorial standards. Students use Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) markup to encode their individual documents according to their group's standards, a process that is typically iterative as the groups continue to refine their approaches for modeling and publishing their texts. The second case study modifies this assignment to make it more feasible in larger classes; in this version, students each encode a selection from a single text, and the class works together to establish a limited set of editorial principles, typically focusing on markup for interpretation and analysis. The final example reduces the technical lift yet further by using a content management system (in this case, WordPress) rather than TEI/XML to express students' editorial insights.

These assignments seek to provide students with an inside view into the development and publication of digital editions. Because students are keenly aware of the many choices that they themselves must make in this project, they come to recognize the choices that others have made to produce the textbooks, digital archives, primary sources, and other resources that they encounter in their studies. When students move from passive consumers to active producers of digital editions, they gain more than just insights that make them critical users of text (although this is, of course, a central goal). Students also become aware of the many forms of power and access that shape the textual records available to them. When working with archival documents, for example, students must consider who had access to technologies of writing and publication, whose texts were treated as worthy of preservation, who owned the physical and digital archives that have maintained those texts, and who built the tools that are used today to edit and publish archival objects. Primary and archival sources thus transition from objects that are "just there" into manifestations of complex power systems.

This approach does place significant technical demands on both students and instructors. However, the benefits are equally substantial. The more choices students are asked to make, the more invested they become in editorial theory and praxis. When students know they will determine not only how to transcribe and encode their texts but also how to publish those texts online—and when they know they will be evaluated primarily on the critical thinking they show in making their editorial choices—they tackle complex technical tasks with increasing confidence. The balance between individual and collective work in these assignments not only provides an opportunity for students to develop an understanding of how editing and textualities intersect, but it also leads to student investment that manifests in informed and strongly felt debates over how to approach tasks such as selection, contextualization, and, of course, regularization. These case studies will demonstrate holistic approaches to digital editing assignments in which students can gain mature insights into digital textualities by building editions over which they have ownership at every level.

Scholarly, Institutional, and Technical Contexts

The three case studies discussed in this article are most usefully situated within their scholarly, institutional, and technical contexts. The pedagogical approaches described here are in conversation with and benefit from the wealth of excellent work that has already been done on teaching text encoding and digital editing.² Much of the research on pedagogies of text encoding focuses on the ways that markup is both challenging and deeply useful for achieving a broad range of humanistic learning goals, sharing strategies for challenges while bolstering useful

applications.³ For example, Kailey Fukushima and Karen Bourrier have persuasively shown the value of an explicitly feminist “apprenticeship model of education” as enacted in the teaching and learning practices of the Digital Dinah Craik project.⁴ Another instance of project-based pedagogy can be found in an article by Janelle Jenstad, Kim McLean-Fiander, and Kathryn R. McPherson describing the approach adopted by the Map of Early Modern London project, which gives students “a high-stakes research-based learning opportunity with the potential for an open-access, peer-reviewed publication.”⁵ Bringing in the student perspective, Maura Ives, Victor Del Hierro, Bailey Kelsey, Laura Catherine Smith, and Christina Sumners have described the challenges and benefits of teaching TEI in humanities graduate courses; as with many TEI assignments, the students learned markup not simply for its own sake but for its ability to instantiate important disciplinary insights. Ives writes that her assignment’s primary aim was “not to teach students how to encode with TEI, but rather, to help them understand the trajectory of a digital textual recovery project by wrestling at each step of the way with the questions that normally emerge in the process of editing a literary text for a scholarly audience.”⁶ Student autonomy is also central to a recent article by John Bryant, Mary Isbell, Christopher Ohge, and Mary Erica Zimmer, which brings together several perspectives on teaching digital editing with these features in common: “each offers openings for critical analysis and interpretation, in a collaborative environment, and each is a kind of declaration of intellectual independence for students and instructors alike.”⁷ As with these projects, the teaching strategies I describe here prioritize opportunities for students to learn by doing, teaching text encoding and digital editing both because they are useful skills in themselves and also because they provide important learning opportunities for critical analysis. Our work also shares a focus on choice and student empowerment, a deliberate resistance to top-down methods for transmitting knowledge, and a confidence that students will accomplish remarkable things when they have access to tools for digital editing.

Institutionally, these case studies share teaching and editorial work that centers around two groups at Northeastern University: the Women Writers Project (WWP) and the Digital Integration Teaching Initiative (DITI). The WWP is a long-term research and encoding project focused on early women writers and electronic text encoding. Founded at Brown in 1988, the WWP has been using the TEI markup language to model early women’s writing since the early days of the TEI itself and has been teaching text encoding through workshops and classroom partnerships for decades. My own involvement with the WWP began soon after the project moved to Northeastern University in 2013, and my current role as the project’s associate director focuses strongly on teaching—with our student encoders, in our workshops, and through partnerships with faculty at Northeastern and other institutions. The WWP’s flagship publication is *Women Writers Online* (WWO), a collection of 475 texts written, translated by, or attributed to women, first published in print and in English between 1526 and 1850.⁸

The DITI has a more recent history, having been founded at Northeastern in 2018. The aim of the DITI is to integrate computational and digital methods into humanities and social science classrooms. Our graduate fellows collaborate with faculty to develop workshops and activities that introduce digital methods in ways that complement class learning goals. The DITI team has expertise in a range of skills, including not only text encoding and digital editing but also mapping, qualitative coding, quantitative coding, computational text analysis, audio and video editing, interactive gaming, data management, data ethics, and 3D modeling. In my role as co-director of this program, I provide mentorship to our graduate fellows while also teaching some classroom workshops.

It is worth acknowledging that both these projects benefit from institutional privilege; Northeastern is a large private research university that has dedicated substantial resources to digital scholarship. This privilege manifests

at many levels: it means that instructors and learners have access to an institutional license for the Oxygen XML Editor, it means that programs like the WWP and DITI are well staffed and supported by administration, and it means that Northeastern students typically have access to personal devices that can run the code necessary to publish their editions. In this article, I have tried to surface wherever this privilege impacts teaching and learning, while considering approaches that might be adapted in other institutional contexts.

For the technical contexts of this article, two case studies employ TEI/XML encoding, using the Oxygen XML editor and a customized environment for the CETEIcean publication platform.⁹ CETEIcean is described by its publishers as a “Javascript library that allows TEI documents to be displayed in a web browser.”¹⁰ CETEIcean is meant to support lightweight publication for TEI files, but it still requires some technical knowledge to implement. For instance, the project’s documentation indicates that “you can use CETEIcean in your projects just by grabbing the CETEL.js file from the latest release and linking to it in an HTML file,” but this is not a process that many humanities undergraduates would be able to implement on their own.¹¹ Reflecting this need, the localized instance of CETEIcean used by the WWP has an additional XSLT transformation, developed by Ash Clark, the project’s XML applications programmer. This transformation is designed to allow users to easily view HTML versions of their encoded files.¹² Working in Oxygen, students need only run the default transformation associated with their TEI files (which can be accomplished with a single button) and a formatted HTML file will automatically open in their browser.

The CETEIcean framework also includes a custom.css file that students can modify to express their decisions about display and publication, and the teaching templates used for these projects include a set of CSS samples that students can modify.¹³ This approach prioritizes giving students the most seamless process possible for viewing their encoded files as formatted HTML, while making the modification of each project’s display accessible for new learners. Students thus gain well-scaffolded opportunities to express their decisions around publication, along with a lightweight mechanism for moving between XML editing and HTML publication views. Within these technical, institutional, and scholarly contexts, then, the case studies below show the ways that students with no previous technical backgrounds can gain useful understandings of digital editing and publication when they are asked to both *make* and *articulate* all the necessary decisions for their digital editions from beginning to end.

Case Study: Encoding the Archive

In this project, each student selects and encodes a brief archival document. Based on shared thematics in their texts, the students are placed into groups that are responsible for determining the audience and goals of their digital editions. Informed by those goals, students make decisions about regularization, handling of named entities, annotation and contextualization, representing the physical condition of their source texts, and so on. Students also use the TEI’s provisions for interpretive annotation such that each group establishes and applies a set of thematic tags to their texts. Groups author an editorial declaration that outlines the aims of their digital edition and describes their practices for transcription, encoding, and publication.

Each student encodes an individual text following the group’s shared standards. Students also write an individual reflective introduction in which they explain their processes for transcribing and encoding their texts; this provides a space for them to share insights derived from the practice of encoding and articulate the choices

they made in editing their texts. This reflection is a useful way to negotiate the concern that students may feel about being graded on digital work, since the assignment emphasizes throughout that students are evaluated primarily on their decision-making, which they can articulate in the familiar form of the essay. Students are instructed to comment extensively in their XML files, which offers another space to show their thinking and reflect on any interesting or challenging aspects of their texts. Focusing on student choice and the critical application of technical methods addresses a common challenge with the assessment of digital and computational projects in humanities classrooms. At every stage of this assignment, we emphasize that students will be evaluated based on the thoughtfulness and rigor of their applications of digital methods, rather than for their technical competencies. This places the work of the project within a skillset that students expect to exercise in humanities classes and alleviates issues of fairness that arise from the widely varying backgrounds and experiences students have with technology in the classroom.

Finally, the groups decide how they want their texts to appear when published online. This phase is especially useful in helping students to understand that creating a TEI web edition is rarely about showing all the information that is formalized in the markup. Web publication also provides a strong “reality effect” for the students and gives them an artifact they are often excited to share outside class contexts. Moreover, publishing their work online gives students insights into the other digital and even print editions that they use in their studies, since they come to recognize that these, also, are the product of editors making a series of choices that condition what is visible in the final publications.

This assignment was initially developed in collaboration with Professor Marina Leslie for her undergraduate Renaissance literature courses at Northeastern.¹⁴ I have subsequently taught the project in several other undergraduate and graduate classes at Northeastern. The most developed version can be seen in the assignment materials for the Literature and Digital Diversity course that I co-teach with Professor Elizabeth Maddock Dillon.¹⁵ This undergraduate class typically includes a combination of English and computer science majors, and the digital edition project is the first major unit, followed by projects on computational text analysis and on digital archiving.

An example student project can demonstrate how this assignment sequence foregrounds critical decision-making across a range of editorial processes. The project was created by Sarah Lamodi (Northeastern University class of 2023) and is shared with her permission. Sarah selected an anonymous pamphlet published in 1647 whose title provides a detailed depiction of its contents: “Strange newes from Scotland, or, A Strange relation of a terrible and prodigious monster, borne to the amazement of all those that were spectators, in the kingdome of Scotland, in a village neere Edenborough, call’d Hadensworth, Septem. 14. 1647.” The creature described in the pamphlet possessed two heads “bearing the similitude of man and woman” and had “secret parts” that “shewed it to bee both Male and Female.”¹⁶ Sarah worked on this document in a group called “Representations of Gender”; her collaborators’ texts included a pamphlet warning women against the signs of pride, a treatise on witch finding, and a ballad from the perspective of a “poor and blind” woman.

The assignment asks students to identify audiences and goals for their editions, and to make their editorial decisions based on these selections. Sarah’s group chose to create an edition for high school and early career undergraduate students. Accordingly, their transcriptions prioritize regularization and they offer extensive contextualization aimed at drawing out insights into early modern concepts of gender. As Sarah writes in her reflective introduction, she initially chose her text for its focus on monstrosity, but the process of encoding and

the group's discussions on gender caused her to become aware of "how much material there was within the text on gender with the use of pronouns, references to childbirth, and the depiction of a heretic mother."¹⁷ She notes that her group was "able to draw the reader's attention to these important aspects of the text and create a document that we believe would be helpful to high-school and early-college students in their research on how gender was written about in select Early Modern texts, specifically as it may relate to religion, childbirth, physical features, and ethnicity."¹⁸ Because this assignment focuses so heavily on student choice, the space that the reflective essays provide for articulating those choices is essential, as can be seen in the care and thought that Sarah puts into describing the features her group chose to highlight, as well as in her discussions of the ways her understanding of the text changed over the course of the project.

Complementing the synthetic opportunity for reflection offered by the essays is the more localized space of XML comments.¹⁹ The encoding sample below, from part of a passage describing the physical appearance of the monster, shows how Sarah has used comments to flag her decision-making for several instances in her text:²⁰

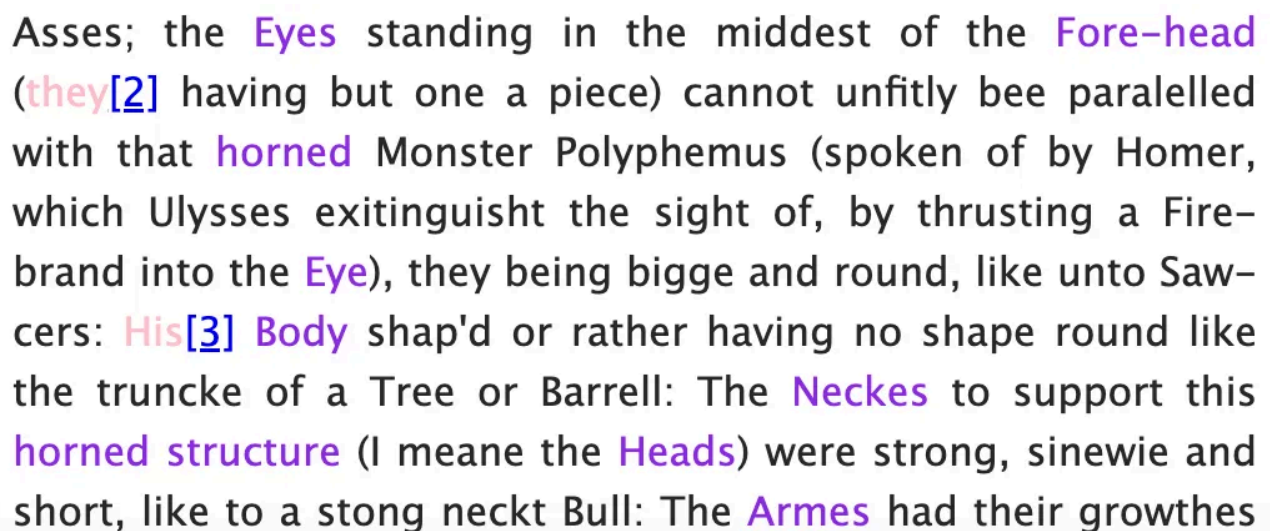
```
[...] the <seg ana="#physicalfeatures">Eyes</seg> standing in the midst
<lb/>of the <seg ana="#physicalfeatures">Fore-head</seg> (<seg ana="#gender_pronoun"
xml:id="a001" corresp="#n001">they</seg> having but one a <!-- This instance of 'they'
influenced our idea to encode pronouns, specifically singular pronouns. -->
<lb/>piece) cannot unfitly bee paralleled with
<lb/>that <seg ana="#physicalfeatures">horned</seg> <name>Monster Polyphemus</name> (spoken
of <!-- In the original document, there is no parenthesis here; it has been silently
corrected for ease-of-reading. -->
<lb/>by <persName>Homer</persName>, which <persName>Ulysses</persName> extinguisht the
sight
<lb/>of, by thrusting a Fire-brand into the <seg ana="#physicalfeatures">Eye</seg>),
<lb/>they being bigge and round, like unto Saw-
<lb/>cers: <seg ana="#gender_pronoun" xml:id="a002" corresp="#n002">His</seg> <seg
ana="#physicalfeatures">Body</seg> shap'd or rather having no <!-- This "His" is the only
time the Monster is given an explicit gender. -->
<lb/>shape round like the truncke of a Tree [...]
```

This sample highlights a few key features of Sarah's editorial and analytical work. First, we see three comments, one of which describes her decision, following the priorities of her group's edition, to silently supply a missing parenthesis. The other two relate to her reading of gender in this text, calling attention to the pronouns used to describe the creature. These comments are visible only in the XML, but Sarah has also added two public-facing annotations that provide a more detailed analysis of gender and language in her text.

In addition to annotations, students also bring their editorial perspectives to bear on their texts by using the TEI's provisions for interpretation and analysis. The encoding sample shows several instances in which a <seg> (segment) element has been added to the text, with an @ana attribute pointing to a list of interpretive annotations in this document. This passage shows two of this group's annotations, one in which the students elected to tag singular gendered pronouns, and another in which they marked references to physical features. The group's other annotations highlight gendered language more generally, references to religion, language related to children or

childbirth, and references to ethnicity. Each group derives their own set of annotations, and this is usually an iterative process as they negotiate between the themes in their individual documents and the group's emerging sense of a shared thematics among their texts.

Using the CETELcean toolkit, the groups can view their documents as HTML, so they have a clear picture of how these will appear when hosted on the class website. As Figure 1 shows, the display is more functional than aesthetic, but its most important feature is the ease with which students can modify and view the styling of their texts.



Asses; the **Eyes** standing in the midst of the **Fore-head** (**they**[2] having but one a piece) cannot unfitly bee paralleled with that **horned** Monster Polyphemus (spoken of by Homer, which Ulysses extinguisht the sight of, by thrusting a Fire-brand into the **Eye**), they being bigge and round, like unto Saw-cers: **His**[3] **Body** shap'd or rather having no shape round like the truncke of a Tree or Barrell: The **Neckes** to support this **homed structure** (I meane the **Heads**) were strong, sinewie and short, like to a stong neckt Bull: The **Armes** had their growthes

Figure 1. Display for “Strange Newes from Scotland” on the Literature and Digital Diversity class site.

The students in this group have made their interpretive annotations visible through color coding: language related to physicality is purple and singular pronouns are pink. This example helps to reinforce how much of the encoding work is analytical, as Sarah has chosen to treat the potentially ambiguous “they” as a singular pronoun. Her note then discusses the rationale for this decision: “Although this pronoun is almost certainly being used in the plural form to refer to the Monster’s two heads, it is important to make note of it as a possible instance of referring to one being of disputed gender with a gender neutral pronoun.”²¹ The color coding is a simple mechanism, but it does make visually evident just how saturated this passage is with bodily language. In addition to color coding, groups also use their custom CSS files to control features like the display of line breaks, shifts between roman and blackletter typefaces, representation of missing or unclear text, handling of original or regularized spellings, and so on.

As suggested by Sarah’s experience in discovering the significance of gender for her text, the push-and-pull between group decision-making and students’ work on their individual documents is essential to the design of this assignment. In addition to demanding an iterative approach to identifying and applying their interpretive annotations, this structure also enables students to build their own frameworks for understanding early textualities. Phenomena like catchwords and signature marks quickly emerge as part of a shared print culture, rather than being just idiosyncrasies of their documents. Students also become invested in the negotiation between their specific texts and an encoding practice that can be applied consistently across a corpus. As noted above, producing their own digital editions helps students to become aware of the constructedness of all the editions they

encounter. The key skill this project teaches, then, is the ability to critically examine, and sometimes even challenge, the preconditions and perspectives that have produced the many editions students will encounter in their coursework and future careers.

There are, of course, some limitations to this approach. Most significant is that the project demands considerable technical proficiency and effort on the part of both students and instructors. On the instructors' end, it takes not only technical knowledge but also time and effort to create all the templates, teaching materials, examples, assignment guides, and other resources that make this project possible. These resources require substantial effort to develop and maintain, but they are necessary to ensure that the project is equitable for students with very different experiences in using computational methods or in applying digital tools to humanistic scholarly endeavors. It is essential that all students, regardless of how comfortable they feel with technology, are able to successfully complete this assignment. Producing such an environment demands robust scaffolding at every end of the process, from making informed editorial choices to writing CSS.

On the students' end, they must not only build new skills but also address the logistics and challenges that are inherent to all group work. There are some ways to mitigate these: for instance, the reflective introduction gives students a space to describe not only their design rationales but also the things that they were *not* able to accomplish within the constraints of the assignment. Comments also provide a space for students to show their thinking as well as their technical abilities. And finally, class sessions can be structured to allow for peer mentoring and on-the-spot troubleshooting. However, this is still a project that requires a substantial commitment on all sides of time, effort, and expertise.²²

Case Study: Building a Class Edition

With this last point in mind, I offer two briefer case studies, each of which is designed to accomplish many of the same goals, but with some streamlining of technical and infrastructural lifts. The first is a project that I have co-taught with Professor Jessica Kane in introductory undergraduate literature courses at Albion College, a private liberal arts college in Michigan. This collaboration was part of the WWP's teaching partners program, in which instructors at a range of institutions share teaching materials and reflections on their pedagogical strategies.²³ In some cases, as here, WWP staff may visit classes, assist with assignment planning, or otherwise collaborate directly with teaching partners. The assignment we developed for Jessica Kane's class includes individual and collective work on both encoding and publication, but there are some strategic simplifications. First, students encode selections from a single shared text, rather than discovering their own archival objects. This reduces some of the opportunity for student choice, but it also removes a substantial amount of the bandwidth necessary for the project, as students no longer need to learn how to navigate archival databases.²⁴ Second, collective decisions are made at the class level and focus on a small but intellectually rich set of decision points, such as what their editions' goals and audiences will be, how to handle named entities, and which thematic annotations they will tag.²⁵ The markup at stake was both simplified and more robustly scaffolded, with students applying a selected list of elements to template TEI files.

These modifications were aimed at a few key goals. First, they simply made this project possible for large introductory courses. Second, they reduced the time footprint substantially, from six weeks to three. Lastly, the

demand on students is substantially lower,²⁶ although the approach still requires scaffolding and instructor expertise. There are some sacrifices in the number of choices students get to make, but they still applied encoding to their own texts, made group editorial choices, and came out of the project with a shared digital edition. As Kane describes in a blog post on the project, the act of marking up their selections significantly improved students' analyses: "students were forced to slow down in their reading, they practiced identifying elements of the text, they thought about how those different textual elements fit together, and they expressed this analysis and significance to a new audience."²⁷

We also found that there were advantages to having students all work on the same longer publication: the first is that it opened up many more opportunities for peer mentoring, since students were often facing the same kinds of textual challenges in their individual selections. Another advantage is that the results could be modified for publication in a more durable and public format than a class website. Unlike the student anthologies in the first case study, these classes worked on complete texts, which meant that we could adapt their XML files to follow WWO encoding standards and publish their work both on a class publication site and with the WWO collection. These two editions can be seen in Figure 2.²⁸

Women Writers Online edition	Student edition
Fantomina: Or, Love in a Maze. A young Lady of distinguished Birth, Beauty, Wit, and Spirit, happened to be in a Box one Night at the Playhouse; where, though there were a great Number of celebrated Toasts, she perceived several Gentlemen extremely pleased themselves with entertaining a Woman who sat in a Corner of the Pit, and, by her Air and Manner of receiving them, might easily be known to be one of those who come there for no other Purpose, than to create Acquaintance with as many as seem desirous of it. She could not help testifying her Contempt of Men, who, regardless either of the Play, or Circle, threw away their Time in such a Manner, to some Ladies that sat by her: But they, either less surprised by being more accustomed to such Sight, than she who had been bred for the most Part in the Country, or not of a Disposition to consider any Thing very deeply, took but little Notice of it. She still thought of it, however; and the longer she reflected on it, the greater was her Wonder, that Men, some of whom she knew were accounted to have Wit, should have Tastes so	FANTOMINA: OR, LOVE in a Maze. A YOUNG Lady of distinguished Birth, Beauty, Wit, and Spirit, happened to be in a Box[3] one Night at the Playhouse; where, though there were a great Number of celebrated Toasts, she perceived several Gentlemen extremely pleased themselves with entertaining a Woman who sat in a Corner of the Pit[4], and, by her Air and Manner of receiving them, might easily be known to be one of those who come there for no other Purpose, than to create Acquaintance with as many as seem desirous of it. She could not help testifying her Contempt of Men, who, regardless either of the Play, or Circle, threw away their Time in such a Manner, to some Ladies that sat by her: But they, either less surprised by being more accustomed to such Sight, than she who had been bred for the most Part in the Country, or not of a Disposition to consider any Thing very deeply, took but little Notice of it. She still thought of it, however; and the longer she reflected on it, the greater was her Wonder, that Men, some of whom she knew were accounted to have Wit, should have Tastes so

Figure 2. WWO and student editions of Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* (1725).

This modification proved a substantial motivator for the students, since they valued the opportunity to contribute to a long-standing publication. The strategy of having students edit for existing publications has been used successfully in a range of projects, perhaps the best known of which is the Map of Early Modern London, which has a Pedagogical Partnership Project in which "students contribute to MoEML under the close supervision of their professor on site," thus allowing MoEML to "honour our pedagogical origins while upholding scholarly standards*."²⁹ The value of giving students the opportunity to contribute to a long-term and thriving project is clear. While recognizing this value, it was nevertheless important for Professor Kane and myself that students should be able to develop their own encoding and publication practices, even if this required downstream effort from the WWP. Thus, the approach we adopted is a compromise; students in this project have less autonomy than in the first case study, but they are also able to contribute to a long-term publication. Or, to compare this approach

with the one adopted by MoEML, students have more autonomy, but this comes at the cost of the chance to apply a mature project's standards to their selections. As we are seeing, any of these approaches can be fruitful, depending on class goals, resources, and contexts.

Case Study: Editing Without (TEI) Markup

For contexts in which text encoding may demand more resources than are available, one final case study can offer an approach that further reduces bandwidth by removing the markup component. This last example is taught in Professor Erika Boeckeler's undergraduate and graduate Shakespeare classes at Northeastern. I collaborated on the instructional design and site development in my role as co-director of the Digital Integration Teaching Initiative (DITI), which partners with social science and humanities faculty to integrate digital and computational methods into their courses. In this project, students edit and publish a single page from a Shakespeare play, working directly in WordPress. The outcome is a generational digital edition in which each page reflects a different editorial vision. The ongoing project is called The Cacodaemon Shakespeare, adopting a term used only once in Shakespeare's canon to "comment on the many different editorial 'spirits' that take possession of Shakespeare's word" through this collaborative edition.³⁰ Students are asked to identify the goals and audiences for their single-page contributions, and then to transcribe and make display decisions about each page based on those determinations. Working directly in WordPress enables a greater range of styling choices—students experiment with color, add images and videos, adjust type sizes and fonts, strike through or overlay text, and so on. As of spring 2026, the project is in progress for editions of *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Hamlet*.³¹

Students are encouraged to adopt deliberately interventionist editorial standpoints and to link these frameworks with class readings and discussions. Such work is evident in Figure 3, which shows an example page focused on "analyzing the breadth of Shylock's religious subversion."³² In the headnote for this page, editor Emily Sullivan explains that she regularized long *s* characters as "not significant" for her reading, but she has attempted to recreate the "spatial dynamics of the original page, such as indents, enjambment, and italics" because "lines, and especially which words share the same lines, were important to [her] analysis."³³ Sullivan uses a combination of color coding and annotation to foreground her reading of Shylock's religious subversion, explaining: "Shylock is able to create tension between Christian and Jewish logics through his manipulation of grammar/verb tense (in green), spiritual roles of authority (in orange), religious numerology (in red), and spatial contrast (in blue)."³⁴

Duke. Get thee gone, but doe it.

Shy. In christning shalt thou haue¹ two² Godfathers³,
had I beene iudge⁴ thou shouldst haue had⁵ ten more⁶,
to bring thee to the gallowes, not to the font⁷. *Exit*⁸

Duke. Sir I entreate you home with me to dinner.

Figure 3. Student digital edition of *The Merchant of Venice*; shared with permission.

As this example shows, students make critically informed transcription and display choices through this project, even though they have a less robust toolkit for modeling their texts than the TEI assignments provide.

Other projects are even more experimental. One student page reimagines a conversation between Portia and Nerissa as a text thread, with the goal of framing the play in a context that will be familiar to their selected audience of high school students. Editors Annelise Dramm and Maisie Saganic explain that their approach “not only widens the accessibility of Shakespeare but also seeks to grow appreciation and understanding of early modern text.”³⁵ Another strategic modernization, by Lea Hendler and Jennie Koh, reimagines act 1, scene 1 of *Hamlet* as “Shakespeare: Unsolved” in the style of *BuzzFeed Unsolved* and includes a video embedded alongside the text of the page. The student editors explain in their headnote that they chose to highlight the paranormal aspects of this scene because these are so central to the narrative that follows, asserting that an “increased understanding of how other characters view the ghost helps to truly characterize Hamlet.”³⁶ Another project by Aya Al-Zehhawi and Grant Richmond creates an edition for readers ages five through ten in the style of the *Geronimo Stilton* series, with simplified language and typographically highlighted keywords. As the editors explain: “In regard to the emphasized terms, each word is styled with typography that best matches its definition, for example, ‘frozen’ appears in light blue, while ‘Lord’ is rendered in a more refined typeface.”³⁷ They go on to explain that their adaptation seeks “to reinforce comprehension and introduce young readers to the richness of Shakespeare’s texts while maintaining the integrity of the original work.”³⁸

Working with WordPress instead of TEI/XML substantially reduces the technical demands on students. Logistical demands on instructors are also reduced, although the efforts needed to maintain a WordPress site do need to be taken under consideration. As with the second case study, this approach represents a compromise, preserving opportunities to make and implement decisions for a collectively edited digital edition, but omitting the in-depth editorial experiences provided through learning TEI/XML. Because the students are not required to engage in the form of intimate analysis necessary to produce TEI editions, matters of editorial praxis are less visible to them. Students still engage with some aspects of editing and transcription, such as handling long s characters or determining which features from the appearance of their printed source merit preservation. But the focus of their analyses tends to fall on display and publication, as these are the spaces in which they have the most powerful set of tools for expressing their insights. This assignment’s narrower scope—both in the reduced technical toolkit and the focus on a single page—enables students to generate the kinds of deformations and adaptations made evident in the examples discussed above. For situations in which text encoding is out of scope, editing via WordPress can support the key outcomes of this approach to teaching digital editions, including the balance between individual and collective decision-making and the attention to multiple stages of digital edition development.

Conclusion

The assignments discussed in this article vary in their technical complexity, but they share two key characteristics: they ask students to make decisions for the full scope of the editorial and publication processes, and they are structured such that students make those decisions both individually and collectively. While there are some

challenges associated with this approach—in particular, the technical demands on students and instructors are substantial—there are also significant learning benefits. When students are asked to make decisions about textual selection, transcription, regularization, annotation, and publication, they gain insight into the layers of mediation that go into all edited texts, becoming more informed readers of both digital and print editions. This combination of group and individual activities gives students a framework for making informed decisions, as well as a stronger understanding of early print cultures. Students make more rigorous editorial decisions because discussion and consensus are required—the necessary negotiations between the group’s encoding standards and the particularities of each individual document are a key part of their learning.

As we have seen, pedagogical approaches to digital editing that emphasize both individual choice and collective consensus—and that prioritize giving students a full toolkit for expressing those editorial decisions—may be intensive, but they also help students gain much more informed insights into the mediations of edited texts, essential knowledge for the complex and often-changing engagements with textuality that are so central to scholarship today. Students may not need to interact with early typographic features such as the long *s* in their ongoing studies, but they do need to navigate complex and often changing forms of textuality, and this assignment helps prepare them to do so with critical attention and an informed understanding of textual mediations, transmissions, and manipulations.

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1. The long *s* (ſ) is an archaic form of lowercase *s* used in early printed books, as in “fſyle” or “reviſing.” ↵
 2. In addition to the published research discussed here, my work is also indebted to the scholarship in the collection *Teaching with Text Encoding*, edited by Brian Croxall and Diane Jakacki, forthcoming from the University of Minnesota Press. I am grateful to Diane and Brian for their feedback on my own piece in this volume, and to my co-contributors for the generous and eminently useful insights they have shared in their chapters. ↵
 3. For instance, Yasmin Faghihi, Matthew Holford, and Huw Jones write that “the TEI has a reputation for being difficult to teach and difficult to learn” and provide several case studies for successfully teaching TEI despite these challenges. “Teaching the Text Encoding Initiative: Context, Community and Collaboration,” *Journal of Open Humanities Data* 8 (2022): 2, <https://doi.org/10.5334/johd.72>. ↵
 4. Kailey Fukushima and Karen Bourrier, “Inside *Digital Dinah Craik*: Feminist Pedagogy, Cognitive Apprenticeship, and the TEI,” *Journal of the Text Encoding Initiative* 12 (2019–2020): para. 3, <https://doi.org/10.4000/jtei.2185>. ↵
 5. Janelle Jenstad, Kim McLean-Fiander, and Kathryn R. McPherson, “The *MoEML* Pedagogical Partnership Program,” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (2017): para. 1, <https://dhq.digitalhumanities.org/vol/11/3/000302/000302.html>. ↵
 6. Maura Ives, Victor Del Hierro, Bailey Kelsey, Laura Catherine Smith, and Christina Sumners, “Encoding the Discipline: English Graduate Student Reflections on Working with TEI,” *Journal of the Text Encoding Initiative* 6 (2013): para. 2, <https://doi.org/10.4000/jtei.882>. ↵

7. John Bryant, Mary Isbell, Christopher Ohge, and Mary Erica Zimmer, “Digital Editing and Pedagogy Making Editions / Building Arguments,” *Scholarly Editing* 41 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.55520/KBS01GGN>. ↵
8. As of spring 2026. ↵
9. For more on how TEI and XML model data, see Julia Flanders and Fotis Jannidis, “A Gentle Introduction to Data Modeling,” in *The Shape of Data in Digital Humanities*, ed. Julia Flanders and Fotis Jannidis (Routledge, 2018). See also John Bradley, “Documents and Data: Modelling Materials for Humanities Research in XML and Relational Databases,” *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 20, no. 1 (2005): 133–51, <https://doi.org/10.1093/lc/fqh048>. ↵
10. “CETEIcean README,” Text Encoding Initiative Consortium, accessed October 8, 2025, <https://github.com/TEIC/CETEIcean>. JavaScript is a programming language that is central to the composition of the modern Web. ↵
11. “CETEIcean README,” TEI Consortium. ↵
12. XSLT (Extensible Stylesheet Language Transformations) is a language for transforming XML documents, often into other forms of XML or to HTML. ↵
13. CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) is a language for specifying the styling to be used in a marked-up document, often an HTML document. CSS makes it possible, for example, to specify that all headings should be bolded, or all paragraphs should be aligned left, or all instances of emphasized text should be italicized. ↵
14. We first developed this assignment through participation in one of the WWP’s “Taking TEI Further: Teaching with TEI” seminars, generously funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. ↵
15. The text encoding assignment for this class can be viewed on the Literature and Digital Diversity course site: <https://litdigitaldiversity.northeastern.edu/part-i-shakespeare-in-many-forms-text-encoding/>. ↵
16. *Strange News from Scotland* (W. Lee, 1647), 1–2, Early English Books Online. ↵
17. Sarah Lamodi, “Encoding Reflection,” assignment for Literature and Digital Diversity, 2021. ↵
18. Lamodi, “Encoding Reflection.” ↵
19. XML comments are enclosed with `<!--` and `-->`. ↵
20. Sarah Lamodi, “Strange Newes” annotation, *Literature and Digital Diversity*, 2021, <https://roominhistory.com/GenderWomen/StrangeNews.html>. ↵
21. Lamodi, “Strange Newes” annotation. ↵

22. The commitment of time is a particular consideration, given that the Oxygen XML editor offers free trials that last thirty days, which can be enough time to complete the project but which leaves little room for error or revision of plans. ↵
23. See “Teaching Partners Program,” Women Writers Project,
<https://www.wwp.northeastern.edu/wwp/teaching/pedagogical-dev.html>. ↵
24. While many archival documents are preserved in open-access digital collections like Google Books, this modification can also be useful for institutional contexts in which paywalled digital collections like Early English Books Online are not available. ↵
25. For instance, students in one section decided to use <rs> (referencing string) to capture the many indirect references to persons in their text; this was a deliberately recuperative tactic, since they observed that historically marginalized persons were less likely to be called by their names. ↵
26. It is worth remembering that *lower* demand is not *no* demand. As we found the second time we taught this project, we needed to further simplify the assignment once it became clear that we had misjudged the degree of technical lift for the many students who were learning how to navigate their file browsers and use keyboard shortcuts for the first time. Kane describes the insights from this iteration of the project in a post on the WWP’s blog, identifying lessons learned as the need to slow instruction, provide more scaffolding, and build in time to “teach what we sometimes think of as ‘basic’ computer skills.” Jessica Kane, “Using Encoding to Teach Textual Analysis II: Bigger and Badder,” *Women Writers Project: The Blog*, March 20, 2023,
<https://www.wwp.northeastern.edu/blog/kane-incidents/>. ↵
27. Jessica Kane, “Using Encoding to Teach Textual Analysis,” *Women Writers Project: The Blog*, July 11, 2022,
<https://www.wwp.northeastern.edu/blog/kane-fantomina/>. ↵
28. The WWO edition from the first collaboration is available at
<https://www.wwp.northeastern.edu/texts/haywood.fantomina.html> and the student edition is available at
<https://www.wwp.northeastern.edu/lab/publications/fantomina/fantomina.html>. In the second collaboration, the students worked on Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and completed approximately half of the text; our hope is to finish the text in a subsequent iteration of the assignment. ↵
29. “Our Pedagogical Partners,” Map of Early Modern London, accessed October 8, 2025,
https://mapoflondon.uvic.ca/pedagogical_partnership.htm. ↵
30. “About,” Cacodemon Shakespeare, ed. Erika Boeckeler, accessed October 8, 2025,
<https://cacodemonshakespeare.com/>. ↵
31. Students are not required to publish their pages on the class site; those who elect not to publish can instead leave their pages as drafts. Most students, however, are excited at the idea of publicly sharing their work. ↵

32. Emily Sullivan, H4v headnote, Cacodemon Shakespeare *Merchant of Venice*, accessed October 8, 2025, <http://cacodemonshakespeare.com/comedies/merchant/h4v/>. ↵
33. Sullivan, H4v headnote. ↵
34. Sullivan, H4v headnote. ↵
35. Annelise Dramm and Maisie Saganic, G1v headnote, Cacodemon Shakespeare *Merchant of Venice*, accessed October 8, 2025, <https://cacodemonshakespeare.com/comedies/merchant/g1v/>. ↵
36. Lea Hendler and Jennie Koh, B1v headnote, Cacodemon Shakespeare *Hamlet*, accessed October 8, 2025, <https://cacodemonshakespeare.com/tragedies/hamlet/b1v/>. ↵
37. Aya Al-Zehhawi and Grant Richmond, C1r headnote, Cacodemon Shakespeare *Hamlet*, accessed October 8, 2025, <https://cacodemonshakespeare.com/tragedies/hamlet/c1r/>. ↵
38. Al-Zehhawi and Richmond, C1r headnote. ↵