
ARTICLE – DIGITAL MODERN LANGUAGES

Digital Literacy and Modern Languages: How to Make a Digital Video

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In this article, you will learn how to integrate digital literacy and Modern Languages through digital videos. The first part of the article is mainly addressed to teachers and instructors and will extensively discuss pedagogical questions. It looks at how the digital video can help teach and learn the four language skills. In the second part of this article, i.e. the actual tutorial, you will learn how to make your own teacher/student-generated videos. The tutorial will explain how to combine and edit text, video and audio in a variety of ways, in order to serve different teaching and learning outcomes in Modern Languages, as well as looking at what software and applications can assist this purpose. In the final section, I will present a number of pedagogical activities using digital videos and what learning outcomes they can help achieve.

Introduction

Computer technology has been embedded into the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages for decades. After the early drill-and-practice approaches of the 1960s and 1970s and the development of specific software for language learning in the 1980s and 1990s, since the turn of the millennium we have entered a new phase of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in which multimedia and computer-mediated communication (CMC) have become common practice in teaching and learning. The Internet, text-based online virtual reality systems and learning management systems, such as MUDs (multi-user dungeons, i.e. multi-player real-time virtual worlds), MOOCs (massive open online courses), Canvas, Blackboard and Moodle, have allowed easy remote communication and co-sharing of teaching and learning resources, so that instructors can experiment with blended teaching, personalised instructions, new collaboration models and a wide array of innovative, engaging learning strategies. The latest generation of apps and e-textbooks, games and simulations, new digital tools to edit and present verbal and audiovisual materials, discussion boards, web workspaces, e-portfolios, and machine assessment have multiplied and diversified the opportunities to work on the four language skills (reading, speaking, listening, writing) both individually and collaboratively. Software companies such as Adobe, often in collaboration with hardware companies such as Apple Inc., for example, have worked towards app suites that allow users to communicate and express their creativity in original ways. This has added a new toolbox to expand our everyday communication and advance our digital literacy. These digital tools offer

a wide variety of resources to learn a new language and gain knowledge about its culture. Most significantly, they have become ubiquitous and can be easily accessed through smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices. In a nutshell, computer technology has gone beyond just 'assisting' language learning and has become an integral part of the way we communicate in most situations in our daily life. More recently, artificial intelligence (AI) has further extended the affordances of adaptive, personalised and differentiated instruction. By using data input to create 'Student Profiles', the so-called AI-powered education can record what concepts students grasp better and which they struggle with, how they respond to different teaching methods, how quickly they reply to questions and what incentives drive them.

This article focuses on one of these creative digital tools, namely digital video software, as an excellent 'intermedium' for both teachers and students in Modern Languages to combine text (print and digital contents), video (film footage, documentary material) and audio (music, voiceover, sounds). Different combinations can be used for the development of a wide variety of language skills, as well as creative and critical abilities. To this end, the first part of the article is mainly addressed to teachers and instructors and will extensively discuss pedagogical questions. It looks at how the digital video can help teach and learn the four language skills. Teacher/student-generated videos can be created and used at all levels. They can serve as teaching material for 5–18-year-olds (including Key Stages, GCSE and A-level in the UK), undergraduate students (from first year to final year) and postgraduates. In the second part of this article, i.e. the actual tutorial, you will learn how to make your own teacher/student-generated videos through a combination of techniques. The tutorial will explain how to combine and edit text, video and audio in a variety of ways, in order to serve different teaching and learning outcomes in Modern Languages, as well as looking at what software and applications can assist this purpose. Most of the digital tools listed do not require any prior technical expertise. The final section will present a number of examples of digital videos to both educators and students and what learning outcomes they can help achieve.

1. Digital literacy and Modern Languages

Learning a foreign language today also implies learning how to communicate through a variety of digital formats, as well as to analyse, understand and critically engage with its culture through digital storytelling, social networking and digital applications. The latest generation of students – 'Generation Z' (born between 1995 and 2010) which, after the millennials (born between 1980 and 1994), is the second generation of 'digital natives' (Prensky) – has been exposed to the internet, to social networks and to mobile systems from an early age. Inevitably, this has produced a 'hypercognitive generation' which is 'very comfortable with collecting and cross-referencing many sources of information and with integrating virtual and offline experiences' (Francis & Hoefel 2018). In order to teach new generations how to critically engage with digital technology and develop an awareness of how digital tools are used to convey information and meaning, whether for commercial or cultural purposes, digital literacy has become part of the key curriculum.¹

The term 'digital literacy' was coined in 1997 by Paul Gilster who defined it as 'the ability to both understand and use digitised information' (Gilster 2). This concept built upon a number of other crucial literacies in our time, including visual literacy (using non-textual symbols and images to make sense of knowledge), technological literacy (the ability to use a particular technology or technologies), computer literacy (from simply using computers to coding) and

¹ See, for example, the handbook produced by Sarah Payton and Cassie Hague handbook which introduces educational practitioners to the concepts and contexts of digital literacy. <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/futl06/futl06.pdf>.

information literacy (finding, evaluating, using and sharing information) (Belshaw). Digital literacy means being able to communicate and represent knowledge in different contexts and to different audiences (for example, in visual, audio or textual modes). This involves finding and selecting relevant information, as well as critically evaluating and re-contextualising knowledge. This process is underpinned by an understanding of the cultural and social contexts in which it takes place.

Following Bloom's taxonomy (**Figure 1**), digital literacy engages students in the process of learning on many levels. Students can use technology to help them remember new information. They can watch a video or create their own to demonstrate understanding. Students can devise infographics to show processes. They can even use social media to get answers to their questions and interact with people around the world (Cole 2019).²

Learning a foreign language and developing digital literacy at the same time is therefore a winning combination for present and future generations of professionals. Making videos, also referred to as 'videography', in order to give a presentation, launch and promote a service or a product, inform, tell an inspirational story, advise on something, entertain and so on, is a central communication skill in our time. There are a number of professional fields in which the ability to make videos is very much in demand: journalism, digital marketing, computer-assisted language teaching/training, online education. Videos circulate readily on social networks and require less concentration than reading. Hence, they are preferred by many. Moreover, as I explain more extensively in the next section, as an intermedium, the video allows us to critically and creatively merge different media contents in a linear or non-linear sequence.

1.1. Making digital videos: rationale, aims and objectives

Video presentations offer the possibility to present topics in a multimodal format, by using text, video and audio, in interesting ways. They also contribute to the development of digital literacy: we can access and use our own pictures and videos or the broad range of resources

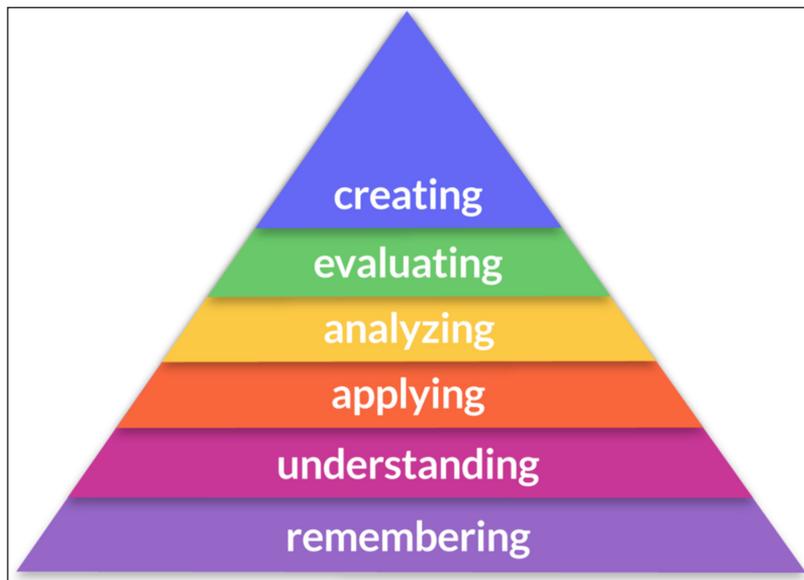


Figure 1: Bloom's taxonomy.

² <https://www.schoology.com/blog/epic-guide-digital-literacy-education>.

found on the Internet, learn how to differentiate reliable sources from unreliable ones, ensure we select reusable materials, edit them using various applications and software, and gain multimodal literacy. Video essays are another popular educational genre, especially in screen studies. They allow users to *transmediate* between written text to a multimodal form of communication which combines written, audio and visual modes to communicate an idea or a thesis. As an assignment, for instance, the video essay is an excellent way to develop an argument using the language of cinema, video and visual culture. It is also a way to reflect and critically explore 'how we think about what we see', as Kevin B. Lee argues in his essay film.³

In an age in which we are overwhelmed by audiovisual inputs, visual critical thinking has become increasingly important. Video essays offer new tools for criticism at a time when culture is produced in a huge variety of new media. In this respect, we can consider video essays as a 'media stylo', along the lines of what Astruc defined as 'camera stylo' in 1948.⁴ Basically, the language of video is another rhetorical mode in which to 'write'. As Eric S. Faden put it in 'A Manifesto for Critical Media':

Importantly, the [new] media stylo does not replace traditional scholarship. This is a new practice beyond traditional scholarship. So how does critical media differ from traditional scholarship and what advantages does it offer? First, as you will see with the works in this issue, critical media demonstrates a shift in rhetorical mode. The traditional essay is argumentative-thesis, evidence, conclusion. Traditional scholarship aspires to exhaustion, to be the definitive, end-all-be-all, last word on a particular subject. The media stylo, by contrast, suggests possibilities – it is not the end of scholarly inquiry; it is the beginning. It explores and experiments and is designed just as much to inspire as to convince. (Fadden 2007)

Now, how can teacher/student-generated videos be relevant in teaching and learning Modern Languages? It goes without saying that teaching and learning formats that involve reading, listening, speaking and writing are great allies of Modern Languages. When we create a digital video, whether it is a video essay or a video presentation, we need to engage with various combinations of either text (print and digital contents), video (film, documentary material) and/or audio (music, voiceover, sounds). Reading is practised when we research, collect and analyse written texts, either print or web based, about a certain topic, understand them correctly, learn relevant vocabulary, formulate coherent new sentences and/or texts in the form of captions or script to read for the voiceover. Listening is activated when we select and/or imitate dialogues or oral texts we want to reproduce and edit – for students, this could be the voiceover of a sample video produced by the teacher or an oral text (a dialogue, a description, a voiceover) in a film or documentary. Speaking is practised by students when they produce the voiceover for their videos. Depending on their linguistic level, it could be a self-introduction, a series of instructions about how to cook a dish, a dialogue, an interview, the script of an essay and so on. Students need to check that their pronunciation is correct before publishing their videos. Either their teachers or web resources on phonetics can serve this purpose.

³ <https://vimeo.com/73733888>.

⁴ As Astruc claimed, the metaphor of the 'camera-pen' has a very precise sense: 'By it I mean that the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language. This art, although blessed with an enormous potential, is an easy prey to prejudice; it cannot go on for ever ploughing the same field of realism and social fantasy which has been bequeathed to it by the popular novel. It can tackle any subject, any genre. The most philosophical meditations on human production, psychology, metaphysics, ideas, and passions lie well within its province. I will even go so far as to say that contemporary ideas and philosophies of life are such that only the cinema can do justice to them'. Alexandre Astruc, 'Du Stylo à la caméra et de la caméra au stylo', *L'Écran française* 30 March 1948.

Finally, writing is exercised when students have to come up with the script for their video, as well as the captions of the video frames. At more advanced levels, teachers can request a separate critical commentary in written form in which students provide an argument or explanation for their editing choices. There are numerous possibilities for creating teaching materials and assignments for students by using videos. What you need is video-making/editing software, a database/collection of texts and audiovisual materials (including images, video clips, music files, sounds), a file converter and a file management platform.

2. The Tutorial

2.1. *Software and applications*

Video-making software: A number of free excellent video-making/editing software packages are available today for both Mac and Windows users. To create a basic video, Adobe Spark Video is one of the easiest free web and mobile applications to use. You can make videos in a few minutes without any preliminary experience (**see video sample 2**).⁵ To create more advanced videos, for example video essays, some of the most popular free software for editing at the time of writing this tutorial are VideoPad (Windows, Mac), iMovie (Mac), Movie Maker (Windows). An excellent non-free program is Adobe Premiere Pro. Adobe also offers discount packages on multiple applications, such as Creative Cloud All Apps, for teachers and students, which features a variety of excellent apps (Photoshop, Premiere Pro, Premiere Rush, Illustrator, Lightroom, Dreamweaver and many others).

Texts and audiovisual materials: Digital videos can replace or integrate written and oral communicative and argumentative activities and assignments for language and content modules in Modern Languages. When we make a video, we can thus use a broad range of texts, such as:

- a literary extract;
- a poem;
- a caption;
- pictures;
- video recording of printed material;
- photographs and images taken in real places or from print or digital platforms, such as screenshots;
- film excerpts, video clips, screen recordings, mobile phone footage, including crowd-sourced material;
- sounds and music taken from daily life or digital archives.

Users must check that the material is copyright free and, by all means, give credit to the owners at the end of the video. Various sounds, vectors, music, images and video clip libraries provide resources we can mix in when we edit our videos. For example, for sounds: Audacity, Wikimedia Commons (multimedia), Splice; for vectors and images: Flaticon, Freepik, FlickCC, Google Images (check copyright status), MorgueFile, Everypixel; for videos: Pexels, YouTube, Vimeo, Creative Commons. Many national media archives, such as Pathé, RAI and BFI, have also made their resources open access. Both teachers and students can also use their own photos, footage or digitalised documents taken with their mobile phones, for example. A number of web and mobile applications also assist the search for and editing of such materials.

⁵ You can find step-by-step instructions about how to make a video with Adobe Spark at the following link: <https://spark.adobe.com/make/video-maker/>.

File converters: When you use multimedia materials to create a video, you might need to convert the file format. The following are some of the best file converters for both Mac and Windows: Wondershare UniConverter, DivX Converter (Mac, Windows), Movavi Video Converter (Mac, Windows), Any Video Converter (Windows, Mac), HandBrake (Windows, Mac). These are just for Mac: Aimersoft Video Converter (Mac), WonderFox HD Video Converter Factory, ACH Prism Video Converter Software, DivX Converter, Leawo Video Converter.

File management platforms: Videos occupy a significant amount of disk space, so it is preferable to save them on shared free cloud storage platforms (such as Google Drive, for example, or Canvas in university settings) where both teachers and students can create and manage their own e-portfolios in a sustainable way. Another option is to create a module website and a blog space with the likes of Wix or Wordpress, where teachers and/or students can not only share video materials but also leave comments and feedback.

2.2. The process: how to make a digital video

Making a video usually requires a plan, a storyboard, the collection and editing of relevant multimedia materials, references and credits. Let us consider each phase in more detail. You can find a specific example of the process and the practical demo in the Appendix (see 'News Video').

Planning: The plan depends on the communicative function. Do you want to inform, teach, motivate, sell, persuade, entertain, enlighten, advocate, share, explain, contradict, propose, express your opinion/argument? What do you want to communicate? What story do you want to tell? Or, what is your argument? Who is the intended audience – students? Faculty? General public? What is their prior knowledge? From what perspective will you tell your story? Personal? Journalistic? Biased/objective? What register, tone and style will you use? Formal? Informal? Black & white? Write down a few sentences of a potential dialogue, for example, or the texts you are going to read as a voiceover or from which you will extract your captions, or a first draft of a script to use for the narration voiceover if you want to produce a video essay. You can get some inspiration by watching other videos.⁶ From a pedagogical perspective, in this phase students are encouraged to reflect on communicative functions and forms, registers, tones, styles. They have to think about vocabulary and special phrases, verb tenses, adverbs and so on to use in a specific context.

Storyboarding: Storyboarding (see **Figure 2**) is how you organise your story or argument in shots. Each shot contains three pieces of information: visual + script + notes. Each shot on a storyboard represents approximately six seconds of the video – this is the recommended length of each shot. So, if you want to set out a three-minute video, it means you have to prepare about thirty shots. The visual choices should be strategic and evocative. You can use PowerPoint or Word to do your storyboarding.

In this phase, students have to elaborate their thoughts, organise their story into sequences, decide how to structure it from a temporal perspective and practise their writing. In summary, effective writing and communicative skills are crucial at this stage. At a more advanced level, students should also reflect on how to create meaning in a multimodal way. In other words, they have to choose how to combine images, audio, space, orality, writing, gestures

⁶ This segment was copied and edited with permission from Tufts University, (2014). *Video treatment planning – Multimedia production guide*. Medford, MA. See <http://researchguides.library.tufts.edu/DDSVideoTreatment-Planning>.

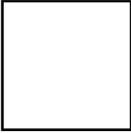
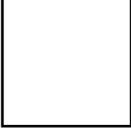
MAIN STORY BOARD/Story: Story title _____					
Image 1		Image 2		Image 3	
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Figure 2: Example of storyboard.

and movement in significant ways. From a pedagogical perspective, students learn how to develop visual thinking through a grammar of multi-literacies. Because they are dealing with a foreign language and culture, this activity is extremely helpful to understanding visual, audio, social and material culture. At higher levels, students can develop a critical perspective on the topic by juxtaposing and/or combining images, sounds, words and other cultural materials in a contrastive way.

Collecting and editing media materials (audio, video, images, written texts): At this stage, you are ready to choose an image or a six-second video clip for each shot. You can also add the caption (which can be written and read/acted as a voice on top of the images), the music or the sounds. You can use multimedia material from online resources (see section 2.1, 'Texts and audiovisual materials', above) or your own pictures, videos, footage. For both teachers and students, this is a research activity that helps acquire knowledge about print and online resources and how to use them. In this phase, students practise reading and listening comprehension, they gain awareness of visual culture related to the topic, and develop critical web search skills. Moreover, they have to ensure that the material they select does not include fake news or factual information.

Video editing: The actual process of video editing can be started with one of the editing software applications listed in 'Video making software'. Each software package offers a number of specific features and effects which can help you add extra professionalism to your videos (see [video sample 2](#)). At this stage, students practise speaking, especially when they use voiceover. They also acquire digital literacy skills in video editing.

Credits and references: Please remember to give credit to each individual who has collaborated in the production. You can use standard sentences like 'Written and produced by [names]'. Next, add a short sentence in which you explain the purpose of the video. For example, 'This video was produced for [course name] at [Institution's name] in [year]'. Finally, add the bibliographical references you have used and the names of the images, videos, texts, music copyright owners and so forth.

Hosting: Vimeo or YouTube? It depends on your personal preferences. YouTube is certainly the most popular platform, but Vimeo tends to attract more artists and creatives.⁷ Read the relevant Privacy Settings very carefully and make your choices. Some basic information about how to upload your videos onto Vimeo and YouTube can be found respectively [here](#) and [here](#).

2.3. Examples of activities

Teacher/student-generated videos can be used in multiple ways in Modern Languages classes. Teachers can create their own personalised video materials, use them to work on specific language functions or for their lectures – to introduce a topic in their content module (e.g. an author or film director, a novel, a historical phase or a particular aspect of society). By employing such materials, teachers also provide students with examples of videos from which they can take inspiration for their own creative production. One of the advantages of making your own videos is that they can be adapted to different classes, purposes and students' needs. In turn, students will prepare, individually or collaboratively, their own videos. These can count as an assignment or practice during the course. I propose below a selection of tasks for each level.

- Introducing yourself (beginner to advanced): Most of the beginners' language functions, including describing who you are, what you do, your family, your hobbies, your favourite food, your routine, your hometown, your ambitions and so on, can be practised in this type of video project through writing and speaking. By using images, students are encouraged to provide detailed description or reveal particular 'backstage' information which may not appear in the picture. This type of video can be basic (approx. 250 words, i.e. 20 shots for 2 mins, **see video sample 1**) or advanced, including simple narrations and captions or more elaborate descriptions (approx. 1,000 words, i.e. 80 shots for 8 mins).
- Describing a place or a person (beginner to advanced): This type of video can be used to describe a place we went on holiday, a city we visited, a tourist attraction, a natural landscape or such like. We can create a documentary or a personal story. If we want to describe a person, we can provide different images of the chosen subject for each perspective we want to assume. We can focus on the character and their social interaction, concentrate on the physical appearance and lifestyle, and/or talk about our relationship with that person. This is an excellent opportunity to consolidate vocabulary about different places and personalities at any level.
- Describing a process or a recipe (pre-intermediate to advanced): With this type of video students basically learn how to make a tutorial. It could be giving instructions about how to cook a dish, assemble a wardrobe, knit, do make-up, use a platform and so on. It is an excellent tool for teachers, as they can provide instructions about creating ad hoc video genres for their courses, for example. Moreover, students can use them in order to teach others what they can do. By doing this, they will practise a series of language functions and forms, such as imperatives, verb actions, technical words, special phrases.
- Giving news in journalistic style (intermediate to advanced): The journalistic style of TV news is very specific. TV journalists need to be concise, effective and highly communicative. Students can simulate the 'news style' and present stories which have been neglected by mainstream journalism, for instance. They can also tell stories about the country of the language under study in its original language. For this sort of video, language skills must be quite high. Students need to read news and produce their own concise and compelling summaries (**see video sample 2**).

⁷ You can find a comparative review about YouTube and Vimeo here webtrends.about.com/od/profiles/a/Vimeo-Vs-YouTube-Video-Sharing-Sites.htm.

- Talking about a novel, a film, a show or an artwork (intermediate to advanced): Especially in literature, cinema, theatre and art classes, both teachers and students can present an artist and their work through a video. Given the topic, this is a typical example of inter-art/intermedia criticism. We present a literary, filmic, theatrical or any other artistic topic through the language of visual culture. At more advanced levels, students can prepare their presentations and essays in this form. They therefore need to transmediate their selected topic or question from written text to multimodal text.
- Selling something (intermediate to advanced): Selling a product or a lifestyle via social media is at the core of digital marketing. Videos offer a great opportunity to create short and attractive ads in a few shots. Students here practise the art of persuasion, promoting and oral communication skills. This type of video requires a strategic construction of meaning through multimodality – in other words, the combination of images + caption + sound which evoke feelings in the potential customers. In order to learn more about ‘making visual meanings’, watch this **video**.
- Talking about politics or current affairs (intermediate to advanced): Students learn how to argue for or against an idea, comment on the news, disagree with others and express their own views on specific topics. By imitating the style of a talk show, a political debate or a TV interview, students can practise this linguistic function, by filming themselves in similar contexts or talking over images which represent facts and key figures. With this type of video, students can effectively practise interactive communication skills with other students, learn and consolidate relevant vocabulary, perfect their pronunciation, prepare interviews and concise introductions of main events and people.
- Video poetry (pre-intermediate to advanced): A video poem is a poetic reading accompanied by audiovisual material. It is an excellent method for both teachers and students to transmediate poetic images into digital images – for example pictures, art, film frames, video art. Shots can be used to evoke images included in single lines, stanzas or entire poems. Students learn about difficult poetic expressions and how to read a poem with the appropriate tone and pronunciation.

Making any of the videos described above can be an individual or a collaborative activity. Collaboration can happen among various groups of people: between language tutors in higher education and secondary school teachers, in order to explore together the potential of multimodal teaching in those disciplinary areas such as language, art history and history; between students when they work collaboratively on a video project (in this case, they can share tasks in the different phases of the video-making process); between teachers/students and society or public institutions (some videos may require interviews or research in archives); between students and artists, and so on.

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Emanuela Patti (MA UCL, PhD University of Birmingham) is a Senior Researcher at Royal Holloway. She is the author of *Pasolini After Dante: the ‘Divine Mimesis’ and the Politics of Representation* (Legenda, 2016), as well as the co-edited book *Transmedia: Storia, memoria e narrazioni attraverso i media* (Mimesis, 2014) and the edited book *La nuova gioventù? L’eredità intellettuale di Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Joker, 2009). In 2016 she edited two special issues on experimental narratives from the avant-gardes to the digital age: *Experimental Narratives: From the Novel to Digital Storytelling*, a special issue of the *Journal of Comparative Critical Studies*, 13.3 and *Reading Practices in Experimental Narratives: A Comparative Perspective from Print to Digital Fiction in Modern Languages*, a special issue of the *Journal of Romance Studies*, 16.1. Her second monograph on Italian electronic literature, will be published within the

series Italian Perspectives (Peter Lang). She is the forum co-editor of the journal *Explorations in Media Ecology*, the official journal of the Media Ecology Association.

Videos

Videos from all the tutorials in this collection have been archived in a special playlist on the Digital Modern Languages YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfaB2f0CyBdu1OluU36KKLkXpKWDco62q>.

Here is a list of videos associated with this tutorial:

- Video sample <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=854Pbc5M5TE>
- Making Videos: Digital Methods in Modern Languages <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIxoanMCyq>

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