



# **Digital Methods for Disability Studies**



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School of Disability Studies, X University

Adan Jerreat-Poole; Ted Rawson; Juan Escobar-Lamanna; Jill Hoffman;  
Hannaford Edwards; Tali Cherniawsky; Darren Creech; and Esther Ignagni

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# About eCampusOntario

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## Using This Resource

We encourage you to use this resource and would love to hear if you have integrated it into your curriculum. Please consider notifying Dr. Ignagni if you are using part of this Pressbook, identifying the learning focus and the number of learners. Please help us support future OER efforts by reporting your adoption of this resource at <https://openlibrary.ecampusontario.ca/report-an-adoption/>

Dr. Esther Ignagni  
Ryerson\* University

eignagni@ryerson.ca

415-979-5000 ex. 554286

350 Victoria St.

Toronto, ON M5B 2K3

\*name change pending summer 2022

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# Authorship

This Pressbook was written by many authors in a collaborative process. The content was led and modules edited by the project lead. Each module author is listed below.

## Project Lead

Esther Ignagni, PhD, Director and Associate Professor, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

# **Pressbook Editors**

Esther Ignagni, PhD, Director and Associate Professor, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Hannaford Edwards, MSc, Project Coordinator, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Tali Cherniawsky, MSc, Lab Coordinator, Disability Publics Lab, Ryerson University\*, Toronto, ON, Canada

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

## **Course developer**

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

## **Content Writers**

### **Module 1**

Ted Rawson, MA, Research Associate, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

### **Module 2**

Ted Rawson, MA, Research Associate, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Tiffany-Anne Stones, BA, Master of Educational Technology Program, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

## **Module 3**

Ted Rawson, MA, Research Associate, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

## **Module 4**

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Tali Cherniawsky, MSc, Lab Coordinator, Disability Publics Lab, Ryerson University\*, Toronto, ON, Canada

## **Modules 5, 6 and 7**

Jill Hoffman, MA, PhD Candidate, Western University, Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research, London, ON, Canada

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

## **Modules 8 and 9**

Juan Escobar-Lamanna, MA, PhD Candidate, Western University, Faculty of Information and Media Studies, London, ON, Canada

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

## **Module 10**

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

\*name change pending Summer 2022.

# Preface

# How to Use This Pressbook

This Pressbook has been developed as a platform for hosting an introductory course at the intersection of digital methods and disability studies. The course content has been piloted first as an asynchronous, online course. Organized around a scaffolding assignment in which students created a digital project, the instructor used the modules to offer space for students to experiment with digital tools and methods. The sample course outline and assignment instructions can be found in the back matter of the Pressbook or at the following links:

[Sample syllabus](#)

[Sample assignment descriptions and breakdown](#)

[Sample class schedule](#)

In the second run of this course, we worked with a community-based group of disabled self-advocates. This time, we moved through the modules swiftly, covering two per day in the week-long, synchronous, online session. Our focus was on introducing the critical concepts relevant to disability studies and thinking through how they would find expression in the digital sphere. The disabled community members would later go on to use the exercises and tools presented in the Pressbook to launch digital campaigns for improved access to housing and attendant services.

Throughout the Pressbook, exercises are primarily developed as if users are working independently. In this preface, we have included ‘[Instructor notes](#)’ corresponding to module exercises, offering suggestions and collaborative documents to adapt these exercises into a more dialogical form (coming March 31, 2022).

Included in the Pressbook back matter are Youtube tutorials for some of the digital tools needed to carry out module exercises. At the time of the Pressbook preparation, these tools are widely available and free for use. We

recognize this may change over time and encourage users to substitute alternatives as needed.

Where possible, links have been PermaCC'd. This means that the content on these sites has been archived for future access, regardless of whether the original site is still operating. However, there are many live links to YouTube videos, digital galleries, and podcasts; please notify us at [eignagni@ryerson.ca](mailto:eignagni@ryerson.ca) if these become unavailable in the future.

# **Notes for Instructors**

This will be updated March 31, 2022 to include ways to make exercises in each module more collaborative and classroom-based.

# Learning Objectives

The Digital Methods for Disability Studies course introduces students to a range of technologies and teaches them to think critically with and through media objects, practices, and processes. In this course, students ask critical questions about digital methods and explore how these methods work with other forms of knowledge production. Through texts, videos, podcasts, games, and interactive activities, students develop their critical thinking, close-reading, textual analysis, platform analysis, visual analysis, and critical game design skills. This course offers students an opportunity to both interrogate the digital realm as a site of inequality and to harness digital tools and methods in addressing complex social challenges. This digital-by-design course responds directly to the expressed needs of students for content that will prepare them to navigate digitally-mediated community, work, learning, cultural, and intimate spaces.

This course is comprised of ten modules. Each module introduces students to theoretical and practical conversations at the intersection of critical disability studies and digital methods. It offers both open-access required and suggested additional readings as well as multimedia resources by key figures in these intersecting fields. Through a series of ‘spotlights,’ students meet emerging and established Canadian disabled and Deaf makers.

## **Throughout this course students will:**

- Become skilled with multiple digital storytelling platforms, such as social media, podcasts, and Twine, in knowledge communication and dissemination
- Gain hands-on experience with meeting AODA standards and making the digital sphere accessible.
- Understand the fundamentals of crip technoscience, crippling digital media, and critical game design and how to apply them in cultural and social environments.
- Develop a nuanced understanding of accessibility and accommodation law, policy, and practice guidelines related to media design and

production. Practice using this knowledge with digital media platforms and technologies.

- Critically reflect on how technological innovation proceeds from and is related to social, cultural, and embodied difference.
- Witness first-hand the impact of the digital divide on disabled people. Analyse sources of inequitable access to digital resources due to economic, physical, geographic, and infrastructure factors.
- Identify the affordances and constraints of media platforms and technologies with attention to access and disability justice. Reflect critically on the labour and ethics of digital making.

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## **Course Production**

### **Project Support**

Darren Creech, Research Assistant & Access Support, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Donna Linklater, Research Assistant, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Shukannya Saif, Access Support, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Erica Friesen, Access Staff, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Paris Master-McRae, Program Coordinator, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

### **Subject Matter Experts**

Eliza Chandler, PhD, Associate Professor, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Pamela Cushing, PhD, Associate Professor, King's University College at Western University, Disability Studies Department, London, ON, Canada

Jeff Preston, PhD, Assistant Professor, King's University College at Western University, Disability Studies Department, London, ON, Canada

## **Workshop Pilot**

Jeffrey Preston, Assistant Professor, King's University College at Western University, London, ON, Canada

Jill Hoffman, Instructor, King's University College at Western University, London, ON, Canada

Juan Escobar-Lamanna, Instructor, King's University College at Western University, London, ON, Canada

Billie Anderson, Instructor, King's University College at Western University, London, ON, Canada

## **Community Collaborators**

Blair Williams, Jennifer Acton, Christine Saikali, Teresa Camilleri, Caroline Acton, Tara Gibson, Mike Iacovone

## **Student Collaborators**

Thai Hunte, Regina Berko, Jemma Waito-Taylor, Simran Bassi, Natasha Deoni, Stephnanie Hart

## **Game Design**

Emily Flynn-Jones, Killjoy Games, Toronto, ON, Canada

## **Pressbooks Production**

## **Graphics and Learning Support**

Sally Goldberg-Powell, eLearning Instructional Technologist, Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Ryerson University\*, Toronto, ON, Canada

Morgan Sea Thomson, MFA, Artist, Toronto, ON, Canada

David Arromba, eLearning Instructional Technologist, Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Ryerson University, Toronto, ON, Canada

## **Platform Support**

Sally Wilson, University Library, Ryerson University\*, Toronto, ON, Canada

Tanya Pabouda, PhD Candidate, Ryerson University\*, Communication and Culture, Toronto, ON, Canada

## **Copyright Support**

Ann Ludbrook, University Library, Ryerson University\*, Toronto, ON, Canada

## **Maker Spotlights**

### **Videography and Video Editing**

Lisa East, Toronto, ON, Canada

### **Sound Production**

Nicolas Field, Nicolas Field Audio, Toronto, ON, Canada

## **Special thank you to maker spotlight video participants:**

Chiara Francesca, Chicago, Illinois, United States of America

Dr. Fady Shanouda, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON, Canada

Dr. Jeff Preston, King's University College at Western University, London, ON, Canada

Dr. Jenelle Rouse, Multi-Lens Existence, London, ON, Canada

Squinky, Soft Chaos, Montreal, QC, Canada

Kaitlin Tremblay, That Monster Games, Toronto, ON, Canada

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# Accessibility Statement

## General Project Statement on Accessibility

This book was designed with accessibility in mind so that it can be accessed by the widest possible audience, including those who use assistive technologies. The web version of this book has been designed to meet the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, level AA](#).

While we aim to ensure that this book is as accessible as possible, we may not always get it right. There may be some supplementary third-party materials, or content not created by the authors of this book, which are not fully accessible. This may include videos that do not have closed captioning or accurate closed captioning, inaccessible PDFs, etc.

If you are having problems accessing any content within the book, please contact: [eignagni@ryerson.ca](mailto:eignagni@ryerson.ca). Please let us know which page you are having difficulty with and include which browser, operating system, and assistive technology you are using.

## Starting with Standard Access

We encourage the users of this Pressbook to start from the standard accessibility and accommodation text and policies in their institutions and to let us know where we could be doing better. For all of us, standard access and accommodation texts are an important starting point for critical discussion.

## Our Access Principles

An ethos and set of practices have developed around accessibility, enacted and adapted by instructors and learners in the context of Disability Studies courses offered through both the School of Disability Studies, Ryerson University (name change pending summer 2022) and the Disability Studies Program at King's University College at Western University.

## **In General Terms:**

Access is **collectively** and **interdependently** created as students, guests, and faculty are invited to share what they need for an accessible learning environment. As such, access is understood to be an interdependent practice that is created by all those who participate in a course.

**Negotiation** and **flexibility** are crucial to access and accommodation, as it is understood that our bodies and minds are dynamic and that what we may need in terms of access can change over time and with circumstance and context. Access check-ins are conducted regularly throughout a course.

Access is always **intersectional**. As part of our commitments to honour the recommendation from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we work to unsettle access and the course content. In conversations about access, we consider how access often privileges the white-settler colonial practice of seeking equal access to all spaces. This unsettling is a key component of disability studies but one that requires critical reflection.

Another way we acknowledge the intersectionality of access is through its **generous framing**. In a course on digital methods, we are aware that students are always making choices about digital access against other questions about the barriers to learning: 'do you have enough to eat?', 'do you feel safe coming to campus?', 'do you have housing?', 'does campus security represent a threat to you?'.

This Pressbook has made every effort to follow principles of **universal design in learning** within the course materials (e.g. lecture transcripts, open-captioned videos, image descriptions). While these practices are logistical, they work symbolically for students, serving as an invitation for

those who may have few opportunities to witness accessible curriculum design.

# **Introduction to Disability Studies**

This module was written by:

Ted Rawson, MA, Research Associate, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

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# Module 1 Readings

1. Graby, S. (2015). Access to work or liberation from work? disabled people, autonomy, and post-work politics. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 4(2), 132. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v4i2.212>

Read the article here:

<https://cjds.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cjds/article/view/212/362>

2. Pfeffer, D. (2002). The Philosophical Foundations of Disability Studies. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 22(2), 3.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v22i2.341>

Read the article here: <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/341/429>

3. Prince, M. J. (2016). Reconsidering knowledge and power: Reflections on disability communities and disability studies in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 5(2), 1. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v5i2.271>

Read the article here:

<https://cjds.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cjds/article/view/271/477>

# Introduction to Disability Studies



Disability Studies is a complex discipline, animated by radical hope, a theoretical commitment to reflexivity and plurality, and its own fair share of internal debates. This brief introduction will begin with a short history of how disability studies became an academic discipline with academic departments in Universities across the world. A conversation between the philosopher Judith Butler and the philosopher, activist, and artist Sunaura Taylor, found through [the YouTube link below](#), will be used to ground the rest of our introduction; a transcript of their conversation is also available (beneath the YouTube link).

## History of Disability Studies

Disability studies emerged as an independent academic field in the 1980s. Disability had been previously studied in universities and hospitals for a long time but always from a clinical or sociological perspective that framed disability as deviance; **disability was considered a problem in need of a solution ore repair.** As a new area of analysis, rooted in activism, disability studies marked a departure from this way of thinking. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes,

Scholars and researchers began to think of **disability as a social construction and a set of cultural products**, and of disabled people as a group historically oppressed but politically recognized under the logic of civil rights.  
(Garland-Thomson, 2013)

The discipline flourished in the 1990s. The first disability studies program was developed in 1996 at Syracuse University (<https://soe.syr.edu/disability-studies/>) and by the end of the decade, it had become a broadly recognized field of study in which aspiring academics could publish, conduct research, and teach through tenured positions. Garland-Thomson writes that once disability had been sufficiently theorized as a “constructed cultural category”—meaning, as a concept emerging from society, rather than a deficiency that exists in the body—scholars suddenly began to recognize disability in places it hadn’t before been seen, leading to decades of productive and inspired inquiry:

With the critical idea of disability as a pervasive and productive presence in the world and self in place and universities supporting disability studies, the field yielded complex interdisciplinary work that expanded toward areas such as law, performance, life writing, design, bioethics, and material culture. By the twenty-first century, finding disability everywhere was no longer a critical surprise.  
(Garland-Thomson, 2013)

## **Examined Life – Judith Butler and Sunaura Taylor**

With this brief history of the field of disability studies in mind, please watch, listen to, or read the conversation between philosopher Judith Butler and philosopher, artist, and advocate Sunaura (Sunny) Taylor. As you watch this video, text boxes will appear with links to chapters in this module expanding on the concepts they discuss. These are also linked in the transcript. You can watch the video in full and use the navigation menu of this Pressbook to read each chapter, click the link on the bottom banner of this page, or navigate to each chapter by clicking the in-video links. The video and transcript are embedded at the end of each chapter for you to continue watching or reading if you prefer to interact with the video.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text.  
You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=386#h5p-3>

[Click here to read the Examined Life video transcript](#)

# Models of Disability

“It wasn’t until I was in my early 20s, about 20 or 21, that I became aware of disability as a political issue. And that happened largely through discovering the social model of disability.”

Taylor (4:20)



In the video, Sunaura Taylor goes on to introduce the ‘social model’ of disability and summarize one of its key interventions—the distinction it makes between ‘disability’ and ‘impairment’. Before exploring the social model and unpacking these terms, it is important to provide a brief overview of the way that ‘models’ help to structure and organize the knowledge generated by disability studies. We will then introduce some of the key models used within the field and describe a few of their essential elements.

## Where Are We and How Did We Get Here?

Ideas about disability existed long before ‘disability studies’ emerged as an academic discipline. Much of the work of disability studies involves looking at the history and present way that those outside of the discipline construct their own understandings of disability, and revealing the influence these concepts have had on how disability is experienced. Analyzing the history and present life of commonly held ideas about disability helps clear a path for new ways of thinking.

Models provide the discipline with a way of organizing these different understandings of disability. The origin of these models differ, as do the ways that they are claimed, contested, and rejected by those who engage with them.

Here are five models of disability that you should be familiar with. This list is by no means exhaustive!

## **The Medical Model**

The medical model of disability conceives of **disability as a personal malady in need of cure**. It relies on medical expertise; examiners, practitioners, and researchers are the keepers of knowledge about both disability and its cures. The person experiencing disability does not possess authoritative knowledge about disability by virtue of their experience. (Withers, 2012; Pfeiffer, 2002)

## **The Rehabilitation Model**

The rehabilitation model is similar to the medical model, but views **disability as something that should be diminished, rather than cured**. The medical model envisions a world of ‘cured’ people—i.e., a world without disability. The rehabilitation model imagines a world of scarcely noticeable disability. The rehabilitation model seeks to ‘rehabilitate’ disability through alterations to the human mind and body as well as to the environment; however, unlike the social model below, and much like the medical model, it is led by an authoritative class of rehabilitation-experts, whose goal is to minimize the presence of disability in society. (Withers, 2012; Pfeiffer, 2002)

## **The Charity Model**

The charity model is a further extension of the medical model, and is based on the same dichotomies of “fit” and “unfit”. Like the medical and rehabilitation models, the charity model often portrays disability as a personal tragedy. In a charity model, disabled people are often constructed

into a class of ‘deserving’ citizens, who are owed a greater volume of social or philanthropic support than the rest of the population; housing, for instance, will be viewed as something to be beneficently allotted to a select few, rather than as a universal right. Disability is managed through the bureaucracies and ideologies of charitable institutions, and ‘care’ follows a rigid, top-down structure. (Withers, 2012)

## Key Takeaways

The 3 models above can be characterized as ‘individualistic’ models in that disability in all 3 is found in the body and/or mind of the disabled person. They can also be categorized as ‘deficit models’, as they are grounded in the underlying assumption that disability is a form of lack. The next two models are more closely aligned with the principles, paradigms, and perspectives of disability studies.

## The Social Model

The social model was formulated by the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation, a British network of advocates who fought for opportunities for people with impairments to live productively and independently in society. The term ‘impairments’ became crucial to their conceptual framework. Impairments referred to the individual and often embodied state of an individual which may impact their ability to participate in society. Disability, in the social model, refers to the social or cultural idea imposed upon an individual by their society. For instance, if an individual does not have motor control of their right hand, they are impaired in that hand; however, that same individual is only disabled to the extent that their society requires them to have full motor control of their right hand. Addressing disability in the social model thus involves a confrontation with society—the onus is on the social collective to create circumstances in which the individual can reach their full potential, regardless of any impairments they may possess. (Shakespeare, 2021)

# **The Radical Model**

The radical model builds upon the social model of disability by conceptualizing disability as a by-product of a capitalist society that requires a certain degree of productivity from its citizens. The radical model strives to eradicate the oppression of disabled peoples by emancipating them from the demands of capitalist economy. It considers ‘impairments’ and ‘disability’ as equally socially constructed, as both are assigned their respective values due to the demand for productivity, and the conflict that demand creates with certain bodies or personalities. Like the social model, the radical model strives for ‘access’, but access here refers to more than physical access to pre-existing institutions: it also means access to non-oppressive spaces and communities. The radical model explicitly draws attention to interlocking forms of oppression, such as anti-black racism and colonial violence, and acknowledges that power functions in the overlap of oppressing ideologies. (Withers, 2012)

# **Bodyminds**

In disability studies, and within this Pressbook, we may use the term bodymind and it is worthwhile to go over what this term means. Bodymind is a materialist feminist term first initially explored by mad studies scholar Margaret Price (2015) and disability studies theorist Alison Kafer (2013). Bodyminds refers to the ways in which bodies and minds are connected and overlapping – which is to say, our bodies and minds are impossible to separate or to fully comprehend in distinction from one another.

The concept of bodyminds helps us understand how what happens to us ‘mentally’ always also impacts us physically and vice versa. At some level that seems intuitive; if we are injured when bitten by a dog, for instance, we feel betrayed, scared, regretful, surprised, or any other emotion that flows out of that context. Similarly, if we are feeling anxious about a public presentation we may feel sweaty, shaky, and notice that our breath rate has increased. Despite how common these connections are for all of us, in Western/ized societies we tend to think of the body and mind as distinct,

prioritizing the mind's capacity to control or overcome corporeal limitations and fragility. Increasingly, we turn to the government of the body through exercise, diet, and other forms of self-care as a means to secure mental wellness. While these efforts speak to how bodies and minds are connected, Price argues that they still keep body and mind “rhetorically distinct” (2015, page i).



Test your knowledge of these models of disability with the Model Match activity below.

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You can continue watching, reading or listening to the video here (the video and transcript start from 4:08 – the quote above)

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[Click here to continue reading the Examined Life video transcript](#)

# Epistemology

“When in those in-between moments—in between male and female, or in between death and health— when do you still count as a human?”

Taylor (12:30)



Before going any further, let’s take a moment to clarify what is meant by ‘epistemology’.

Epistemology refers to theories of knowledge: How do we know what we know? How does ‘knowledge’ become knowledge? Where is it found, and what is the process by which it is accepted?

These questions can be a lot to grapple with, but, as we will soon see, they are questions at the foundation of disability studies, which discipline must revise its answer to again and again, and again.

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This process of investigating knowledge and asking questions about its logical foundations and historical origins is one way of ‘doing’ epistemology. Disability studies is constantly engaged in this examination of where knowledge about disability comes from.

Disability studies examines the *contexts* in which knowledge is produced, and the social locations of those involved in its production. The authority of professional ‘experts’ on disability is questioned; conversely, the knowledge that comes with experience is highly valued. The social location

or positionality of the speaker is considered to be highly relevant to the content of their ideas (Alcoff, 1991; Prince, 2016).

Different perspectives do not emerge in a vacuum. Understanding how knowledge about disability is constructed in different ways also requires us to think about power. In society, some individuals are listened to more than others. Some individuals, such as psychiatrists and professors, are able to impose their knowledge upon others. Disability studies exposes the relationship between ideas about disability and the complex web of power and social relations from which those ideas emerge, and through which they are deployed (Alcoff, 1991; Prince, 2016).

You can continue watching, reading or listening to the video here (the video and transcript start from 12:29, the quote above)

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=394#h5p-6>

[Click here to continue reading the Examined Life video transcript, starting after the quote above](#)

# Intersectionality

“I think gender and disability converge in a whole lot of different ways. But one thing I think both movements do is get us to rethink what the body can do.”

Butler (8:20)

Judith Butler makes open-ended reference to the ways that gender and disability “converge.” Social location is never singular, and context is always complicated. Disability, race, gender, Indigeneity, sexuality, class, and other facets of identity and experience converge in the individual; when these intersections are not acknowledged, the knowledge and experience that forms at these points of convergence are suppressed.

Theories of Intersectionality understand that different forms of oppression typically overlap in the individual. When a school of thought, such as disability studies, ignores this overlap, it suggests that an assumption has already been made about the identity of the disabled subject. When disability studies ignores race, sexuality, gender, and colonialism, the field normalizes an assumption that disabled people are white, heterosexual, cis-gendered settlers.

The assumption of whiteness in disability studies has been pointed out by many scholars within the discipline. These scholars often have first-hand knowledge of how interlocking oppressions are experienced. In 2017, Chris Bell stated that what we have termed “disability studies” is actually “White Disability Studies”, because it “by and large focuses on the work of white individuals and is itself largely produced by a corpus of white scholars and activists” (p. 407).

Nwadiogo Ejiogu and Syrus Marcus Ware (2008) build on Bell’s work in a reflection on their time as students in a disability studies classroom, observing,

Whiteness was normalized in this class and within the broader field of Disability Studies, in the use of colonialism merely as a metaphor to theorize ableism and the marginal position disabled people (read: white) inhabit in dominant spaces. What we are specifically speaking to are the ways in which white disabled people were understood as “colonized” by normative culture and pedagogies. While it is necessary to pay close attention to the many violences done onto particular bodies in order to maintain notions of able-bodiedness, intelligence, sanity, and productivity within a capitalist market, the appropriation of the term colonialism erases violent histories and contemporary realities.  
(p. 14)



Disability studies begins with the questioning of dominant notions about disability. However, in challenging clichés and oppressive, outdated ideas about disability, the discipline risks forgetting its own internal biases, and the limits of its own perspective.

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You can continue watching, reading or listening to the video here (the video and transcript start from 8:20, the quote above)

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=397#h5p-7>

[Click here to continue reading the Examined Life video transcript, starting after the quote above](#)

# Transformative

“There’s a challenge to individualism that happens at the moment you ask for some assistance with a coffee cup. Hopefully people will take it up and say ‘yes, I too live in that world in which...we need each other in order to address our basic needs, and I want to organize a social and political world on the basis of that recognition.’”

Butler (13:35)

Disability studies strives to be transformative. The ideas it has produced, promoted, or embraced have the power to change lives. Earlier in the video Sunaura Taylor discusses the transformative effects of the city of San Francisco’s accessibility:

I moved to San Francisco largely because it’s the most accessible place in the world. Part of what’s so amazing to me about it is that the physical access—the fact the public transportation is accessible, there’s curb cuts most places, buildings are accessible—and what this does is it also leads to a social acceptability: because there’s access, there’s simply more disabled people out and about in the world... So physical access actually leads to a social access and acceptance.

Taylor (1:30)

We can connect this to what Taylor later says, and what we have just learnt, about the social model of disability studies. The model begins with the idea that to understand and address disability we have to turn our gaze to society, and examine the society’s effects and demands upon its citizens. The social model then asks us to change society to make fuller participation possible. The idea transforms the world in concrete ways that allow disabled people to engage in society, which, as Sunaura Taylor observes, in turn changes the ideas that able-bodied people have about disability.

The ideas found within disability studies share this power to transform the world by changing both its conditions and the ideas of those who exist within it. As seen in the works mentioned above by Chris Bell, Nwadiogo Ejiogu and Syrus Marcus Ware, sometimes the transformative task of an idea is to change disability studies itself. Disability studies should remain open to these transformations: it should be a reflexive discipline, and one that acts upon its reflections.

Two articles on topics relating closely to the subject of this course illustrate this point clearly. In the article *Is there a place within academic journals for articles presented in an accessible format*, Ruth Garbutt asks exactly that: how can scholars and activists working in disability studies simultaneously meet expectations around academic writing and publishing and produce writing that is accessible to disabled people?

Garbutt considers this question in relation to people with learning disabilities who might have difficulty with academic writing, and summarizes her findings under four non-conventional models of presenting research findings. Descriptions and/or examples of the models are outlined below – click each model name to see more detail.

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=405#h5p-14>

In *Building access: Universal design and the politics of disability*, Aimi Hamraie digs deep into that notion of ‘accessibility’ itself: When spaces, buildings, or academic articles are designed to be ‘accessible’, what kinds of disability do we have in mind? And what assumptions are we making about disability itself? Hamraie observes that accessible design is often thought to be the same thing as “productivity-enhancing” design. The assumption that disabled bodies are not productive enough, and that disabled people ought to be made more productive by way of ‘accessible’ design, illustrates how,

constructs such as limitation and enhancement, far from neutral or self-evident, produce a ‘depoliticized’ perception of disability, which... treat as common sense the notion that disability is a ‘problem to be eradicated.’

(Hamraie, 2017, p. 13)



Accessible design doesn’t need to be about ‘productivity’; accessibility can be developed with other goals in mind, such as comfort or to develop a sense of belonging.

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As you proceed to learn about digital methods in disability studies, keep in mind the importance of knowledge and social location to this discipline. Questions about how knowledge is generated, accessed, and shared will always have a direct bearing on whose knowledge is being given a space to grow.

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# Examined Life Transcript

Judith Butler: I thought we should take this walk together, and one of the things I wanted to talk about was what it means for us to take a walk together. When I first asked you about this, you told me you take walks, you take strolls.

Sunaura Taylor: I do.

JB: And can you say something about what that is for you? When do you do it, and how do you do it, and what words do you have for it.

ST: Well, I think that I always go for a walk. Probably every day, I go for a walk, and I always tell people that I'm going for walks. I use that word, and most of the disabled people who I know use that term also.

JB: Which environments make it possible for you to take a walk?

ST: I moved to San Francisco largely because it's the most accessible place in the world, and part of what's so amazing to me about it is that the physical access, the fact that the public transportation is accessible, there's curb cuts most places. In most places I'll go there's curb cuts. Buildings are accessible and what this does is that it also leads to a social acceptability that somehow because there's physical access, there's simply more disabled people out and about in the world. And so people have learned how to interact with them and are used to them in a certain way. And so the physical access actually leads to a social access and acceptance.

JB: It must be nice not to always have to be the pioneer, the very first one they meet and have to explain.

ST: Yes, very definitely. The first disabled person they've ever seen.

JB: Yes I do, you know, speak and think and talk and move and enjoy life and suffer many of the same heartaches that you do." And anyway, um, but what I'm wondering about is moving in social space right, moving all the

movements you can do and which help you live and which express you in various ways. Do you feel free to, to move in all the ways you want to move?

ST: I could go into a coffee shop and actually pick up the cup with my mouth, and carry it to my table but then that, that becomes almost more difficult because of just the normalizing standards of our movements. The discomfort that that causes when I do things with body parts that aren't necessarily what we assume that they're for. That seems to be even more hard for people to deal with.

[camera pans to a shoe on the side of the street]

JB: Is that somebody's shoe?

ST: I wonder if they can walk without it.

JB: I'm just thinking that nobody takes a walk without there being a technique of walking. Nobody goes for a walk without there being something that supports that walk outside of ourselves and that maybe we have a false idea that the able-bodied person is somehow radically self-sufficient.

ST: It wasn't until I was in my early 20s about 20, 21, that I became aware of disability as a political issue and that happened largely through discovering the social model of disability, which is basically in disability studies they have a distinction between disability and impairment.

[This quote leads us to the Models of Disability section:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/chapter/models-of-disability/>]

ST: So impairment would be my, my body, my embodiment, right now the fact that I was born with arthrogryposis which affects, or what what the medical world has labeled is arthrogryposis, but basically that my joints are fused, my muscles are weaker, I can't move in certain ways and this does affect my life in all sorts of situations. For instance, you know there's a plum tree in my backyard and I can't pick the plums off the plum tree. I

have to wait for them to drop or whatever but then and so there's that, there's that embodiment, our own unique embodiment, and then there's disability which is basically the, the social repression of disabled people. The fact that disabled people have limited housing options, we don't have career opportunities, we're socially isolated. We're, you know, in many ways, there's a cultural aversion to disabled people.

JB: So would disability be this social organization of impairment?

ST: The disabling effects basically of society.

JB: What happened, did you come in contact with disability activists, or did you read certain things?

ST: I read a book review actually.

JB: Oh really?

ST: Yeah, I just read a book review, and, and when that happened I lived in Brooklyn and I would, I would really try to make myself go out and just order a coffee by myself, and I would sit for hours beforehand in the park just trying to get up the nerve to do that. In a way, it's a political protest for me to go in, and order a coffee and demand help, simply because in my opinion, help is something that we all need, and it's something that is, you know, looked down upon and not really taken care of in this society when we all, when we all need help and we're all interdependent in all sorts of ways.

[They arrive outside a vintage clothing store]

ST: Can we stop and get me something warm?

[JB picks up a red dress]

JB: I don't know, honey.

ST: That's pretty fancy.

JB: Let's go find something for you.

[JB holds up a red sweater]

ST: Yeah I think that would probably fall off my shoulders. Well I guess we could try it on. Okay so basically that's the back.

JB: Other arm?

ST: Other arm. And I like it, it's stylish!

JB: It's very stylish, it's kind of you know, sporty and fancy.

ST: It's gonna be a new show: shopping with Judith Butler.

JB: For the queer eye!

ST: Maybe I can just get it while wearing it.

[They arrive at the cash register]

JB: Hi! We put the sweater on. So we just want to buy it.

ST: Yeah, I'm actually buying this one that I'm wearing.

Cashier: Okay! So it's by weight.

ST: Oh, it's by weight?

JB: Can we guess?

Cashier: I can probably just do it for four bucks.

JB: That sounds good.

ST: Can I get the bills first and then give me the change? Oh oh, I just meant. yeah I just can't hold both at the same time.

Cashier: There you go!

ST: Thanks! Thanks so much.

JB: I think gender and disability converge in a whole lot of different ways, but one thing I think both movements do, is get us to rethink, um, what the body can do.

[This quote leads us to the Intersectionality section:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/chapter/intersectionality/>]

JB: There's an essay by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze called "What Can a Body Do?" and the question is supposed to challenge the traditional ways in which we think about bodies, right? We usually ask, you know, what is a body or what is the ideal form of a body or you know what's the difference between the body and the soul and that kind of thing. Yeah, uh, but what can a body do is, um, is, is a different question. It isolates a set of capacities and a set of instrumentalities or actions, and we are kind of assemblages of those things, um, and I like this idea it's, it's not like there's an essence and it's not like there's an ideal morphology, you know, what a body should look like. It's exactly not that question, or what a body should move like, um, and one of the things that I found in thinking about gender and even violence against sexual minorities or gender minorities, people whose gender presentation doesn't conform with standard ideals of femininity or masculinity, is that very often, um, it comes down to, uh, you know, how people walk, how they use their hips, what they do with their body parts, uh, what they use their mouth for, what they use their anus, for or what they allow their anus to be used for.

There's a guy in Maine who, I guess, he was around 18 years old, and he walked with a very distinct swish, you know, hips going one way or another, and very feminine walk. But one day, he was walking to school, and he was attacked by three of his classmates, and he was thrown over a bridge and he was killed. And, um, the question that community had to deal with, and indeed, the entire media that covered this event was, you know, how could it be that somebody's gait, that somebody's style of walking, could engender the desire to kill that person and that, you know, that makes me think about the walk in a different way. I mean, a walk could be a dangerous thing.

ST: I'm just remembering when I was little, when I did walk, I would be told that I walked like a monkey, and I think that for a lot of, you know, disabled people, the violence, and the the sort of, that, the hatred exists a lot in in this reminding of people that our bodies are going to age and are going to die and, you know, in some ways I wonder also just, you know, just thinking about the monkey comment, if it is also a level of, and this is just a thought off the top of my head, right now, but just, um, the sort of, where our boundaries lie as as a human and what becomes non-human.

JB: Well, it makes me wonder whether the person was anti-evolutionary. Maybe they were a creationist. It's like, why shouldn't we have some resemblance to the monkey? I mean.

ST: Well the monkey's actually always been my favorite animal to this day, actually, quite a lot of the time. I was flattered.

JB: Exactly!

ST: Yeah but that, when, when in those in-between moments of, you know, in between male and female, or in between death and and health, when, when do you still kind of count as a human?

[This quote leads us to the Epistemology section:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/chapter/epistemology/>]

JB: My sense is that what's at stake here, is really rethinking the human as a site of interdependency, and I think, you know, when you walk into the coffee shop, right, if I can go back to that moment for a moment, and and you, you ask for the coffee, or you indeed even ask for some assistance with the coffee, um, you're basically posing the question do we or do we not live in a world in which we assist each other? Do we, or do we not help each other with, with, with basic needs? And are basic needs there to be decided on as a social issue and not just my personal individual issue or your personal individual issue? So, I mean, there's a challenge to individualism that happens at the moment in which you ask for some assistance with the coffee cup, and hopefully people will take it up, and say "yes, I too live in that world in which I understand that we need each other in order to address

our basic needs, you know, and and I want to organize a social political world on the basis of that recognition.”

[This quote leads us to the Transformative section:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/chapter/transformative/>]

# **Introduction to Digital Methods for Disability Studies**

This module was written by:

Ted Rawson, MA, Research Associate, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Tiffany-Anne Stones, BA, Master of Educational Technology Program, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

\*name change pending Summer 2022

# Module 2 Readings

1. Disability Intersectionality Summit [Host], & Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. [Speaker] (2018, Oct. 26) “Thanks and Acknowledgements” and “The Crip art of Failure: Based on Real-Life Events”. In Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha “Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice?” [Video]. YouTube.

Thanks and Acknowledgements reading begins at 3:15; The Crip Art of Failure reading begins at 10:15.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=105#oembed-1>

2. Hamraie, A. (n.d.) Mapping Access. *Critical Design Lab*.  
<https://www.mapping-access.com/mapping-access-methodology>

3. Hedva, J. (2016). Sick woman theory. *Mask Magazine*, 19.  
Read the article here:  
[https://johannahedva.com/SickWomanTheory\\_Hedva\\_2020.pdf](https://johannahedva.com/SickWomanTheory_Hedva_2020.pdf)

## Suggested Readings

Goodley, D. (2020). What Does it Mean to be Human in a Digital Age? In *Disability and Other Human Questions* (pp. 91-109). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.

Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2018). So Much Time Spent in Bed. In *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (pp. 180-187). Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.

Shew, A. (2020). Ableism, Technoableism, and Future AI. *IEEE Technology and Society Magazine*, 39(1), 40-85.

<https://doi.org/10.1109/MTS.2020.2967492>

# Introduction to Digital Methods



This Pressbook is intended to aid your understanding of the important and empowering role that digital methods can play in generating and sharing knowledge about disability. But what do we mean by ‘digital methods’? There is no strict definition because, like disability, digital methods are constantly evolving; they are being constantly re-imagined and re-examined by disabled people and scholars. Digital methods describe the online opportunities we have to share and create knowledge, to organize and advocate, to tell stories to and support one another.

Digital methods, in the context of any academic discipline, can be broadly defined as a set of “...developed standards for how best to create, organize, present, and preserve digital information so that future generations of teachers, students, scholars, and librarians may still use it” (Williams, p. 202). The term digital methods traditionally refers to the techniques used by diverse groups to create, share, and preserve the knowledge of their field in a digital medium.

As we learned in [Module 1](#), disability studies seeks to understand disability from the perspective of disabled people. It challenges the medical-driven view that disability is a form of deficiency by elevating the voices of disabled people, where difference is perceived from a more positive and nuanced perspective. In the words of philosopher Elizabeth Barnes,

“As disabled people, we are forever being told that there is something about our bodies that is lacking, that is less than. Disability pride says it doesn’t have to be that way. Disability pride says that we have minority bodies, but we don’t have – we refuse to have – tragic

bodies.”

(as quoted in Shew, 2020, p. 42)

In disability studies, we foreground the knowledge of disabled people to challenge ableist tropes. Therefore, as we learn about and practice digital methods for disability studies, we are also considering the ways that these methods increase and amplify a wide range of voices. This amplification of voices also includes intentionally reflecting on and diversifying who we think about as making and sharing disabled knowledge.



## Scavenger Hunt

Before entering too far into the theoretical, let's do an activity that is intended to get you thinking about the role digital media plays in disabled people's lives. Open the following link and then follow the instructions below.

<http://www.blindcanadians.ca/news/press/2012-05-31-blind-canadians-applaud-decision-federal-court-appeal-finding-federal-governme>

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=100#h5p-31>

# Connecting Digital Methods to Disability Studies



Digital media and disability are plural, complex, and shifting arenas of embodiment.

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=764#h5p-32>

Keeping these terms in mind, let's look at an example of a research project created using digital methods by a disabled scholar of disability studies.

## Mapping Access

The 'inclusive campus map' was created at Vanderbilt University under the guidance of Dr. Aimie Hamraie as part of the ongoing 'Mapping Access' project. It is an excellent example of what digital methods can offer disability studies and the material impact these methods can have on disabled people's lives.

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The map is embedded above or you can open it in a new window by clicking this link: [https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1hwcpE\\_y5D-qQysG8H-X93PHS9Kg&ll=36.14377540091811%2C-86.80565828084804&z=15](https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1hwcpE_y5D-qQysG8H-X93PHS9Kg&ll=36.14377540091811%2C-86.80565828084804&z=15)

This digital map can be zoomed in and zoomed out of and scrolled around—at first glance, it is very similar to other digital maps created in Google Maps.

If you are viewing the map in full-screen mode or in a different window, look at the left side of the map. If you are viewing the embedded version above, click the icon that looks like a square with an arrow inside it just above the top left of the map. Here, there are a number of boxes listing different kinds of inclusive spaces and accessibility features as well as issues found on the Vanderbilt University campus. If you check one of the boxes—'SideWalk Obstructions – Permanent', for instance— a number of pins appear that show where mobility restricting obstructions can be found on campus (...or avoided). In the same sidebar with this checklist, there is a drop-down menu providing more specific descriptions of the locations of the obstructions, such as "Commons Upper Quad" or "East Lawn."

**The Mapping Access project is a collective and critical mapping project that draws on the lived experiences and perspectives of participants.** It offers different information than what is provided by a traditional accessibility map because its methods are different. Hundreds of students contributed to this and other maps by participating in school-wide Map-A-Thons while others continue to update it voluntarily and as an extracurricular activity (Hamraie, 2018).

The project, Hamraie (2018) writes, turned mapping into

“a device for asking questions: what counts as access, for whom, and under what conditions?” (p. 460).

When an Ontario institution, such as an Ontario university, announces its commitment to creating an 'accessible' campus, its definition of 'accessibility' is drawn mostly from human rights codes and legislation, namely The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act (AODA) and

the Ontario Human Rights Code. This definition results in a form of accessibility based on ‘compliance’; as long as all the boxes of AODA are ticked, the university can consider itself ‘accessible’ (Hamraie, 2018; “King’s Commitment to Accessibility,” n.d.; “Statement of Commitment,” Ryerson University, n.d.).

However, the Mapping Access project prompts us to think about accessibility beyond ‘compliance’ or ‘checkboxes’. For example, what happens if an automatic door suddenly breaks down? For some people that day, the university might be totally inaccessible. And who do we have in mind when we are thinking about accessibility? Who may we be leaving out?



Revisit the inclusive campus map of Vanderbilt University. How does the map demonstrate, or not, the claim earlier in the module that digital media and disability are plural, shifting, and complex?

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Now that we have learned about the Mapping Access project, let’s examine the accessibility of our own neighbourhoods through Access Now. Access Now is a crowd-sourced online platform that is trying to map accessibility around the world (Access Now, n.d.) through submissions from disabled people. You can learn more about them at this link:

<https://accessnow.com/about/>

For this activity, navigate to the Access Now Map:

<https://map.accessnow.com/?lng=%lngCode%>. The map should automatically show the neighbourhood you are in right now. You can also search in the top left corner for other places you are interested in exploring.

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# Introduction to Key Terminology

## Web 2.0

In “Online Lives 2.0: An Introduction,” Laurie McNeill and David Zuern (2015) identify the qualities of what has been termed “Web 2.0.” The early internet, i.e. “Web 1.0” spanned the 1980s, 90s, and early 2000s, and was characterized by the ability to access information online and connect via email. Web 2.0, the current iteration of the internet, began around 2004-5 and is characterized by participation, social media, and the collapse between private and public lives. In Web 2.0, Internet users are no longer passive recipients of knowledge. Today, we are actively involved in creating content online and much of what we consume was created by other users rather than traditional media conglomerates or corporations. Many theorize that Web 3.0 is right around the corner (Mersch & Muirhead, 2019) but this course will not take up this next possible phase.

McNeill and Zuern also note that in Web 2.0 it’s increasingly difficult not to be online, as the Internet has become integrated into every part of our daily life. The Internet today is used for everything from paying bills to dating to staying in touch with loved ones who live far away, and even for attending a university undergraduate class.

## New Media

Web 2.0 is related to a term we will be using throughout this course: new media. New media are *enabled* by Web 2.0.

What differentiates old media from new? Every media technology and platform was new at some point! Contemporary conversations around new media revolve around what Henry Jenkins (2006) calls “convergence culture”, which he defines as “the flow of content across multiple media

platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (p. 2). A key element in new media is participation; as described in Web 2.0 above, users are no longer passive viewers, but active participants.

Jenkins (2006) describes new media in the following ways:

- “The new media operate with different principles than the broadcast media that dominated American politics for so long” including “access, participation, reciprocity, and peer-to-peer rather than one-to-many communication” (p. 219).
- “A changed sense of community, a greater sense of participation, less dependence on official expertise, and a greater trust in collaborative problem solving” (p. 220).

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What examples of new media can you think of? Take a few minutes to write down some ideas.

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## Digital Technologies

**Technologies** are the tools that we use in our everyday lives. They are the application of scientific, mechanical, technical, and digital innovations.

We will focus on digital technologies and screen technologies in this course (laptops, smartphones, smart TVs, desktop computers, etc.) and the new media and web 2.0 platforms that we use on these devices such as digital media tools (i.e. image editing, audio recording and editing, video editing, and Twine) and social media (i.e. Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram).

**Digital technology** describes a specific kind of technology that works with data and information represented by ‘digital’ values, typically the digits ‘0’ and ‘1’ in binary code.

Technologies can be powered by different mechanisms. Digital technology is distinct from other technologies such as the steam engine, which ran on steam power, or analog technologies such as the film camera or mercury thermometer. The computers, tablets and cell phones we use today are all examples of digital technologies. Digital media are media that are enabled by and take place on digital technologies.

**Digital platforms** are the online environments and the associated softwares that facilitate content creation, interaction, and communication between platform users. Burgess (2021) describes how people have become “increasingly dependent on a relatively small number of digital media platforms” including “Google and YouTube (owned by Alphabet), Tencent Video and WeChat (owned by Tencent), iQiyi (controlled by Baidu), Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram (owned by Facebook), and Facebook itself” (p. 22. Note that since this article was written, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook are now all owned by Meta). These, along with entertainment platforms like Tumblr, Twitch, and TikTok and crowdfunding platforms like Patreon and Kickstarter, make up the “commercial digital media ecosystem” of Web 2.0 today (Burgess, 2021, p. 22).

# Introduction to Digital Storytelling



## What are digital stories?

Digital stories are a type of personal narrative presentation mediated through a combination of images, text, narration, and video. Although typically short videos between two and 10 minutes, some are much longer to suit the demands of specific projects (see for example Benick, 2011). Digital stories are largely understood as holding therapeutic, educational, research, and advocacy potential (Morris, 2019; Rice, 2020).

## How are digital stories made?

Digital stories are made using different applications and software depending on availability, accessibility, and familiarity to the maker. The tools that you can use are extensive such as Avatar Maker (<https://avatarmaker.com/>), Microsoft PowerPoint, MovieMaker, Storyboardthat.com (<https://www.storyboardthat.com/>), Pixton.com (<https://www.pixton.com/>), and more. Sometimes, people tell digital stories using just the digital tools at hand. For example, Bandi-Rao and Sepp (2014) offered students the option to use their phones for images and either index cards or a digital storyboarding program depending on their preference.

## Principles of Digital Storytelling

Dana Atchley and Joe Lambert founded digital storytelling through the creation of StoryCenter in 1993 (De Jager et al., 2017). Find out more about StoryCenter here: <https://www.storycenter.org/history>

### Seven Principles of StoryCenter (as quoted in Benick, 2011)

1. A first-person experience is relayed through the story through a specific point-of-view;
2. A dramatic question drives the action of the story and sustains the creative tension;
3. Emotional content explores the author's inner feelings;
4. The storyteller's voice is recorded in a voiceover;
5. A powerful soundtrack establishes the mood of the digital story and changes the way the viewer perceives the visual information;
6. It has an economical structure built on a small number of images and video, as well as relatively short text;
7. There is attention to pacing or the rhythm of the story.

Since 2002, Joe Lambert has developed these principles into a 'cookbook'. Check out this link and think about how digital storytelling is evolving:

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55368c08e4b0d419e1c011f7/t/5900fb1637c5814c17f8258c/1493236524897/cookbook\\_full.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55368c08e4b0d419e1c011f7/t/5900fb1637c5814c17f8258c/1493236524897/cookbook_full.pdf)

### Seven Storytelling Steps (from Lambert's cookbook, 2010)

1. Owning your insights;
2. Owning your emotions;
3. Finding the moment;
4. Seeing your story;
5. Hearing your story;
6. Assembling your story;
7. Sharing your story.

These seven principles (and the seven cookbook steps) distinguish digital stories from any other type of video-based project. One thing to keep in mind when thinking about these principles is that StoryCenter typically

proceeds from the point-of-view of the storyteller, i.e. we are always telling our own stories. However, some storytellers might suggest that digital stories can take other or multiple points-of-view. Later in the Pressbook, when we take up interactive games as a form of digital storytelling, we will explore this further in how we can trouble dominant or established points-of-view.

## Counter-Narratives

Digital Storytelling is a technology-dependent format but it can still be challenging and emotional due to the personal nature of the narratives, which may bring up experiences of trauma, conflict, and harm. However, digital storytelling is also an opportunity to create and share counter-narratives of resistance. Counter-narratives are stories that are presented as an alternative to the dominant ideas about the world. For example, a dominant story might be that disabled people can overcome all barriers just through hard work and willpower. A counter-narrative might focus on the institutional structures that maintain these barriers or the joy in self-made access and disability community.

Digital storytelling has the power to challenge the status quo in a number of ways:

- As an empowering tool for marginalized people to share their personal narratives
- Digital stories typically use accessible and relatable language.
- By focusing on personal narratives, they draw in the audience and form points of relationship and identity around issues that may not commonly appear in the public sphere.

For example, Lind et al. (2018) describe how a digital storytelling project was used to reimagine the temporality of queer fat bodies. Because of its use of digital mediums, it allowed the makers and audiences to move away from a text-based understanding of queerness and fatness. As another example, Morris (2019) documented digital storytelling as a participatory

learning experience towards restorative justice. Here is an example of such a project (please note that captions are auto-generated):

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Digital storytelling can also be used for self-advocacy. In a South African project focused on combating the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, students decided that they wanted to share their digital stories with their families and communities (Mnisi, 2015). By documenting and sharing their experiences with larger audiences, digital storytellers have an opportunity to influence how we think about stories of chronic illness, disability, and difference. To find many examples of disabled, mad, and Deaf people's digital stories, check out ReVision Centre for Art and Social Justice:

<https://revisioncentre.ca/projects>. Here is an example of a digital story from ReVision by Margaret Robinson titled, "My Mi'kmaw Body":

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# Writing a Digital Object Story



## Scavenger Hunt (3-4 minutes)

We're going to go on a personal object scavenger hunt. Take a couple of minutes and pick 2 or 3 objects in your space. Ideally, these are objects that you use every day or frequently, items that you have an intimate, personal relationship with. We are going to use these objects as prompts in our writing activity. Will you choose your bed? Cell phone? Running shoes? Mobility aid? Plant? Alarm clock? iPad? Ergonomic desk? Pipe? Really uncomfortable chair? The bottle of ibuprofen on your bedside table?

## Writing Exercise (7-10 minutes)

Now we're going to use these items to tell stories about our feelings and experiences, access needs, and relationships with culture and society, as well as power, privilege, vulnerability, violence, and care. When you are finished writing your thoughts you can click the blue arrow and save your answers. You may use this object story in other parts of the Pressbook as we build a digital story.

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# Situating Ourselves: "So Much Time Spent in Bed"



## Community Happens in Beds

We will frame this section around the quote below from Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (2018). You can watch them read an section from the book here:

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“There is queer crip community happening in beds, living rooms, coffee shops, on Skype, and it counts just as much.”  
(Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 200)

In this quote, Piepzna-Samarasinha describes the ways that queer crip community is made and sustained across spaces that are physical and digital, public and private. By using digital methods and media, like Skype or Zoom, individuals that are physically separated can work, think, create, and protest together. For many, remaining home is often an act of self/community care or survival (as in a pandemic) and therefore, it is a critical component of both public health policy and personal wellbeing.



Let's think about some of the challenges and opportunities we have when we advocate, express ourselves, and/or work from home. As we reflect, we can consider the nature of the tools and personal space we have at home to do this work. Take one minute now to think and write about one or two tools you (might) use to work and advocate from home and where those objects are located.

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## Advocacy Happens in Bed

Earlier we discussed how digital methods allow a plurality of voices to generate knowledge as shifting bodies in a rapidly changing and complex world. Valuing the forms of advocacy and knowledge that emerge via digital mediums from the (dis)comforts of home represents a cultural shift of its own kind. This type of advocacy is explored and unpacked in Johanna Hedva's impactful essay, *Sick Woman Theory*, which was written in 2015 while Hedva was lying in bed with a chronic illness. They write,

“There was a Tumblr post that came across my dash during these weeks of protest, that said something to the effect of: ‘shout out to all

the disabled people, sick people, people with PTSD, anxiety, etc., who can't protest in the streets with us tonight. Your voices are heard and valued, and with us.' Heart. Reblog... ...So, as I lay there, unable to march, hold up a sign, shout a slogan that would be heard, or be visible in any traditional capacity as a political being, the central question of Sick Woman Theory formed: How do you throw a brick through the window of a bank if you can't get out of bed?"  
(pp. 3 and 5)

Both Hedva and Piepzna-Samarasinha claim the bed and the Internet as sites of resistance, rebellion, and radical self-care. It is important to note that both Hedva and Piepzna-Samarasinha use their personal experiences of being disabled women of colour to interrogate the violence of patriarchal, white supremacist, and capitalist systems. Personal experience can give us critical insights into the broader trends and ideologies of culture and society, brushing up against currents of power, oppression, and privilege.



The next writing activity will invite you to reflect on your relationship with your own space and the objects in that space. Like Hedva and Piepzna-Samarasinha, let's start by situating ourselves.

Examine what is around you.

What can you sense and perceive?

Are these sounds, textures, and/or sights familiar or strange?

Personal and domestic spaces can teach us about the world. We act from these places to care for ourselves and our communities. Consider some of these connections between the space you're in now and the people in your community as you write. Do you ever worry that these spaces need to be protected? If so, in what ways are our spaces—physical and digital—threatened? (I.e. by noise, interruptions to digital connectivity, etc.) These

reflections can ground your digital story and your ideas in your personal perspective.

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# Platform Studies



Digital methods clearly have a role to play in disability studies. Digital storytelling and communal projects like the inclusive campus map help to position disability studies as a discipline that can embrace and amplify a plurality of voices. Digital media provides an outlet for people to advocate from bed, from their wheelchairs, or from anywhere else.

But, the platforms that offer us a medium to practise digital methods and advocate or tell our stories online are complex. While people can accomplish critical advocacy and create vibrant community spaces on them, the platforms themselves are profit-driven. The stories and protests posted to platforms like Twitter and Facebook are, in the eyes of the company, profitable commodities that can be exploited to generate ad revenue or repackaged and sold as data about the user/advocate/storyteller (Burgess, 2021). We have praised the pace, responsiveness, and plurality of digital methods, but digital platforms – social media especially – deliberately encourage this speed. On social media, the fast pace of content creation, viewership, and engagement are used by the platform to maximize content, traffic, and revenue. The profit-driven nature of digital platforms prompts us to ask if such an environment truly encourages us to reflect, or act upon those reflections.

## Platform studies

Understanding the online platforms that facilitate digital methods and media is critical to the responsible use of digital methods in disability studies. Focusing on specific ‘platforms’, such as Facebook (Meta Platforms, Inc.)

or Google (Alphabet, Inc.), is worthwhile given that the vast majority of our online social activity occurs on a very small number of such platforms. As discussed in the section on Web 2.0, this relatively recent development marks a significant shift away from the Web 1.0 internet of the late 90s and early 2000s, which was comparatively decentralized (Burgess, 2021, p. 21).

Platform studies offer us both a research method and practice with which to analyse a digital media platform like Instagram or Zoom. It is introduced by media studies theorist Jean Burgess (2021) as,

“An umbrella term for holistic approaches to those entities that are understood and represent themselves as digital media platforms. Platform studies concern the technologies, interfaces, and affordances, ownership structures, business models, media- and self-representations, and governance of these entities.”  
(p. 25)

It may seem abstract to think about and analyze digital platforms as we would other physical social spaces. In his book *Disability and Other Human Questions*, the philosopher Dan Goodley (2020) writes,

“...distinguishing between actual (physical) and virtual (digital) cultures is an old-fashioned hangover from an age of predigital thinking and what we really should deploy is the term ‘digital real’.”  
(p. 95)

Dan Goodley goes on to reject the idea that we, as users of and contributors to the Internet, are the ones shaping the landscape of our shared digital reality:

“However, it would be a mistake to suggest that we are the ones in control of our digital engagements: that we are making the decisions and driving our use of the digital. Like all cultures, digital ones subject their members to particular ways of being in the world.” (p. 95)

Analyzing digital platforms challenges us to try and distinguish between the role played by the platform’s community of users and the role played by the company which owns the platform in shaping the experience, content, and

effects of that platform; or as Goodley puts it, in shaping the digital real that is formed upon these platforms.

Regarding this second point — the role played by the company that controls a platform — media theorists van Dijck, Poell and de Waal (2018) remind us that “social media platforms are never neutral ‘tools’: they make certain things visible, while hiding others” (p. 32). Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal divide the “tools” that platforms use to fulfill certain goals, such as increasing traffic, monitoring use, or prolonging engagement, into 3 general categories based on what it is these tools seek to accomplish:

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The concept of ‘identification’ from Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018) — or, the processes by which some content becomes visible on a platform and other content does not — is of particular interest to this course. On the one hand, challenging the authority of “experts and...professional norms” (p. 41) is fundamental to disability studies where ‘expert’ opinions, typically medical professionals, are challenged by the knowledges and experiences of disabled people. By amplifying the voices of ordinary people and communities, digital platforms are seemingly well-suited to disability studies. However, as we have just considered, these platforms are far from neutral, and we need to think critically about whose voices are being heard as well as how this ‘hearing’ takes place. As we think critically about the role of digital platforms in amplifying the voices of certain users, we need to remember that the underlying incentive for these companies is to increase engagement towards profit and growth.

## Affordances and Constraints

One way of framing the questions of ‘who’ is being reached and ‘how’ they are being reached is by analyzing platforms in terms of what they *allow us to do* and also *what they limit us from doing*.

All platforms and technologies have limits. They allow us to do certain things and prohibit us from doing others. We can these limits by using different media platforms in our storytelling and communication and experimenting with length, formatting, audio, visuals, and audience reach. This part of the module will encourage you to think about what each platform allows or doesn't allow us to do, and how we can use digital media as avenues for storytelling. Technology Affordances and Constraints Theory states that to understand how people use technology, we must “consider the dynamic interactions between people and organizations and the technologies they use” (Majchrzak, 2013).

**Affordances are what the platform, technology, or site allows us to do.**

**Constraints are the limitations that the site and medium impose on us.**

Every medium—digital or analog—has both.



Use the following form to fill in affordances and constraints for different digital media and platforms. Feel free to also add other platforms or mediums that are of interest to you. Take 3-4 minutes to jot down some ideas.

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Before we go any further, take a moment to think about the relationship between ‘affordances’ and ‘constraints’ and the texts and topics we looked at earlier in this module—how do these terms relate to accessibility?

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# Digital Accessibility and Techno Ableism

Affordances and constraints are not universal. Think about the text we read to begin this module about Ms. Donna Jodhan, linked here again:

<http://www.blindcanadians.ca/news/press/2012-05-31-blind-canadians-applaud-decision-federal-court-appeal-finding-federal-governme>.

The Court found she had been discriminated against because important information on a government website was not made accessible using a screen reader. By posting important information in a digital medium, the government of Canada presumably hoped to take advantage of the **affordances** offered by their own web-based platforms; however, Ms. Donna Jodhan, who is blind, encountered a **constraint** because the website had not been made accessible to screen readers.

The normative presumptions about ability that guide the design and implementation of technology, which includes digital platforms and media, are referred to as technoableism. The term was coined by Dr. Ashley Shew (2020) to describe,

“a rhetoric of disability that at once talks about empowering disabled people through technologies while at the same time reinforcing ableist tropes about what body-minds are good to have and who counts as worthy.”

(p. 43)

The concept of technoableism invites us to ask **how** accessibility is being determined and **who** it is being determined by.

When non-disabled researchers and experts are given the power to design and develop technology **for** disabled people, they bring to the design and development process their own assumptions about **what is desirable and undesirable** about disability.

For instance, non-disabled researchers often assume there is something inherently undesirable about navigating the world in a wheelchair. Ashley Shew (2020, p. 46) points us to consultations with disabled people who feel a great appreciation for their wheelchairs, and are frustrated not by the technology itself but by the lack of curb cuts, ramps, and door openers that make navigating the world in a wheelchair difficult, if not impossible.

When disabled people are integrated into the design and development of technology, the priorities guiding this process of innovation are likely to change. Shew summarizes this point by resurfacing an important question already raised by the blogger Shane Clifton,

“Why can’t a tech designer create a workable device to help with bowel and bladder control or nerve pain? These are a much bigger problem for many wheelchair users than the chair itself.”  
(Shew, 2020, p. 46)

Consider this all again in the context of digital methods. Digital methods are plural: there are lots of different ways of doing digital research and they allow us to hear lots of different voices. But, digital methods make use of technology that will not be experienced by everyone in the same way; the affordances and constraints that each digital method offers are determined by the abilities and conditions of the person engaging with them.



Let's think again about some of the examples discussed in this module, such as the disability-led Inclusive Campus Map (Hamraie, 2018) and the barriers faced by Ms. Donna Jodham in accessing online government resources. A major difference in the digital methods and resulting accessibility of these examples is the involvement of disabled people in their design. Therefore, to develop an understanding of how to use digital

methods in an accessible manner that includes and welcomes disabled people's participation, we must incorporate disabled voices into our understanding of digital methods themselves. And, we will highlight the plural, complex and shifting ways we can engage with digital methods and disability throughout this Pressbook.

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# Screen Media Cultures

This module was written by:

Ted Rawson, MA, Research Associate, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

\*name change pending Summer 2022

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# Module Overview



In this module, we will analyze representations of technology and disability in popular culture, including science fiction and advertising, and explore the cultural power dynamics that shape digital algorithms. Through this process we will:

- Develop a deeper understanding of ableism in discourses of new media.
- Interrogate ableist representations of disability and technology in pop culture and advertising.
- Begin to imagine crippled technologies and uses for digital media that emerge from disabled bodyminds, access, and collective care.
- Become familiar with the terms “cripping technology” and “crip technoscience.”
- Become aware of the invisible labour and biases that go into creating algorithms and web filters.
- Begin to think critically about the algorithmic and machinic processes that shape our everyday lives, from Google Search results to Wikipedia articles to Twitter feeds.

# Cripping the Future



## Cripping

What do we mean by “cripping” the future? What does it mean to “crip” something?

Crip theory, like disability studies, calls on us to critically examine normative ideas about disability. It does this, however, from a particular position: crip theory refuses to view normativity as, itself, a desirable thing that disabled people should assimilate into. In this module, we will be looking at depictions of the future where discrimination is eliminated through the elimination of difference. Crip theory protects us, ideologically, from this imagined future. It does so by inviting us to view reality in different ways—specifically, in ways that are aligned with embodied experiences of disability. So, instead of relieving the future of discrimination by removing disability from the future, Crip theory crips the future itself, to make it a place—firstly in thought, and then in practise—where disability can flourish (Kafer, 2013, pp. 26-27).

Crip theory, as demonstrated by its name, involves a re-appropriation of the term “Crip”. Robert McRuer (2019) writes on the use of Crip as both noun and verb:

“As a noun or adjective, ‘crip’ is of course a flamboyant reclamation, one that disabled activists, artists, and theorists have long used to signify solidarity and resistance...As a verb: ‘To crip’, like ‘to queer’, gets at processes that unsettle, or processes that make strange or

twisted.”  
(p. 134)

Anything can be crippled. Later on in this module, we will ask you to cripple science fiction. To prepare for this crippling-to-come, we will look at some other ways that the future has been crippled by scholars in the field.

## Crippling Time

Time has been thought about in many different ways by many different scholars working in disability studies and crip theory. In the following video (IRTG Diversity, 2021), **starting at 4:30 and ending at 6:15**, Robert McRuer describes how Crip time is thought of in disability communities and by different scholars:

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=188#oembed-1>

Drawing on the work of prior disability studies scholars, Alison Kafer (2013) asks us to consider what it would mean to re-examine the future and the progression of time from the perspective of disability. Kafer brings up one of the common usages of ‘crip time’, especially in disabled communities: “Recognizing some people’s need for “more” time is probably the manifestation of crip time most familiar to those of us in the academy”. “But,” Kafer continues, “‘crip time’ means more than this kind of blanket extension; it is, rather, a reorientation to time” (pp. 26 – 27). What’s involved in this reorientation?

Time has a very close relationship to how disability has been, and is, thought about. The medical model of disability frequently generates timelines that identify when a disability was acquired and how long it will take to be treated or cured. This particular relation of time to disability, Kafer (2013) writes, is embedded in a series of questions commonly posed to disabled people,

“Were you born that way? How much longer do you have to live this way? How long before they invent a cure? How long will a cure take? How soon before you recover?”

(p. 28)

Alison Kafer assigns the term “curative time” to these hypothetical or real ‘dates’ — the date when one’s ability was lost, the date when one can expect to recover — that are embedded in these questions and the ‘medical’ perspective more generally. Kafer’s careful construction of ‘curative time’ chooses the term ‘curative’ rather than ‘cure’ so as to not stigmatize the desire for cure:

“I use “curative” rather than “cure” to make clear that I am concerned here with compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness, not with individual sick and disabled people’s relationships to particular medical interventions; a desire for a cure is not necessarily an anti-crip or anti-disability position. I am speaking here about a curative imaginary, an understanding of disability that not only expects and assumes intervention but also cannot imagine or comprehend anything other than intervention.”

(p. 27)

Kafer’s notion of ‘curative time’ is, itself, a crippling of time, in that it draws our attention to the timelines embedded in normative approaches to disability in a way that makes these timelines visible in a new light. ‘Curative time’ simultaneously generates a new concept and identifies something that was previously invisible: this generative process of making taken-for-granted things unfamiliar is fundamental to crippling.

Kafer provides us with many other ways of thinking about ‘cripping time’ or ‘crip time’. It is worth repeating that Kafer is not the inventor of the term ‘crip time’ or the first to explore the relationship between time, the future, and disability. Crippling time, importantly, is not a singular way of thinking about time, but something that is done to normative ideas about time, to prevent disabled people and crip theory from having to conform or concede those (normative) ideas:

“Crip time is... time not just expanded but exploded; it requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of “how long things take” are based on very particular minds and bodies. We can then understand the flexibility of crip time as being not only an accommodation to those who need “more” time but also, and perhaps especially, a challenge to normative and normalizing expectations of pace and scheduling. Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds.” (Kafer, 2013, pp. 27)

## Crippling Technoscience

 [A black x-box controller with a grey 3D-printed addition attached with a yellow elastic.](#)  
3D-printed toggle for Xbox/Playstation controller button by Caleb Kraft. Image Source:  
Prusaprinters, licensed under [CC-BY-NC 4.0](#)

In the “Crip Technoscience Manifesto”, Aimie Hamraie and Kelly Fritsch (2019) outline four commitments to the crippling of science, technology, and political life (p. 2). The theoretical area where these three subjects (science, technology, political life) interact with and influence one another is referred to by the authors as ‘technoscience’ (hence the title of their manifesto).

The relationship between disabled people and technology has historically been characterized as one rooted in ‘need’ and passive recipience. According to this “mainstream” view, Hamraie and Fritsch (2019) write, technoscience is a “field of traditional expert relations and practises concerned with designing for disabled people rather than *with* or *by* disabled people” (pp. 3-4, emphasis in original).



Can Holder byNestor9dwis. Image source:  
Thingiverse, licensed under [CC-BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Cripping technoscience means altering how we perceive the relationship between disability, science, and technology. It also means uncovering concealed aspects of the relationship that already exists between these three areas. The manifesto foregrounds the active and creative relationship that disabled people have to the technology they utilize, and frequently reminds us of the significant ways that technology has been used by disabled people in political protest, in order to illustrate a central principle of crip technoscience:

“Crips are not merely formed or acted on by the world — we are engaged agents of remaking.”  
(Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019, p. 7)

Below are the four commitments of crip technoscience as described by Hamraie and Fritsch (2019). Click each concept to expand the accordion.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=188#h5p-47>

# Crippling Science Fiction



[@crutches\\_and\\_spice](#)

Reply to @crutches\_and\_spice truly this conversation is the same no matter the topic. [#disability](#) [#freebritney](#) [#filmtiktok](#) [#ItWasntMe](#)

[🎵 Monkeys Spinning Monkeys – Kevin MacLeod & Kevin The Monkey](#)

In the TikTok video assigned for this module above, Imani Barbarin (2021) artfully describes the process by which disabled people are barred from participating in creating mainstream media (such as film, TV, games). Largely a consequence of access barriers, this exclusion contributes to an underrepresentation of disability in popular culture. When disability does appear, it is often filtered through harmful and ableist stereotypes (see for example Haller, 2010; Wong, 2020). We are going to explore some of these tropes in pop culture — in particular, representations of the relationship between technology and disability in one of the most tech-heavy genres, science fiction.

## Disability, Technology, and Science Fiction

From spaceships to teleporters, science fiction is deeply concerned with technological development and progress and how technology both impacts individuals and societies. As such, it can be a useful genre through which to explore a culture's imaginings about technological development and the future (for more see Allan, 2013). This, in turn, tells us about a culture's values and ideologies.

What technology is being imagined? How is it being used? Why was it created? What is our relationship to technology in these futuristic settings and worlds?

Science fiction can allow us to re-imagine our worlds and see all that they can be, “the good, the bad and the downright terrifying” (Schalk, 2018, p. 12). Within disability, mad and Deaf studies, science fiction can allow us to re-examine the constructed categories of disability difference and the contexts from which these categories are produced and upheld. They can work against dominant tropes or representations of disability, presenting disability as incidental, as in the character of Geordi in *Star Trek: Next Generation*. Geordi is blind and uses a piece of future technology, his visor, to transmit visual information to his brain. In most episodes of the series, his disability is not remarked on or seen as exceptional.

In other instances, such as Professor X in *X-Men*, or the dis/abled characters in the speculative stories of Octavia Butler, the social positioning of disability can be interrogated and re-constituted. Professor X, a central character in the X-Men series, uses a wheelchair following an injury ‘in the field’. Through Professor X’s founding of the School for Mutants, his role as a mentor and leader who actively creates a community space is highlighted but he often remains outside the action-adventure of X-Men narratives. From this vantage point outside the action, he is powerfully situated to offer his psychic powers and keen insight to any situation. In a sense, Professor X deploys the marginality of disability into sharpened powers of observation and turns stereotypical understandings of disability as ‘isolated’ on their head.



Action figure of Professor X from X-Men. Image Source: JD Hancock on Flickr, licensed under [CC-BY 2.0](#).

Like Professor X, Batgirl, otherwise known as Barbara Gordon, experiences a spinal cord injury at the hands of a villain and uses a wheelchair in the remainder of the series. She assumes a new identity, Oracle, as a software specialist and hacker. As her new identity suggests, her skills allow her to analyze new situations and predict their outcomes, contributing to the success of her team. James South (2006) describes how Barbara Gordon becomes a fully actualized person after taking on the role of Oracle, letting her step outside of the shadow of Batman.



Action figure of Oracle. Image Source: JD Hancock on Flickr

In a literary example, Octavia Butler stories often feature characters that we would understand as disabled. In the short story *Speech Sounds* (1983), Butler describes a post-pandemic California where the narrative revolves around the protagonist's attempted journey to find the surviving members of her extended family. Butler plays with impaired communication in the story – the pandemic has removed people's ability to speak, read, and/or write text. People instead use gestures and symbols to communicate which creates repeated conflicts throughout the narrative, heightening the stakes for survival. Even when people have retained their ability to speak or read, these abilities do little to increase safety and survival. *Speech Sounds* at once demonstrates the capacity for adaptation in the face of impairment but from a disability studies perspective, reveals the illusion of stable ability, i.e. there are always constraints on our ability to communicate.

More affirmative, alternate models of disability can also underpin science fiction. Writers Allan and Cheyne (2020) point to the burgeoning crop of contemporary and equity-based science fiction, such as the edited collection *Octavia's Brood* (2015), which offers a platform for disabled science fiction writers such as Mia Mingus. Working from disability justice or social models of disability, these science fiction narratives present possible worlds of interdependence, access, and critical relationships with technology. At a minimum, these narratives “resist the ableist urge to reduce disability to deficit” (Allan & Cheyne, 2020, p. 390).

## Disability, Technology, and Science Fiction: Cinema

Of the mainstream theatre releases or re-releases over the past 50 years, many of the most successful Blockbusters to hit the big screens have been sci-fis featuring disabled characters in prominent roles.

One of the more significant recent portrayals of disability is within James Cameron's 2009 film *Avatar*. The film's protagonist, Jake Sully is a futuristic disabled veteran, who is assigned to a special mission on the planet Pandora. Jake is able to take on this assignment because his genetic make-up allows him to assume the avatar of his deceased, non-disabled brother. There are many ways to think about the significance of Jake Sully's character in relation to disability, especially as it intersects with militarism, environmental crisis and colonialism. Some might argue that in the film, Sully is only able to take on the hero role through technology, which puts him into an abled body. In his wheelchair, he is framed as weak and incapable, and only in his 'restored' avatar form is he able to take on the role of the action-adventure hero and saviour.

Below is a short YouTube clip from the film where Jake Sully first experiences this transformation into his avatar.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=996#oembed-1>

Sami Schalk (2020) builds a more complex argument, suggesting that the film *Avatar* intervenes into contemporary concerns about veterans who through protective and medical technology are able to survive in greater numbers, albeit with brain and traumatic injury. Far from critically exploring the consequences of military and biomedical technologies, *Avatar* could be understood as offering new avenues for American audiences to escape the discomfort of the 21st century social and material concerns of veterans. More significantly, for Schalk, *Avatar* reproduces and intensifies disability hierarchies in which some disabled people, such as Sully, are deemed good, heroic, and deserving of praise and commendation.

Stuart Murray and Graham Pullin (n.d.) offer another, fleeting, disability example from *Star Wars*. Luke Skywalker's hand is severed during a battle with Darth Vader, shortly before Vader reveals himself to be Luke's father. Murray and Pullin note that the event of limb loss very quickly becomes ordinary, as Luke is equipped with a biotechnological prosthetic that appears and functions as a human hand. The limb loss fades into the background of the narrative and is never referenced again, even in terms of repair and maintenance. While both *Avatar* and *Star Wars* erase disability, it is seen more profoundly in *Star Wars* as Luke's injury does not engage with disability at all and quickly uses technology to render the body normative.



“Mark Hamill as Luke Skywalker with Ian McDiarmid as the Emperor Darth Sidious and Darth Vader.” Image on Flickr. Licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Although not discussed here, we could think about how technology works to amplify the threat of science fiction villains. Technology can be used to make viable villains — it gives them mobility and strength that makes them terrifying. Like heroic or affirmative characters, technology also makes disabled villains able-bodied, ‘fixing’ impaired bodies and restoring abilities to what is considered ‘normal.’ Rarely do any of these portrayals deal with discrimination, access, accommodation, or care work in any meaningful way.

As you progress through this Pressbook, consider disability representations that are “crip” and aim to bring ethics and politics of “crip technoscience” to your analysis and creation of digital media storytelling.

# Analyzing Representations



Watch the trailer to *Pacific Rim: Uprising* (2018) below. Alternatively, choose another science fiction film that employs futuristic technology.

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=1004#oembed-1>

As you engage with this video, consider the following questions:

- What technology is being represented here?
- What is the aesthetic of the technology?
- What does it do?
- Who made it?
- How does it change the body?
- What is the relationship with the bodymind?
- What is the relationship with community, access, care, and social justice?
- What emotions are associated with the technology?
  - Imagine the kinds of complications, feelings, and experiences that are connected to the technology
- Can you imagine a different use for this technology?
- Can we cripple this technology?

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=1004#h5p-30>



Think of a disabled character in a science fiction film, television show, video game, or book. Use the documentation tool below to post images or descriptions to support collaborative archiving and discussions that might arise from this module. What tropes, trends, and patterns do we see emerging? What is the relationship between technology and the character in these examples?

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=1004#h5p-30>

These representations matter. As Kathryn Allan and Ria Cheyne (2020) contend in their introduction to the special science fiction issue of the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*,

“Science fiction opens up possibilities for new worlds and ways of being that enact the crip possibilities of desiring disabilities. Disability studies grounds these possibilities in the present and material conditions in which we continue to experience physical and social barriers.” (p. 391)

The representation of disability in science fiction tells us about present and future relationships between disability, embodiment, and technology. The science fiction stories we tell negotiate complicated and conflicted extraordinary and ordinary intersections of bodies, technologies, and difference (Murray & Pullin, n.d.). In some instances, science fiction perpetuates ableist myths:

- that technology is curative;
- that disabled bodies all want and need to be cured;
- that technology is made by able-bodied peoples for disabled users;
- and that technology can and should improve the limitations of our bodies.

At other times, as in the representations of Geordi, Professor X, or Batgirl/Oracle, the myriad relationships between disability and technology can be agentive, flexible, and disruptive to social categories such as disability, gender, and race.

# Ableism in Advertising



“Cogeco provides superfast fibre-powered Internet, flexible TV and Residential Home Phone services” – Cogeco.ca, September 2020

“Keeping up with friends is faster and easier than ever” –Facebook, Apps on Google Play, September 2020

“Phones, Internet and TV on Canada’s fastest network” –Telus.com, September 2020

Examining our imagination about the future is important, in part, for what it reveals about the present. According to Alison Kafer (2013), whose work on crip time we explored earlier in this module, “the imagined future invoked in popular culture, academic theory, and politics movements” allow us to “trace the ways in which compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness and compulsory heterosexuality intertwine in the service of normativity” (p. 17).

Our purpose now is to look at advertisements for technology that promise to bring us into that future, one that we are led to believe will be faster, more efficient, and more productive than the present. Though these advertisements don’t depict the future, or the present, in an obvious way, they do each express their own norms, biases, and values.

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In *Restricted Access*, Elizabeth Ellcessor (2016) analyzes the iPad commercial above, noting the way women are framed as less technologically competent than men — they “already know how to use it,” no additional technology learning required — and describing the class markers such as business-wear and leisure time that signal that screen technology is targeted at middle- and upper-class users. We want to think about advertisements along similar lines as Ellcessor, paying close attention to what their messages might imply for disability, and the relationship between disability and technology.

When examining our mockup ads below, consider what we have already discussed about crip-time and crippling technology. Recall how crippling technoscience and time both draw attention to a cultural obsession with speed, size, and productivity. What role do advertisements like those below have in reinforcing this obsession, and how might they be encouraging society to think of disability, slowness, and mental or embodied difference, as shortcomings which need to be ‘fixed’?

Consider, too, what we have proposed about a possible future, and possible role for technology, wherein disabled people are not ‘fixed’, ‘made faster’, or ‘made more productive’ using technology, but instead enabled to live within their particular embodiments.

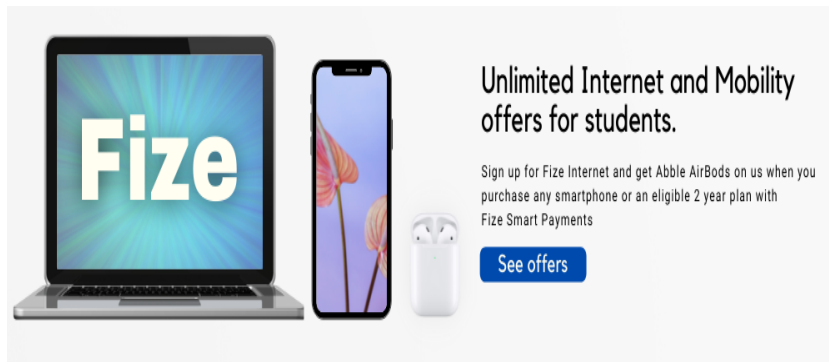


We’re now going to analyze the ideology of communications technology in advertising. The constructed advertisements in this activity draw inspiration from an array of back-to-school, telecommunication, computer,

mobile device, and software promotions.



Advertisement 1. Image credit: Morgan Sea Thomson.



Advertisement 2. Image credit: Morgan Sea Thomson.



Advertisement 3. Image credit: Morgan Sea Thomson.

To analyze these advertisements, consider the questions in the box below. Pay attention to the represented or suggested relationship between technology and bodies, how disability does or does not enter the frame, and what kinds of ideologies underscore these ads for telecommunication companies—both their services and their digital devices.

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# Glitch/Failure



When writing this module, Adan Jerreat-Poole highlighted glitches and failures they regularly encountered in every day technology and the implications of increased technological expectations. We will also take up glitches in [Module 9 as we experiment with game design](#). In Jerreat-Poole's words:

“Internet cuts out. The Zoom/Skype video freezes. My computer crashes—*again*. I lost the save file. I forgot to save. The file is corrupted. The audio is clogged with static. My smartphone is spiderwebbed with cracks from that time I dropped it at the bus stop. It's held together with tape and wishes. Every time I take a photograph, it turns out blurry.

Despite living apparently in the digital age, our technology fails us all the time. I used to live out in the country, where Wi-Fi would periodically cut out and I rarely had cell service. When I was doing a quantitative analysis on a dataset for my PhD dissertation, the programs I was using would routinely crash from the size of the data file, and I had to figure out how to break it up into smaller pieces that the programs could handle. It had never occurred to me before that there was a size limit. Our devices fail, sometimes expectedly (you *know* you have to jiggle the charging cord to get it to work), and sometimes randomly stalling or crashing.

Pre-COVID, this was still an issue, but we had easier access to backups—to public libraries and, of course, the University library computers. In-person classes, while inaccessible to many of us, didn't require a high-speed internet connection (expensive!) and a working web camera. The more reliant we become on technology, the more vulnerable we are when it fails.

I don't mean this as a critique of digital technology in general (old forms of technology also glitched and failed), but I do want to explore our experiences with tech failure and push back on narratives of speed and efficiency. I also want to showcase the knowledge and creativity and improvisation required to work with new media tools, methods, and hardware."

In the Crip Technoscience Manifesto, Hamraie and Fritsch (2019) illustrate the intimate relationship disabled people often have with the technology they use, which often requires adapting to the glitches and failures of these devices. They draw attention to the work of 'tinkering', or making minor adjustments that allow otherwise faulty devices to work or adapt them to specific needs. They reflect on the work of disabled designer Alice Loomer:

"Alice Loomer (1982), a wheelchair user, described her crip maker practices of repurposing household items for wheelchair maintenance or for ad hoc assistive technologies as "hanging onto the coattails of science." Loomer argued that her own tinkering and maintenance practices "kept [her] away from nursing homes and attendants": "I made it. So I know how to fix it...I may have failed as often as I succeeded, but I have equipment that fits me."  
(p. 8).



Take a few minutes to reflect on your personal experiences with technology glitches and failure, and to imagine how we might use our technology in a 'slow' or 'crippled' way. Questions to guide your exploration:

- Do you have a finicky device? Do you know how to work something in your home that nobody else can work? What are your tricks for

when your storage is full on your phone?

- How did you get to know the idiosyncracies of your device? Do you now have a unique relationship with that device that is different from other people in your household?

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=192#h5p-30>

# Algorithms of Oppression



The final segment of today's module turns away from representation and toward algorithmic culture. Our everyday lives are mediated by algorithms: targeted ads on Facebook, Google search results, and social media feeds are all the result of a murky, invisible, machinic process. For example, many online activists, particularly queer people and women of colour, find that their content is falsely flagged for offensive content or 'shadowbanned' on Instagram and Facebook (see this re-port by Salty, a digital newsletter: <https://saltyworld.net/algorithmicbiasreport-2/>). Shadowbanning refers to when social media algorithms show some accounts, products, posts, and stories to very few people.

It is difficult for many of us to find out or understand what algorithms influence our digital experiences. Often, we don't know who created them and what social and political frameworks or financial incentives affect the way they function. While algorithms are often misrepresented/misunderstood as neutral and non-biased (unlike humans!), algorithms are produced by people within cultures and are anything but neutral.

The guiding text for this section of the class is Safiya Noble's book *Algorithms of Oppression* (2018). Noble articulately and thoughtfully dissects the mainstream attitude that search results are democratic, reminding us that search results on Google are often paid-for ads masquerading as popular results, and that companies have found ways to use keywords to maximize their search results.

Oftentimes, companies and organizations that are more homogenous online, that is, more like one another, are more successful in search algorithms

(Caplan and Boyd, 2018). Widely shown social media accounts and top search results on search engines are not necessarily more ‘useful’ or popular, but companies and accounts that conform to normative standards of what is popular.

Noble discusses the white masculine culture of Silicon Valley where so many of the algorithms that govern our apps and social media platforms are crafted, which often results in gender and racial biases in our technologies. Noble insists that “where men shape technology, they shape it to the exclusion of women, especially Black women” (p. 107). Furthermore, “popular” search results that emerge in a culture shaped by white supremacy and patriarchy lead to the reinforcement of racist and sexist stereotypes online. For example, Noble writes that Google image results for professional hairstyles typically return pictures of white women, while Google image searches for unprofessional hairstyles are more likely to show natural Black hair (p. 83).

Noble is not the only scholar concerned with the undemocratic internet and with challenging the myth that computer processes are neutral. In *The People’s Platform* (2014), Astra Taylor writes that

“the algorithms being created are likely to reflect the dominant social norms of our day and, perhaps, be even more discriminatory than the people who devised them” (p. 132).

Furthermore, Pamela Graham, in her article “An Encyclopedia, Not an Experiment in Democracy: Wikipedia Biographies, Authorship, and the Wikipedia Subject” explains that the key contributor demographic for Wikipedia contributors is college-educated middle class white men, typically from North America or Europe (p. 230). Subsequently, an authorship bias has been demonstrated in the creation and revision of Wikipedia pages (i.e. the privileging of Western, white men as considered worthy of having their own pages, overrepresentation of whiteness and masculinity in the encyclopaedia, etc.). Ultimately, Graham concludes that,

“the power dynamics that exist in traditional print, television, and filmic biographies— where some subjects are deemed more worthy than others—do not simply disappear because biography is constructed

in a “new” digital space. The hierarchical structure of the site, the cultural conditions and discourse, combined with the authorship bias, create a space that is not as open and egalitarian as the Wikipedia brand initially suggests” (p. 231).



An image of a photo that has been deleted. Source: Thomas Hawk, Flickr.

It's also important to keep in mind that content filters (algorithms that filter out certain search results, or flag content as ‘in violation of terms of use’ or, for example, a nipple on a feminine body), are also created by corporations reinforcing particular beliefs, boosting some search results and burying others. Meanwhile, content moderators are often restrained by profit margins. For example, when scholar Sarah T. Roberts interviewed commercial content moderators, she was told that sometimes when they flag content that violates the company's terms of use (one example was of blackface), if the post has gone viral and is popular, they'll be instructed to leave it up.

Algorithms operate according to profit motives and an adjacent desire to increase or prolong usership. The values, ideologies, and world that they

construct in this process are somewhat of an afterthought. It's important, however, to not get lost in 'technological determinism', or the view that as individuals or as a society we must powerlessly receive the world that tech giants are constructing for us. The internet is ultimately just a technology for communicating information; whether that technology is used for profit and social control, for creativity, for joy or for war, is determined by human agency. Remaining observant and critical of the ways that technology is currently being used, we can also encourage more promising uses of digital technology, aligned with a more just vision of the present and the future. The internet, like everything else, can be crippled.

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# **The Materiality of Media**

This module was written by:

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow,  
Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community  
Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

Tali Cherniawsky, MSc, Lab Coordinator, Disability Publics Lab, Ryerson  
University\*, Toronto, ON, Canada

\*name change pending Summer 2022

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# Module Overview



In this module, we're going to explore the material reality of our media, i.e. the physical environment and objects that let us access, use, and create digital media. We will focus on access to the Internet and technology and then delve into the production of screen technology. Through this process, we will move from local/regional to global/transnational networks. By the end of this module, you will:

- Understand and complicate the concept of a “digital divide.”
- Understand barriers to media participation.
- Be able to situate ourselves and our devices in a network of global relationships.
- Begin to understand the relationship between colonialism, capitalism, disability, and technological development.

# Digital Divides

## What is the Digital Divide?

One of our assigned readings this week is “Permanent Online Landlord and Tenant Board Hearings Are Having Devastating Consequences” released by the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario. In this statement, the Advocacy Centre describes the impacts of Landlord and Tenant Board hearings being moved online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The statistics show a dramatic decline in tenants attending hearings, leading to a default ruling in favour of the landlord. The paper also notes the different ways in which landlords and tenants access the hearing—with landlords more likely to call in with video conferencing, while tenants are more likely to call in on a phone.

What this contemporary example illustrates is the **digital divide—a material gap in digital access**. Not every person has access to a personal computer and high-speed Internet, or to the time, energy, and money it takes to craft or maintain a personal or professional website.

Why is it important to consider who has the time, energy, and resources to create an online presence?

For example, if you are trying to choose a business to frequent, such as a restaurant or hair salon, or hire someone like a contractor or plumber, would you likely search for their website or social media? What would happen if you found well-maintained websites and social media pages for some but not others?

## Who is Affected by the Digital Divide

The digital divide in Canada falls across lines of privilege and reflects inequalities in society such as income, urban/rural location, age, and immigration status (Haight, Quan-Haase, & Corbett, 2014). Here are some of the other population groups that are affected by the digital divide:

## **Disabled / Able Divide**

According to the World Economic Forum (2021), disabled people in the United States are significantly less likely to own a computer or smartphone. However, Goggin (2017) cautions that most research on the digital divide for disabled people operates through a medical or charity model of disability ([as discussed in Module 1](#)) and fails to capture:

1. The diversity of disabled people's experiences with technology
2. The many ways there are 'built-in' accessibility barriers to technology
3. The ingenuity and contributions of disabled people and culture to digital design
4. Intersectionality in disability and its high incidence alongside other marginalized identities with relationships to digital inequality such as class, race, and global location.

## **Indigenous / Settler Divide**

Critically, a significant divide exists between Indigenous and settler peoples in Canada, where only 24% of Indigenous communities have access to high-speed internet (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2019). There is a complex relationship of 'access to technology' between Indigenous and settler peoples in Canada perpetuated by dominant media narratives that frame settlers as "technologically advanced" and Indigenous peoples as "technologically unsophisticated" (Winter & Boudreau, 2018). Winter and Boudreau (2018) assert that these framings create a false binary in the digital divide that imagines technology only through settler colonial values. They also point to examples of Indigenous initiatives in digital storytelling and virtual landscapes and draw on the words of Cheryl L'Hirondelle, a multidisciplinary artist who works within a Cree worldview,

“Connection to the land is what makes us Indigenous, and yet as we move forward into virtual domains we too are sneaking up and setting up camp — making this virtual and technologically mediated domain our own. However, we stake a claim here too as being an intrinsic part of this place — the very roots, or more appropriately routes. So let’s use our collective Indigenous unconscious to remember our contributions and the physical beginnings that were pivotal in how this virtual reality was constructed.”

(L’Hirondelle, 2016)

## **Gender Divide**

Another digital divide emerges across gender, which has shifted significantly over time and location. In 2006, Henry Jenkins described the “stark divergence in rates of participation, dependent on socioeconomic status, race, and gender, with men considerably more likely to participate online than women” (p. 109). Recently, in the Global North, this gendered divide in access and participation is closing (Haight, Quan-Haase, & Corbett, 2014) but it remains a pressing concern in the Global South (Antonia & Tuffley, 2014). However, as this divide in digital access is closing in the Global North, we have to ask ourselves: why are men more likely to participate online than women? A few answers come to mind: that women, femmes, and feminine persons are still on average doing more domestic and childcare labour than men and masculine persons, often alongside a full-time job; that Silicon Valley and Silicon Valley-inspired tech cultures are known to be toxically masculine spaces, and therefore unwelcoming for women and feminine persons; and that technology is typically coded as masculine, i.e., it’s more likely that boys will be encouraged to play with computers than girls.

## **Global Divide**

Researchers today often use the terms ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ to describe how certain nations control technologies and industry while others provide the resources and labour for this industry (Kazemi, 2017). Broadly

speaking, ‘Southern’ countries are those with higher rates of poverty and a history of being colonized or conquered by ‘Northern’ countries (Meekosha, 2011). While this distinction falls roughly along a North/South boundary, there are exceptions (such as Australia and New Zealand as ‘Northern’ and Central Asia and Mongolia as ‘Southern’) and many complexities and gray areas within this model (including the categorizations of China, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, and others).

When comparing the Global North with the Global South, Richard Heeks (2021) argues that today there is less of a global digital divide in who has access to technology; in fact, many poorer nations are growing rapidly in their digital engagement. However, Heeks contends that poorer nations are less included in the advantages of digital technology, i.e. these technologies allow and even encourage “a more-advantaged group to extract disproportionate value from the work or resources of another, less advantaged group.” As an example, Heeks points to people in South Africa who end up earning less than minimum wage working for tech companies that use a gig economy model.

## Contextualizing the Digital Divide

The digital divide encompasses a range of material conditions: from the homes we (may not) live in and work from, to being able to afford technology and wi-fi, to having access to high-speed internet at all. It includes being able or unable to operate the devices which were crafted for able-bodied users. It includes having the time, energy, and skillset to participate in online culture. It includes barriers to participation in online communities, which continue to reproduce offline violence, including the harassment of women, queer and trans people, and people of colour, often driving users off social media (Duguay, Burgess, & Suzor, 2020; Madden, Janoske, Winkler, & Edgar, 2018).

Astra Taylor (2014) writes that

“material and social conditions have not given way to will and imagination... The disparities of the off-line world have not been

upended and we do not have equal access to the tools of creative production and capacity to attract an audience” (p. 108).

She goes on to explain that “despite the Web’s lowered barrier to entry, not everyone has equal resources or time to devote to the creation of art and culture” (p. 138). [As we discussed in Module 3](#), predominantly through Safiya Noble’s *Algorithms of Oppression* (2018), the Internet may not be a democratic space but instead can reproduce offline inequalities in a digital sphere. In an increasingly digitally mediated world in which our online presence is not only assumed but often required, those with power and privilege are advantaged. However, these conditions also create spaces for resistance and agency amongst those who might be otherwise disadvantaged. For example, listen to or read the transcript of this podcast hosted by Alice Wong who talks with Amanda Cachia about technology and access in museums:



<https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2020/11/01/ep-89-museums/>

## Digital Divide in COVID-19

During COVID-19, these disparities became glaringly clear. The landlord-tenant example at the beginning of this module illustrates the stark class divide in terms of internet access, which of course overlaps and intersects with other social positions as mentioned above. When we think about the digital divide during COVID-19 we may reflect on questions such as:

- Who is joining an online meeting/gathering/appointment from a private office on a high-powered computer, and who is calling in from a shared computer or a cell phone in a crowded apartment?
- Who isn’t able to join an online meeting/gathering/appointment at all?

Erin Knight, in her CBC article that was assigned for this module, writes that “one in 10 Canadian households still have no internet at home, relying

on mobile, work, school and libraries for basic connectivity. This raises the question: who's being left out of the new online normal?" She goes on to note that "it's disproportionately people living in rural and remote areas, low-income families, and Indigenous people" who do not have Internet access, and adds that for many other Canadians, their Internet access is slow—particularly on Indigenous reserves.



Think about times when you have had glitches and dropped phone calls, static and frozen screens. Describe a time when technology failed you. What happened?

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=235#h5p-30>

# Access Barriers and Harm



Image source: Sherm for Disabled And Here

[In the second module](#), we made a list of platform affordances and constraints using the lens of access and disability justice. We saw how writers like Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) and Johanna Hedva (2016) point to the way in which digital media can be an effective way for disabled users to create community, share stories, protest, love, learn, and educate. However, as Goggin (2017) pointed out, it's important to recognize that every platform, medium, and format is limited, and that disability is

incredibly diverse. Here, we can invite Elizabeth Ellcessor into the conversation to complicate our understanding of the relationship between digital media and disability.

In *Restricted Access* (2016), Ellcessor outlines the ways in which digital media can be both inaccessible for people with disabilities as well as disabling. Ellcessor argues that “digital media cultures take for granted an able-bodied user position, potentially restricting access for users with a variety of disabilities” (p. 2). She goes on to explain that “access must be understood not in terms of availability, affordability, or choice but in terms of an individual’s ability to engage meaningfully with a medium/technology and its content” (p. 6). In this section, we will begin to explore the ways in which digital media is inaccessible and exclusionary. We will critically consider which bodies our devices and programs are designed for and which bodies are positioned as the exception, needing accommodations and special (often expensive) set-ups. Remember also the ways that disabled people are creative and agentive within these systems, as outlined in Module 3.



## Inaccessible and Harmful Digital Media

In what ways are digital media inaccessible or even harmful to users?  
Examples:

- Not always close-captioned

- Designed in ways that are not always accessible to people with colour blindness
- Flashing or strobing lights that can cause seizures

Take a few minutes to brainstorm other ways in which digital media are inaccessible or actively harmful to users. Click this link to create your own copy of a chart with different technologies and platforms to guide your brainstorming, or fill out the text boxes below.

Questions to guide your analysis:

- Do these technologies require bodies to be in a certain position? I.e. Sitting at a desk, walking around, etc.
- What parts of our bodies do the technologies heavily rely on for use? I.e. Hands and fingers for touchscreens, ears and hearing for audio, etc.
- Does the platform have alt-text on images for screen readers?
- Does the platform offer close captions? Are the captions created by a person or a program, and how good are the captions?
- Is accessibility an afterthought or built into the platform?
- How might people with different physical disabilities access these platforms?
- How might people with mental illnesses be affected by these platforms and their content?
- Is it easy to find the access options or are they obscured or hidden?

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# Ideology of Design

“Architecture and landscape design not only attempt to project a sense of beauty but exclude people deemed ugly or defective by making their access to society difficult or impossible”

Tobin Siebers (2010), *Disability Aesthetics*, p. 79

“The “you” of Web 2.0 thus always implies the existence of “them””: those who are not invited, those who are not associated with the pleasures and agency of these technologies, and those who cannot take up these user positions because of different articulations of bodies and technologies”

Elizabeth Ellcessor (2016), *Restricted Access*, p. 78



Image source: Pixabay

Stairs. Red and green traffic lights. The design of cities and spaces can exclude bodies from participation both literally and symbolically.

Alternatively, design can build inclusion into the space—with ramps, for example, or tactile paving to assist persons with vision impairment. Similarly, the design of technology and social media platforms can symbolically and literally exclude or include users from participation and community. This part of the module turns to critically analyzing the physical design and interface of our devices.

Recall [the exercise we did in Module 3](#), where we reflected on representation and messaging in advertising. If we now extend this analysis to the physical design of products we may ask questions about our technological devices such as :

- Who can afford these devices?
- Who can use them?
- Who can't use them?
- Who can use them with difficulty or pain?
- What kinds of strength, stamina, and dexterity are required to operate an Xbox controller or a cell phone?



## Activity: Device Platform Study

We're going to practice a platform study on one of our devices. Let's take 3-5 minutes and begin to critically analyze our own technologies. This activity will help us think critically about device design and the way our computers, tablets, and cell phones create barriers to access. For this exercise, use the reflection space below to write down the series of steps you go through when accessing a Zoom lecture. Start with how you turn on your device and login. You may want to think through:

- What does the home screen look like?
- How do you navigate to the Zoom call?
- Once you join, how do you access the chat, turn on your video and audio, and access the class discussion?
- What abilities does your device require?

Further questions to guide your access platform analysis:

- How do you log into your device?
- What does the home screen look like?
- Are there bright lights, flashing lights, or loud sounds?
- How do you navigate to open documents or launch a web browser?
- What size are the keys or buttons?
- What font is the default? What size is the text? Can these be changed?
- What is the contrast between text colour and background colour? Can they be changed?
- What position does your body have to be in to use the device?
- Does your device have audio/voice control options? How effective are they?
- What is the size, shape, and weight of your device?
- What is the style design of your device? What colour is it? What shapes is it composed of? What textures?

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=239#h5p-30>

Example Steps

1. Turn on
2. Login
3. Home screen layout
4. Navigate to Zoom link
5. Join Zoom call
6. In the Zoom call—using video and/or audio, accessing the chat, hearing or reading captions, etc.

# Global Networks

“By now it is well understood that media compound and even generate disability, through...architectural prohibitions, toxic electronic waste, or technologies that establish bodily norms” –Elizabeth Ellcessor and Bill Kirkpatrick (2017), p. 365

In this section of this module we will:

- Identify the ways in which the production of technology is disabling to marginalized bodies.
- Move from a local/regional framework to a global/transnational view of the life cycle of a digital device—from creation to distribution to disposal.
- Situate ourselves in a series of relationships with other bodies, objects, by completing a mapping exercise that tracks the flow of materials, bodies, and affects around the globe.
- Use storytelling to challenge the myth that technology is inherently a social good, and that technology benefits and supports all disabled people.

We take up Jonathan Sterne and Mara Mills’ (2017) call to “think transnationally about disability as it results from global supply chains, war, and international laws or standards” (p. 373). Remember that when we talk about the digital, we are connected to large systems... some people might say... This call reminds us that colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and white supremacy are disability justice issues, and are deeply intertwined with technological development.

This section encourages us to explore our personal, intimate relationships with technology and digital media and to use this relationship as a way of interrogating culture, ideology, and power. It is crucial for us to put ourselves in the frame and recognize our own embeddedness in the objects and practices and institutions we study. This method requires that we recognize the places that we learn from—not just from our office or

bedroom, but from our body, our identities, and our experiences. We start from this position of our bodies, identities, and experiences, and learn outward, like ripples on a pond, concentric circles taking us beyond the limits of what we know to be true, touching other ripples made by other bodies. We are always learning from each other. Let's think critically about the ways that digital technologies bring us into contact with one another.

Screen technologies bring us into contact with other bodies, physical and digital, animate and inanimate, human and non-human. For example, through these technologies, we are brought into relationships with digital avatars that represent their real-world, physical human counterparts. Digital avatars are pictures or three-dimensional illustrations that a person creates to represent themselves in video games, virtual worlds, and on social media. Another example is how our bodies touch physical, inanimate screens, keys, and buttons that have already been touched by non-human machines and human labourers in other parts of the world.

Let's start with creation: the story of how the device we are using right now came to exist and how it came to us. Along the way, we will uncover the values and power structures that underscore the production and circulation of digital devices around the globe. Will also think through the way we become intimate with a multitude of other bodies, as referenced in the previous paragraph, through these processes.



## Researching the Device

Choose one of the devices you use to access the course material. For example, you may choose your smartphone, tablet, or computer. We want to start by thinking about the physicality of our devices.

Using Google, Wikipedia, or school library databases, take 10 minutes to do some cursory research about your chosen device. Record your reflections below. Keep this information with you because we will be working with it in a mapping exercise later in this Module.

Questions to guide your research:

- What materials go into the creation of your device?
- Where are these materials mined? Who mines them?
- What is the impact of this labour on the miners?
- What is the impact of mineral extraction on the environment/land around these mines?
- Where are the devices manufactured? Who manufactures them?
- Who owns the company? How much does the owner make?
- What are the side effects on labourers of working with these materials?

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# The Biopolitics of Disablement



“Other bodies are employed in the production processes precisely because they are deemed available for injury—they are, in other words, expendable, bodies whose debilitation is required in order to sustain capitalist narratives of progress.” Puar, 2009, p. 110

In the above quote, Jasbir Puar talks about how some bodies are expendable in capitalism, i.e. capitalism requires people to do dangerous work, work that often leads to injury and disablement, in order for many of our goods to be produced. In her 2017 book, *The Right to Maim*, Puar expands on this notion to discuss the “biopolitics of disablement”.

Transnational social, political and economic forces ‘debilitate’ or slowly wear down the bodies of those deemed ‘other’ or ‘marginal’. These forces find expression in military occupation, migrant detention, transnational corporations, environmental racism and economic opportunism.

For example, in 2005, the global company, Trafigura, the world’s third-largest independent oil trader, bought unrefined gasoline from Mexico’s state-owned petroleum company. They began to try to refine it, attempting to offload the toxic waste byproduct in Amsterdam. However, due to its terrible smell, Amsterdam port authorities tested the waste and found it to be too toxic. Trafigura contracted out another company to dispose of the waste, which was then unloaded at 18 different dumpsites in Abidjan in the Côte d’Ivoire. More than 100,000 people had to be treated for nausea, headaches, breathing difficulties, stinging eyes, and burning skin, and between 15-17 people died (Amnesty International, 2012).

Turning back to the theme of this section, how do the biopolitics of disablement operate in relation to technology and new media?

E-waste is the byproducts of resource extraction and manufacturing of digital technology and the discarded technologies themselves. The United Nations (2019) estimates that over 50 million tonnes of e-waste are thrown away each year. Robert Mejia (2016) writes, “it is well documented that the manufacturing of electronic technologies is a toxic process” (p. 231). He goes on to explain that technology users in the Global North need to understand that “the epidemiological consequences of technological production, usage, and disposal is most likely to harm poor women, men, and children of color” (p. 236), citing lead poisoning, the toxicity of mercury, and the environmental degradation caused by mining operations.

Safiya Umoja Noble (2018) writes,

“in the ecosystem, Black people provide the most grueling labor for blood minerals, and they do the dangerous, toxic work of dismantling e-waste in places such as Ghana” (p. 164).

A large dumpsite near Ghana’s capital, Accra, is the destination for hundreds of thousands of tonnes of e-waste every year, 85% of which comes from Europe. People who work at and live near this dumpsite suffer severe health consequences to both themselves and their children with reports of dangerously high levels of toxins in the area (Kwan, 2020).

In *The Price of Popular Media*, Toby Miller (2017) describes the dangers for workers in the Global South as a result of breaking down e-waste, arguing that “we need to respond to this situation by connecting the materiality of media technologies to the production of disability” (p. 307). To learn more about the production of disability through a global lens, [read this paper by Sona Kazemi \(2017\)](#). In it, Kazemi conceptualizes a Transnational Disability Studies that investigates the production of disability through war and global capitalist economies which result from “unequal power-relations between the two constructed ‘first’ and ‘third’ worlds” (p. 36).



Questions for us to consider as crip media scholars:

- What are some of the side effects of working with hazardous materials?
- Who is most likely doing this work? Where are they located? Do they have access to protective equipment and healthcare?
- How does mining and the transportation of hazardous materials impact the body?
- How does pollution, water poisoning, and environmental degradation impact individual and community health?



## Mapping Exercise

Following Miller's call to trace the materiality of media, our next activity is to follow the global flow of materials, money, health, and disability in relation to techno-capital networks. Through this activity you will map the life and effects of a digital device, from raw material mining to use of the device and its disposal.

Use the world map image here (<https://pixabay.com/photos/map-earth-world-planet-environment-4818844/>) or find your own. You can print out the map and draw/write on it by hand, or edit with Microsoft Word, Paint, PowerPoint, Google Document, etc. If visual mapping is unavailable or inaccessible to you, answer the questions below in a list format.

Return to your [Researching the Device Activity](#) notes from earlier in this module where you researched the materiality of your media device. Use your work and research as a guide to perform the following activity.

## Part 1: Materials

- Mark down the final destination (for now) of the device, where it resides with you.
- Use your research to mark down the following destinations on the map:
  - 1) Where the minerals for the device were mined
  - 2) Where the device was likely manufactured
  - 3) Where the device resides now, with you
  - 4) Where the device might end up when you recycle or discard it
- Keep in mind that it is nearly impossible to know exactly where the components of your cell phone came from. Guided by research, we will speculate possible locations the device could have moved through.
- You should have at least 4 locations marked on your map; likely more, if you've identified multiple minerals/materials that went into the creation of your device.
- Use arrows to connect these locations, showing the movement of materials around the globe.

## **Part 2: Disability**

On each location where the device (or its materials/components) have moved through, list the disabilities or health implications of the creation process. What are the side effects of mining, manufacturing, using a computer, and recycling e-waste?

## Part 3: Capital

- Who profits from this device? Note where the CEO of the company resides and what their salary is. A website that may help you find this information is <https://www.investopedia.com/>
- How much do the salespeople make at Best Buy or the Apple Store where you bought the device? Note on your map.
- How much do the designers of the device make? Are they located in Silicon Valley, Waterloo, or somewhere else? Note on your map.
- How much do the miners make?
- How much do the workers sorting e-waste make?
- Draw an arrow from your location tracing the flow of money through to the various workers on the chain, identifying who profits the most or least from the product

The map you produce may look something like this. Click a pink 'i' to see the device stage and health implications for each location.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=244#h5p-34>

### Notes on Disability and Disablement

- Remember that we can be critical of the production or exacerbation of disability by capitalism and other systems of violence while still being proud of our own disabled identities.
- Remember that there are people who become disabled who go through a mourning period as they become accustomed to their new embodiment.
- Remember that there are disabled people who have never desired a different body and reject mourning narratives.
- Remember that there are people who want to be cured (chronic pain, anyone?).

- Remember that there are people who do not want to be cured.
- Remember that many of us use the psychiatric or biomedical industries to manage pain or illness, and we can still be critical of those institutions AND want better access to care.
- Remember that neurodivergence is difference from physical disability, which is different from chronic illness, mental illness, being Deaf or hard of hearing and being blind or visually impaired.
- Remember that within these different categories of disability there are a wide range of experiences.
- Remember that in an ableist society, living at axes of privilege (whiteness, masculinity, wealth, heterosexuality, in the Global North, English speaking) makes survival more manageable than those of us living at multiple axes of oppression.

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# Image Workshop

This module was written by:

Jill Hoffman, MA, PhD Candidate, Western University, Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research, London, ON, Canada

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

\*name change pending Summer 2022

# Module 5 Readings

## Photo Essays

Choose two from the list below:

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# Module Overview

## Introduction

In the next three modules, the focus is on “Crip Making: Image, Audio, and Video.” In these modules, you will encounter a blend of theoretical work on the meaning of digital crip making as well as practical tips to guide you through your own process of digital creation. While you will find plenty to ponder in these pages, you may reach the end of the module and find yourself craving more information. Digital methods and crip creation are processes — processes that often lead us to new questions and relationships with the world. This is part of the magic of digital methods: they keep us thinking and exploring. We resist the urge to give any ‘final answers’ or definitive accessibility guide as another goal of this Pressbook is to aid you in developing troubleshooting, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills, especially in the ever-changing digital context. You are encouraged to do further research, find the platforms that suit you, ask critical questions of your own, and play with different methods of building access into your own digital making.

This module begins with an examination of images in our everyday lives, including our digital creation. Why do we study images? In “The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography” (2002) Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes,

All representations have social and political consequences. Understanding how images create or dispel disability as a system of exclusions and prejudices is a move toward the process of dismantling the institutional, attitudinal, legislative, economic, and architectural barriers that keep people with disabilities from full participation in society.  
(p. 75)

Let’s break this quote down. In the simplest terms, Garland-Thomson is arguing that our encounters with images of disability are not socially or politically neutral. Tanya Titchkosky (2009) builds on the idea that images of disability are not asocial or apolitical, arguing,

We never come to imagine and perceive disability ‘purely,’ we perceive disability through our cultural assumptions. While there is no one correct representation of disability, there are more or less typical representations of embodied differences that *count* as disability in Western culture.  
(p. 76, emphasis in original)



When considered together, Garland-Thomson and Titchkosky are arguing that we view images through our existing understandings of disability. Every picture we like on Instagram, every picture we see in an advertisement, and every photograph we use to support our research is viewed through our own personal lens. This lens is made up of our own cultural understandings, assumptions, experiences, and biases. In turn, we share our understandings and biases with others when we create and share images. The act of creating and sharing images can also be an act of passing along ableist, racist, sexist, classist, colonialist and imperialist, fatphobic, and various other oppressive perspectives. Click on the concepts below for examples of some of these ‘-isms’ and the ways they are mobilized in photography. Each section also offers a recommendation for a reading that helps highlight the issue. This will help us develop a shared vocabulary for discussing and analyzing problematic or troublesome perspectives created and enforced by images.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=211#h5p-48>

## REFLECTION

After learning more about problematic systems and structures created and enforced by images, take a moment and think about some of the biases you may bring to your creation and interpretation of images. What are your initial perceptions of the following image?



Fig 1. Image source: PublicDomainPictures on Pixabay.

You did not have any context for this image, but you likely had some initial reactions or feelings. Your mind may have begun to form a story, to narrate what is happening in the image. Did the black and white finish of the image prompt you to think about the cultural mindset of disability as unfortunate or disabled people as the objects of pity? Perhaps social constructions of masculinity as the ‘norm’ popped up and you found yourself assuming that the subject sitting in a wheelchair is a man. How might this image reinforce the perception of women and feminine people as caregivers? Can we reflect on the ways wheelchairs are used in images as a dominant symbol of disability?



Now that you are warmed up and ready to engage critically with images, consider the following learning goals and make your way through the content and exercises in this chapter.

In this module we will:

- Analyze stock photography to understand the roles of photographic representation in disability justice work.
- Perform a platform analysis of Instagram, interrogating the affordances, constraints, and accessibility of digital images and image-sharing online.
- Explore and analyze the ways images create and reinforce cultural understandings of disability and other intersecting identities.
- Create and edit our own images to communicate a personal narrative tied to a social/cultural/political issue or movement.

# Reimagining Stock Photos and the Importance of Image



Stock photography offers an opportunity to think about image and representation in commercial contexts. What sorts of bodies attract and lure someone into a stock photograph and the content it supports? In the context of capitalism and commercialization, what types of bodies are considered ‘marketable’? The idea of ‘marketability’ can be dense and theoretical, but you are touched by the ‘politics of marketability’ in your daily life. Perhaps the related concept of ‘branding’ rings more of a bell. Have you encountered the phrase ‘sex sells’? If so, you have had an encounter with the politics of marketability and clear branding choices. In this case, physical attraction and ‘sexiness’ are being used to sell a product, a lifestyle, and a brand. In speaking about branding businesses, a recent Forbes article states “you can appeal to people’s emotions through branding and make them feel more connected to your company. Branding allows you to build relationships with your audience, which can eventually turn them into loyal customers” (Jones, 2021).

- How are disabled people, their bodies, and identities mobilized to send a message, and what message(s) do disabled people and their bodies send?
- What emotions do the bodies of disabled people elicit?
- How do audiences shape their relationships with brands that use disabled people in their photographic branding?
- Are disabled people seen as an asset or hindrance when it comes to building connections in branding and marketing?

These are large questions that cannot be fully unpacked in a single Pressbook. However, we can walk through some analytical skills and learn to be more critical consumers of images.



It is important to develop and apply critical analysis skills to the stock photography we encounter in our everyday lives. For this activity navigate to a mainstream stock photography website such as [Shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com) or [Unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com). Use the following questions to guide you as you critically analyze a stock photography website of your choosing. As you work through an analysis of your own, flip the prompt cards over and compare your answers to those in the sample analysis. How are your own answers similar? How are they different?

Please note that the analysis offered in the flipcards of this exercise centers the stock photography website [pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com) and speaks to the images found when searching the website with ‘disability’ as the key term. You may find similarities and differences between stock photography websites.

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=214#h5p-17>

Next, let’s take five minutes to explore some stock photography websites that were created to increase the representation of disabled people. Some examples include [affecttheverb.com](https://affecttheverb.com) and [disabilityin.org](https://disabilityin.org). Answer the following questions and then click ‘check’ and ‘show solution’ to see some sample responses. Just a heads up that what you write here does not save anywhere, so if you want to save your answers, copy and paste them to an external google doc or word document.

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=214#h5p-18>

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text.  
You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=214#h5p-19>

# Platform Analysis: Instagram



In module 2, [Introduction to Digital Methods for Disability Studies](#), we were introduced to the work of Jean Burgess and began to develop a foundation for our developing platform analysis skills. This section builds upon your developing platform analysis skills by interrogating the affordances and constraints of Instagram. While our platform analysis in this chapter focuses on Instagram, these skills are broadly applicable. We encourage you to apply these skills to other platforms as well.

## Sample Platform Analysis

Let's walk through a sample platform analysis with the work of Ananya Rao-Middleton.

Ananya Rao-Middleton, known in the Instagram world as [@ananyapaints](#), is a disabled artist and activist with an expressed interest in the lives of disabled women and people living with invisible disabilities. Ananya's Instagram can be found at <https://www.instagram.com/ananyapaints/> and her website is <https://www.ananyapaints.com>.

In analyzing Instagram, it is important to note that users must include between one and ten images in a post. Users cannot opt to create a post without an image. Thus, the platform demands that users include visual elements in their posts. This is a constraint for those who have un- or under-addressed visual access needs or who are not inclined to share some or all of their content in a visual format. Instagram's centering of the visual can also be understood as having great affordances as well. The visual nature of

Instagram offers visual artists and illustrators like Ananya an opportunity to place their art at the forefront of their social media activity.

## Platform Analysis – Ananya Rao-Middleton

An overview of Ananya's Instagram account reveals a beautiful array of brightly colored images that may make the viewer feel cheerful and engaged. Ananya's illustrations primarily feature people of color, which, in [returning to the stock photo exercise](#), responds to an urgent need for more representation of disabled people of color. The figures in Ananya's illustrations are also diverse in terms of gender, mobility/accessibility aids, and body shape and size. Ananya's content consists primarily of her original illustrations but she also includes some photographs and videos of herself engaged in everyday activities.

Ananya's use of Instagram is intriguing as she explicitly expresses an interest in advocating for those with invisible or non-apparent disabilities. Here we can see the ways that platform affordances and constraints are not always easy to untangle. In one respect we can understand the platform's image requirement as a constraint; the experiences of disability and disabled bodies that Ananya is interested in sharing are often the bodies of invisible or non-apparently disabled people. Capturing experiences of chronic pain or the impact of anxiety in a visual form can be difficult. The flip side of the coin is that once Ananya finds ways to express invisible or non-apparent disabilities in her art, viewers have the opportunity to engage with these experiences in a different way, to see visual testimony of the impact of non-apparent disabilities.



Now that you have engaged with a sample platform analysis, it is your turn to put your skills to the test! Navigate to one of the Instagram accounts below and perform your own platform analysis. Think about what you can say about Instagram generally and the individual Instagrammers individually. You can find some sample questions to guide you through your platform analysis after the descriptions of the model Instagram accounts, but feel free to add your own.

**1. Kam Redlawsk @KamRedlawsk**

**<https://www.instagram.com/kamredlawsk/>**

Kam is a Korean-American artist, writer, and advocate with Hereditary Inclusion Body Myopathy (today known as GNE Myopathy). She is an advocate for inclusion and access and uses social media—among other tools—to challenge ableism, including ableist stereotypes about disabled people. (website: <https://www.kamredlawsk.com/about>)

**2. Chiara Francesca @chiara.acu**

**<https://www.instagram.com/chiara.acu/?hl=en>**

Chiara Francesca is an acupuncturist, organizer, artist, immigrant, and former teen parent living with a disability. From their website: “Their clinical focus is on mental health, trauma, CPTSD and queer/trans health. She is committed to making healthcare accessible and in building collaborative healing spaces.” (website: <https://www.chiaraacu.com/about>)

**Pick one of these media makers and answer some of the questions below:**

- What are the affordances of Instagram? (what does it let users do?)
- What are the constraints of Instagram? (what does it not let users do?)
- How is Instagram accessible?
- How is Instagram inaccessible?
- In what ways can Instagram be harmful to users?
- Who owns Instagram? Who benefits from our content?
- When you post a photo, who owns the rights to that image?
- What is the broader culture around Instagram? Which demographics are targeted by Instagram? Who is excluded?
- How do these makers use Instagram to advocate, educate, and centre disability?

#### Additional Questions for Discussion:

- Consider the censoring of feminine nipples on Instagram and the politics and power dynamics that shape the circulation of images of bodies in the digital sphere.
- Who gets banned from Instagram?
- How have Instagram Stories changed the way we use or engage with the platform?
- What does the phenomenon of ‘Instafame’ and the practices of self-promotion and competing for followers and likes tell us about social media use under late-stage capitalism?

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=221#h5p-16>

# Maker Spotlight: Chiara Francesca



This module introduces our first Maker Spotlight, which will inspire conversation about digital art and access and the role of digital media and crip makers in broader conversations and movements about disability justice, activism, advocacy, community-building, and care work.

Our first Maker Spotlight features Chiara Francesca and their use of Instagram as a tool for education, activism, and collective care. You may have already done a platform analysis of Chiara's Instagram page and with this video you can hear some of her reflections in their own words. You can watch her video below:

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=225#oembed-1>

The transcript of Chiara's video can be read at this link:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oZBUKHQa03W-u0A3a98Cfd8UcBNtO2B3IVf2f5oDC\\_Q/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oZBUKHQa03W-u0A3a98Cfd8UcBNtO2B3IVf2f5oDC_Q/edit?usp=sharing)

The transcript of Chiara's video with visual description can be read at this link:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1a2vMTfjKI2zh0mFC6uSSrhCSgfo5vkj9B5j\\_ICEEvtA/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1a2vMTfjKI2zh0mFC6uSSrhCSgfo5vkj9B5j_ICEEvtA/edit?usp=sharing)

After taking time to engage with Chiara's Maker Spotlight, please take a few moments to reflect on their work. You may use the questions below to guide your reflections.

- How does Chiara define/talk about access?
- What barriers does Chiara discuss?
- What did you find most interesting in Chiara's interview?
- What resonated with your own experience?
- What was one thing you learned from watching/listening to Chiara's Maker Spotlight?
- Does Chiara's Maker Spotlight inspire you or make you think about your own digital storytelling in a new way?
- What is your own relationship to social media and/or digital images? Has it changed over time?

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=225#h5p-30>

# Activity: Photo Essay

Photo essays are lively, informative, and malleable digital methods. Photo essays tell stories, share experiences, and make arguments through the combination of images and the written word, although some essays may rely on one medium more than the other. This format can be beneficial as it allows makers to create content in a way that feels right for their interests, their audiences, their creative preferences, and their approach to accessible content creation.



In the works cited section of this module, you were provided with [several photo essays](#). Pick an essay that spoke to you and write a brief five-minute essay (in the box below or using whatever methods work best for you) capturing your reaction to the method and the maker. Once you have finished your five-minute essay, **click Check** and then **Show Solution** on the text box below to see a sample response to Jo Spence’s photo essay “The Final Project.” You may use the following questions to guide your response, but feel free to ask and answer some questions of your own.

## Guiding questions

- What is the relationship between words and images in the essay(s) you chose?
- How might the narrative or argument change if the maker had to communicate in just words or just images?
- How did your chosen photo essay(s) inspire you to create with images or to explore photo essays as a digital method?
- Which essays did you choose to read and why?
- What about the colour and lighting stood out to you in the essays you read?

- Were the subjects facing the camera or looking away?
- What appeared in the frame of the image?
- What feelings did the images illicit?

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text.  
You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=509#h5p-21>

# Image Creation Workshop

## Creating Images of Your Own

We're going to engage in a series of exercises designed to get us thinking about how we take photographs and use images—from framing to lighting to colour palette. What tone or mood do you want your image to evoke? What story are you trying to tell? After these activities, we will have a tutorial on how to edit images on Canva. You will need a cellphone, tablet, or laptop that can take pictures.



### 1. Mood Colour Palettes (5-10 minutes)

Step 1: Navigate to the link provided and choose a colour palette that best represents your mood or emotional state. <https://coolors.co/palettes/trending>

Step 2: identify one to three of the colours in your chosen mood palette in your immediate surroundings (your room, apartment, outside your window, etc.)

Step 3: photograph the item or collection of items in a way that helps to represent your emotional state (consider: shadows? Light? Should the objects be big, or small? What angle should I photograph them from?)

## **2. Selfies of Resistance (5-10 minutes)**

Pick a social issue that you are passionate about. This will be the title of your image. It might be as broad as systemic racism or the patriarchy or as narrow as Bill C-7 or the closure of the indie bookstore down the street due to lack of government support during COVID-19. It could be something you support, dream, or wish for, or something that fills you with fury and despair. Now, take a selfie, using your face, body language (and potentially clothing and make-up), lighting, and background to communicate how you feel about this topic.

## **3. Fragments of Home (5-10 minutes)**

The theme for this activity is space/place, what we might, sometimes, call home (although the spaces we inhabit often don't feel like homes). Places can be safe, protective, dangerous, confusing, chaotic, calm. They can be everything at once. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) points to some of the many connections between disability and the home sphere, taking care to note that creating art and culture from home, and more specifically, from bed, is a "time-honored crip creative practice" (p. 17). In this, Piepzna-Samarasinha rejects framings of rest and working from bed as "weak or uncool" or otherwise lacking the competence or dedication of "real" culture creators, and instead reminds us that working from home and bed are accessibility measures with historical legacies within crip culture and disability justice movements (p. 17). Ellen Samuels (2017) further explores the spaces and timelines disabled people work within, further connecting disabled cultural creation to the home and bed. Samuels locates the home and bed as a place for the quality and quantity of rest needed by many disabled people. Samuels also names home as a place to remove oneself from the public view and sideways glances arising from the ableism

of strangers. These positive associations of home reside alongside some of the pains of home for disabled people. Some disabled people have been confined to the home sphere, while others were ripped from it under the historical legacy of institutionalization. Home is complicated for many, and this includes disabled populations.

For this exercise, take an image that represents your relationship to home and your current space. Does it connect you to intimate moments with loved ones? Is it a place you want to escape? Is it a place you can be yourself, or does it require you to wear a metaphorical mask? If you identify as a person with a disability, how does your relationship with disability merge with your relationship with your home? After considering these questions, take a picture of an object in your space and a body part (perhaps a hand or a foot). The object might symbolize a part of your home life, or perhaps a place you used to live and still hold in your heart. It might be an object you use every day or rarely. It might be an object you love deeply or an object you resent or dislike. Now think about positioning yourself in relationship to the object. Are you touching the object? Are you entering the frame, or leaving it? What's in the centre of your image and what is at the edges? Remember: the point of the exercise is to create an image that represents your relationship (or one aspect of your complex relationships) with space/place and home.



#### Discussion and Reflection:

- Which activity was the most challenging?
- Which activity was the most inspiring or engaging?
- What barriers or difficulties did you encounter during this exercise?
- If you had more time, how would you have changed your images and/or stories?

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You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=227#h5p-22>

# Image Editing



## Edit Your Images

Now it's time to edit our image narratives, experimenting with filters, lighting, saturation, and other forms of visual play. Pick one photograph to start with.

**Step 1:** If you are using a computer, navigate to <https://www.canva.com/photo-editor/>. If you are using a mobile device, head to the app store and download the Canva app for free.

**Step 2:** Click on the 'Upload' option on the top left of the screen. It is accompanied by a plus sign (+). This will prompt your file folder to open. Navigate to the image you want to edit and double-click on the image. It will now be uploaded to Canva.

**Step 3:** On the far left-hand side of the screen there are a series of vertical icons. We are going to use the first two: filter/adjust, edit/crop.

**Step 5:** Play with your image using these tools, keeping in mind the mood/tone and message you want to convey.

**Step 6:** Select Save on the top right-hand corner of the screen. Then choose where to save your edited image on your device.

## Advanced

If you want to add text, shapes, collages, and backgrounds to your photograph, you will need to make a Canva account (it's free!). Navigate to <https://www.canva.com> to make your account. Then select "Create a design" on the top right-hand corner of the screen. From the dropdown menu, select the template you want to work with. I would recommend 'Instagram post' or 'photo collage.' Once the project has been created, you will need to again upload your (now edited) photograph or photographs. Then experiment with what Canva has to offer!

## Accessible Text

Any time you are adding text to images, you can check the readability and contrast rating using websites like Who Can Use (<https://whocanuse.com/>) or Colorable (<https://jxnblk.github.io/colorable/demos/text/>).



## Moving Beyond Canva: Choosing Your Own Photo Editing Platform

While Canva is used as an example and starting point because of its current popularity, ease of use, and free features, there are many other photo editing platforms available. As new photo editing platforms make their way into our digital worlds and others fade away, you may wish to use the following questions and tips to guide your search for a photo editing platform that is appropriate for you.

- What cost(s) are associated with the platform? Is it entirely free? Subscription based? Is there a fee to download the app?
- Does the platform work on the device(s) you are wanting to use? Is it important that the app you choose works on mobile devices and

laptops? Do you need to ensure that the platform works on both Apple and Android devices?

- Does the platform meet your access needs? If you will be using the platform with others, does the platform meet their accessibility needs?

Different platforms will work differently for different people. Access needs vary widely, so a platform that is accessible to one person may not meet the access needs of another. Some makers may wish to pick a platform with extensive features they can explore as they continue to grow in their familiarity with the technology, while others may find that a simplified platform is less overwhelming and thus easier to become familiar with. It is worthwhile to experiment with several programs, noting their pros and cons as well as their alignment with your access needs. It is advisable to experiment with free programs first, and it is important to remember that makers can engage with photographs and creation without spending money.

# Image Descriptions and Access



Image descriptions are vital for ensuring accessibility in image use. In this section you are invited to practice crafting an image description for the photographs you have edited. You might also try to write image descriptions for images found online, in magazines, or for images created by your peers.

What are some qualities of a good image description? At its core, an image description should describe what is happening in the image. However, we cannot stop here. Good image descriptions also capture the mood, feel, and purpose of the image. Let's take the following image as an example.



Fig 2. Stock photo for image description activity

**Sample Image Description One:** A stock photo of a woman working on her computer.

**Sample Image Description Two:** A stock photo of a young woman in business casual attire sitting in her wheelchair at a desk working on her

computer. Her right hand, index finger outstretched, rests on the right side of her face, giving a feeling of deep concentration. The neutral colors and natural light in the photograph make her office space look modern and inviting.

These image descriptions are drastically different. We can think of at least three ways that these image descriptions differ from one another. The second image description offers context, tone/mood, and representations of disability that the first image description does not.

Let's think about context, tone, and mood together. The first sample image description tells us that the subject of the photograph is working, but it does not tell us the context of where she is working. We can understand the significance of this absence if we consider our own experiences of work or perceptions of different working environments. An image of a worker in a large room filled with cubicles offers a different feeling and mood than an image depicting a worker in a room filled with bright, natural light and modern, fashionable decor. This context is then used to better understand the content it accompanies. For example, if someone was creating digital content about ways to improve worker morale, the context of the work environment captured in the second image description might create a feel for the type of work environment the creator finds to be beneficial.

Audiences who are interacting with these two image descriptions are also encountering disability in different ways. Those who are interacting with the photograph using the first image description do not receive any indication that the subject in the photograph is disabled or uses a wheelchair. This is significant as we know that so often able-bodiedness is understood as the default status or the 'norm'.



# Image Description Activity

Writing image descriptions is an art that takes practice. Now that you have engaged with sample image descriptions, choose a picture that you might use in your day-to-day digital life and test your image description writing skills. Once you have finished your image description, think and/or talk about the following questions:

- What was most challenging about this exercise?
- What was the most interesting or exciting?
- If you had more time, how would you have changed your image description?
- How did you create access in your narrative?
- How did the imagined context of the image impact your approach to writing your image description? Would your image description change if you used the image in a different context?

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Once you have finished writing your image description, swap images with a peer and work to describe their image. Once you both have crafted image descriptions for both images, share your descriptions with your partner. You may use the following questions to guide your conversation:

- How are your image descriptions similar? How are they different?
- How did you decide what to focus on in your image descriptions?
- When writing your image descriptions, what elements of the photography stuck out as particularly important to describe? What elements seemed secondary or less important in your description? Did

you and your partner(s) focus on describing different elements or feelings in describing the images?

- How do the differences between your image descriptions allude to the subjective nature of writing image descriptions?
- What can you take away from your partner(s) approach to writing image descriptions?

## Conclusion

In her introduction to the book *Disability Visibility* (2020) Alice Wong writes:

This may feel true for every era, but I believe I am living in a time where disabled people are more visible than ever before. And yet while representation is exciting and important, it is not enough. I want and expect more. *We all should expect more. We all deserve more.* There must be depth, range, nuance to disability representation in media. This is the current challenge and opportunity for the publishing industry and popular culture at large. (xxi, emphasis in original)

As you wrap up your work with this module, consider the ways that your existing, new-found, and developing image creation skills not only represent disability, but provide this all important depth, range, and nuance in representation. We hope this chapter has added to your critical thinking toolkit, left you feeling prepared to critique images that limit understandings of disability, and inspired you to create images with diversity, access, and disability justice in mind.

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# **Audio/Podcasting Workshop**

This module was written by:

Jill Hoffman, MA, PhD Candidate, Western University, Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research, London, ON, Canada

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

\*name change pending Summer 2022

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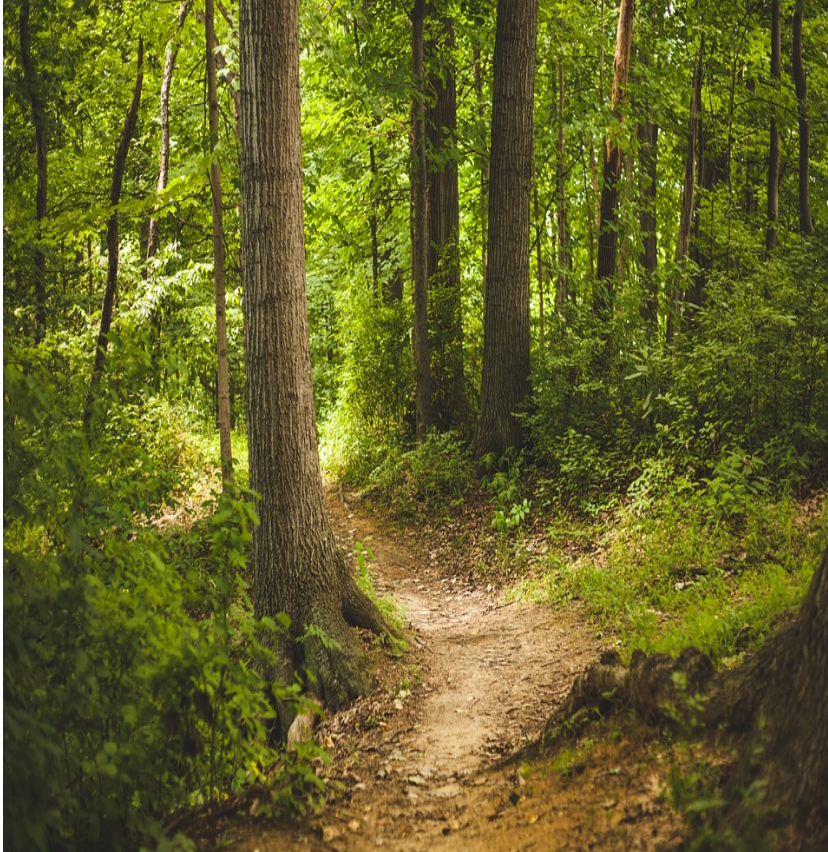
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# Module Overview

## Introduction



A sunny trail through the forest. Image Source: Pixabay.

Imagine you are traveling down your favorite nature trail with a podcast to keep you company. Maybe you are experiencing the rhythm and flow of spoken word poetry. Perhaps you are at a concert and you can feel the bass throughout your body. Our minds and bodies are guided by sound on a daily basis. Let's try a warm up exercise to get us thinking about sound and audio. Use the one minute essay function to describe your definition of sound.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:  
<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=254#h5p-28>

What sorts of things did you think about when you worked to define sound? Was it hard to define sound? Did you associate sound with particular body parts or bodily functions and abilities? There is an entire interdisciplinary field of sound studies interested in exploring what sound is, what sounds does, and how we experience sound.



It is useful to start our journey into audio and sound by exploring how we interact with and experience audio. Sound scholars argue that we don't experience sound with just ears and hearing. Instead, sound scholars think about the ways that sound is experienced in an embodied fashion. Steph Ceraso (2014) writes that,

“identifying the ear as the body part that enables listening does not capture all that is involved in experiencing a sonic event. Listening is a multisensory act” (p.102)

Let's return to our earlier example of a concert to illustrate the ways sound is experienced beyond the ears. If you have ever been seated near the speaker system, you will know that the beat and vibrations of the music can be felt throughout the body. Maybe you are in-tune with a beat and think about the ups, downs, highs, and lows as a line with dips and peaks. You already know what it means to experience sound beyond ears and hearing.

In *Shakin' all over: popular music and disability* (2013), George McKay draws attention to the ways disabled people are impacted by and agents of influence in the world of sound. McKay pays homage to the long list of disabled music innovators and the ways they shift the sonic environment. Yet, McKay does not stop at mere recognition of influential figures. In fact, he celebrates the ways that disability can enhance one's musical sound making capacities and points to the ways that qualities often arising from impairments, such as a so-called “damaged, imperfect, deviant, extraordinary body or voice” (2013, p. 1). McKay further explores this mutual relationship between the disabled body and sound through pointing to the ways that sound itself can be disabling. One example is the loud sounds common in live music venues (p. 11). Constant exposure to loud sounds and other environmental hazards work to shape, and in some cases create, impairment for those who occupy the space. Further, McKay doesn't separate music and disability as two different fields of experience and inquiry that can be mashed together for the sake of analysis. Instead, he points to something deeper between disability and sound, arguing that, historically speaking, important developments in disability history and rights intertwine with important moments in modern music and popular culture. For example, McKay links the increase in war-related visible disabilities at the end of World War 1 and the rise in access to and popularity of music, suggesting that these two major moments of social change have influenced one another (p. 3).

Now that we have thought more deeply about what sound is and how we experience sound, we are better positioned to understand what sound does.

### The Four Effects of Sound

Sound scholar Julian Treasure suggests four effects of sound:

- physiological
  - psychological
  - cognitive
  - behavioral
- (2018, pp. 15-16)

This is to say that sound impacts our bodies, emotions, minds, and actions.

Imagine an irritating noise like a car alarm. Maybe this signals danger and shapes your behavior as you check on your car. Perhaps you feel the irritation in your body, muscles tensing up. What about a calming sound such as ocean waves? Can you feel a swaying feeling in your body? As you continue to think about the waves do you notice a change in your breathing pattern? Sound isn't simply in the background. It shapes our bodies, moods, thoughts, behaviors, and environments.

## Multimodal Listening

Ultimately, sound scholars would generally argue that we need to practice and learn to become more involved consumers and producers of sound. Ceraso (2014) would suggest that multimodal listening is a deeper, more intentional form of listening. What is multimodal listening? Ceraso writes,

“multimodal listening requires undoing ear-centric habits and developing a holistic approach to sonic encounters through situated, embodied experience” (p. 118).

In other words, multimodal listening resists attending to sound only in terms of what we hear of the interpretation of the words we are presented with and instead focuses on the ways we filter sound through contexts and feel sound throughout our body. In short, we can build more meaningful relationships with sound through multimodal listening.

We can connect the practice of multimodal listening and consciousness of the sound we produce to disability. Deaf gain is “a term given to the idea that the unique sensory orientation of deaf people leads to a sophisticated form of visuospatial language and visual ways of being” (Murray, 2016). This perspective pushes back against social structures that work to label Deafness as deviant or less than. In the context of conscious sound use and experiencing sound beyond the ear, Deaf populations regularly attend to the other embodied ways sound can be experienced. Rather than barring Deaf people from meaningful engagement with sound, Deaf populations can understand the impact of sound in ways that hearing populations may not. This is a direct challenge to audism, or the privileging of hearing and hearing people over Deaf people and spoken language over signed language.



As you work to contemplate how you will bring multimodal listening to your audio consumption and making, think of some of the ways you can incorporate multimodal listening into your everyday life. Feel free to do this reflection in the textbox below. Once you have completed your writing, click Submit to see additional suggestions that may be useful as you continue to work your way through the remainder of this chapter. You can then click Create Document and Export to save a copy of your reflection in Word (.docx) format.

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In this module we will:

- Review and analyze our second series of Media Maker Spotlights. In this module, we highlight podcasters Fady Shanouda and Jeff Preston.
- Perform a platform analysis of podcasting, interrogating the affordances, constraints, and accessibility of audio platforms and digital audio file-sharing online.
- Consider a handful of the many ways sound can unite, divide, or otherwise impact human behaviours and social relationships
- Create and edit our own mini-podcast episode to communicate a topic or issue related to disability and technology.

# Considering Our Relationship With Sound



## Analyzing Our “Sound Diet” and Keeping a Sound Journal

What are the sounds you interact with in your day-to-day life? In *(Re)Educating the Senses*, Ceraso’s sound artist interviewee Glennie uses the phrase “sound diet” to describe the sounds we encounter in our daily lives. By now you might be developing a curiosity about your own sound diet and the impact it has on your interactions with the world. You might find it interesting to keep a sound journal over the course of an average day. Alternatively, if you are interested in analyzing a specific space or event, you may wish to keep a journal of the sounds you encounter during a trip to the space of interest or while engaging in the event in question. What sounds do you experience in various spaces? How do you experience these sounds in your body and your mind?

As you build your sound journal, take some time to reflect on what you learn and observe. The following questions may be useful as you work to analyze your sound journal.

- What were some of the dominant sounds you expected to encounter? Did logging them in your sound journal reveal any surprises or new insights about these sounds?

- What are some of the sounds that surprised you? How did they surprise you?
- Were you overwhelmed by the sheer volume of sounds you experienced? How did this help you think about sound pollution in your life?
- How did keeping a sound journal help you understand the embodied ways you interact with sound?

## Creating a Soundscape

In the same vein as the work of McKay, musician and soundscape creator Roxanne Layton thinks about the ways that sound can shape the body. In her 2018 TED Talk, Layton performs a soundscape that replicates the rhythm of a resting heart rate, and upon asking the audience to reflect on their experiences of her soundscape, she places emphasis on the physical reactions to the sounds she produced. Navigate to the video below and listen to Layton's soundscape and consider your own embodied reaction.

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=530#oembed-1>



Thus far we have considered the ways we consume sound. However, we are all producers of sound as well. Think about some of the sounds you produce. How do you impact the sonic environment? One of the ways we can consider our impact on the sonic environment is to create a soundscape of the noises we produce. A soundscape is a piece of media that involves the merging of sound and environment. For example, I might create a soundscape that captures the sounds of my office. If I were to make a soundscape that represents my experience of my office, I might include the

tapping of my pen against the desk, the sound of my fingers rapidly moving across the keyboard, or a vibrating sound that represents my leg bouncing up and down to improve concentration.

What would your office soundscape include? Let's find out!

For this activity you are asked to reflect on your own production of sound and create a soundscape composed of sounds you introduce into your sonic environment. It is helpful to think about a specific environment, like an office, workspace, or room in your home. You can write a description of your soundscape or produce a playlist of various sounds you introduce into the sonic environment. With this said, later sections of this module will focus on audio recording and editing strategies. If the idea of producing a soundscape is intriguing, we encourage you to use these newfound strategies to produce a soundscape audio file of your own!

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=530#h5p-29>

## Using Sound Responsibly

Does being more conscious of the impact of noise on bodies and minds make you want to be more conscious of the sounds you emit into your sonic environment? We know from the work of sound scholars like Treasure that sound impacts physiological, psychological, cognitive, and behavioral functions. Sound can certainly aid physiological, psychological, cognitive, and behavioral well-being, but it can negatively affect these facets of life as well.

Sound theorists like Ceraso question 'sonic overstimulation' and how the constant presence of multiple layers of noise can negatively affect subjects. We can think about sound as a way of asserting power, considering the way that the setting of the sonic environment is also a setting of the social environment. We may therefore want to think about the intersections of sound, power, and control. Dustin Tahmahkera (2017) speaks to the ways in

which the sounds, both presently audible and remembered, can be a reminder of colonization. Tahmahkera describes the sounds of colonist weapons in sacred Indigenous spaces as “sonic savagery” (n.p.).

Tahmahkera highlights the sounds associated with military training, thinking about how they may be experienced differently by fellow Indigenous subjects who have and continue to be threatened by the militaries of colonizers.

Traumatizing or aggressive uses of sound aren’t the only problematic sounds to avoid. Sonic overstimulation is a commonly faced problem, as are uses of audio without accessibility in mind or forgetting about the bodily impact of sound. If you are intrigued by the prospect of adding audio to your repertoire of digital methods, you might want to think about the physiological, psychological, cognitive, and behavioral implications of your decision. This is not to say that audio should be avoided. Audio can and does play a role in knowledge acquisition and transmission, community building, and disability justice work. Like all methods and modes of making, we encourage you to build projects with care and contemplation. Use the one minute essay function below to jot down some of the ways you can responsibly use audio as a digital method. When you are done, click through to see some possible responses.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=530#h5p-24>

# Maker Spotlight: Fady Shanouda



This module's makers spotlight features the talented and thoughtful podcaster Fady Shanouda. Fady is a professor at Carleton University who works at the intersection of disability, Mad, and fat studies. His podcast is called Disability Saves the World (<https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/disability-saves-the-world-with-dr-fady-shanouda/id1504141401>). Before we work through a platform analysis of audio-based work, let's explore what Fady has to say about his work.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=259#oembed-1>

The transcript of Fady's video can be read at this link:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1K2s-IYS7vm\\_mkfKoNG7-H6ejjQhRbY2lUuxNXCIB904/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1K2s-IYS7vm_mkfKoNG7-H6ejjQhRbY2lUuxNXCIB904/edit?usp=sharing)

The transcript of Fady's video with visual description can be read at this link:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1G2yA\\_RPSyF0WK0Q3yKrv5CKRNTR1u9MpViavR-ZnUmg/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1G2yA_RPSyF0WK0Q3yKrv5CKRNTR1u9MpViavR-ZnUmg/edit?usp=sharing)

While watching, jot down some of the important points our makers have highlighted. You may use the questions below to guide your reflections:

- How does Fady define/talk about access?

- What barriers does Fady discuss?
- What did you find most interesting in the interview?
- What resonated with your own experience?
- What was one thing you learned from watching/listening to this Maker Spotlight?
- Does this Maker Spotlights inspire you or make you think about your own digital storytelling in a new way?
- What is your own relationship to podcasts? Has it changed over time?

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# Platform Analysis: Podcasting

How do you consume sound? Many people list podcasts as one of their main sources of audio consumption. By this point in the Pressbook, you likely have some theories for explaining why podcasts are as popular as they are. This module's platform analysis is a great place to start putting your background knowledge and reflections from the Makers Spotlight videos to the test. Working from your reflections on the Maker Spotlight, consider these [ideas brought up by Fady's interview](#):

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=256#h5p-26>



Choose one of the three podcasts below to engage with by listening or reading the linked transcript:

1. Magby, J. (2021, Jan. 7). Tech Talk: Disability Benefits & Algorithms — Talking Tech W/ Lydia X. Z. Brown & Alexandra Givens [Audio Podcast]. CDT's Tech Talk.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=256#oembed-1>

Automated Transcript by Otter.ai:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kwbLOqoBZgG4MgwZwdIkRpJpjNcv5LOCF6xELp4vtOc/edit?usp=sharing>

2. Hagen, S., & Mitchell, J. (2018, Nov. 12). €2 Million Dino Skeleton & Therapy: Not Your Mother's Erotica [Audio Podcast]. Secret Dinosaur Cult. <https://play.acast.com/s/a84271cb-6cba-5eed-8be7-d8737c7efd08/5be95b9094b484625704f318>

Automated Transcript by Otter.ai:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XHx2xiDcwSX1v-eA6XXcB9d1IW-043uFERdaUeqvBsg/edit?usp=sharing>

3. Jiwani, Y. (2019, Apr. 24). The Digital Graveyards Project. Episode 2: Interview with Stine Gotved. Intersectionality Research Hub.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=256#oembed-3>

Automated Transcript by Otter.ai:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/13Put3cXrnxKdIskpEpIW\\_oPMhfzINLj0ukaQwIL1Kk0/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/13Put3cXrnxKdIskpEpIW_oPMhfzINLj0ukaQwIL1Kk0/edit?usp=sharing)

Using the podcast you engaged with, perform a platform analysis using the following questions.

- What are the affordances and constraints of podcasting? (What does it let creators and listeners do and not do?)
- How is podcasting accessible? How is podcasting inaccessible?
- In what ways can podcasting be harmful to creators and listeners?
- Who owns the platforms that these podcasts appear on (SoundCloud, Apple, Acast)? Who benefits from the content?
- What is the broader culture around podcasting? What connections can podcasts make?
- How do these makers use podcasting to advocate, educate, and centre disability?

- Have transcripts been made available for these podcasts?
- Are trigger warnings being used?
- How does listening to a podcast feel different from reading a blog post or looking at images?
- How is music used in these podcasts? How does music or sound effects shape the mood/tone of the piece?
- Where and how do you listen to podcasts?

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=256#h5p-30>

# Podcast Creation Workshop



In the [platform analysis section](#), we asked you to listen to three podcasts. Each episode had a specific theme: Secret Dinosaur Cult explored therapy, Tech Talk discussed algorithmic decision-making and disability benefits, and The Digital Graveyards Project offered an introduction to memorialization online. Let's take a moment to highlight a few connections to the course material:

- Tech Talk is closely tied to our discussion of [Safiya Noble's \*Algorithms of Oppression\* in Module 3](#) and the invisible biases and consequent violence of algorithm and computer code that are never neutral. (Magby, J., 2021)
- The Digital Graveyards Project explores what it means to use social media to remember, memorialize, and represent death in different ways. Recall, also [in Module 3, our discussion of representation](#)—death, like disability, is curated in specific ways. What can and cannot appear in an obituary? Whose death is worthy of a front-page article and whose death is invisibilized? Social media is one place in which we can change or challenge these norms. (Jiwani, Y., 2018)

In this module we are going to create our own short podcast episode and learn how to edit and save audio files. Your episode will explore a specific topic related to **disability and technology**. The activity instructions are meant to be specific enough to provide guidance and structure while also being expansive enough to allow you to explore your own particular interests. While these guidelines and activities are open enough for you to explore more broadly, we will also provide you with prompts that allow you to research, learn about, and focus on ways that disability and digital

innovation meet and intersect in the everyday world. In this way you will have the opportunity to both be a digital maker and see the work of other digital creations and projects in action.

As you work to create your podcast through the following series of activities, you are encouraged to think about the intersections of medicine, health, and technology. Health and technology intersect in numerous ways, from mental health chatbots to mindfulness apps, meditation videos, and online diagnostic workups. We've had therapy sessions over Zoom and phone appointments with our doctors. We've struggled to schedule COVID-19 vaccines through the online booking system. Many of us have experienced diagnosis, treatment, care, or psychiatric/medical harm through digital platforms and spaces. Can you reflect on the ways these technologies shape your relationship with your body? Perhaps telemedicine has positively (or negatively) shaped your experience of accessing healthcare. How do you see the digital methods discussed thus far impacting health and wellness, especially in the age of COVID-19?



## Create a Script Draft

Podcasters find that it is easier to produce a smooth, well-structured, informative, and engaging podcast when they create and work from a well-developed script. Writing a script allows for refinement prior to recording and therefore can lessen the workload in the editing process.

Step 1: Pick a topic related to medicine and technology that you find interesting or that you have personal experience with.

Step 2: Describe how technology was used in this encounter with the medical/psychiatric/wellness industry and the ways in which access is included and insufficient in the technology.

Step 3: Describe the affordances and constraints that you experienced in this encounter.

Step 4: Choose 2-3 other topics to discuss in your analysis: privacy, security, safety, technology requirements, consent, choice, affordability, or privilege.

Take 10 minutes to pick a topic and draft some notes!

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## Practice Reading Aloud: Vocal Exercises

Next, we're going to practice reading our script aloud with the following exercises. We're going to experiment with speed, volume, and emphasis. Below, find 3 reading aloud exercises.

1. For the first half of your story, read very, very slowly. For the second half, read as fast as you can!
2. Start reading your script as quietly as possible. Continue raising in volume throughout the piece until the ending is very loud.
3. Pick one or two important moments in your story and insert dramatic pauses before or after the point to add emphasis. Mark the points down on your page so you don't miss them during the read-through.

Did anything strike you as particularly interesting during this exercise? What did you learn about the ways your voice can impact the sonic and social environment?

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=261#h5p-30>

## Recording & Editing

For this workshop you are invited to use any audio recording app of your choice. Many devices have built-in audio recording apps ranging from HD Audio Recorder to Apple's Voice Memo app. Neither of these apps allows us to edit our files, but they are useful tools for recording and tend to be more user-friendly and easier to navigate than many other programs. In [Appendix 1 of this Pressbook](#), there are video walkthroughs of the free programs Audacity and WavePad, which are compatible for both Windows and Mac users, and can be operated on a PC or a mobile device, and Apple Voice Memo for iPhones.

**Note on Access:** In the assigned article, "Podcasting for the Blind & Partially Sighted" by Matthew McLean (2017), interviewee Stuart Beveridge identifies the way in which audio recording and editing platforms are inaccessible to vision impaired podcasters. He recommends Voice Memo instead of a dedicated podcast app like WavePad because Voice Memo is easier to navigate due to its use of larger font and fewer buttons. He also identifies accessible programs such as Victor Reader Stream for recording and Adobe Audition for editing audio. It is important to note that both are pay-to-use apps. Interviewee Tanja Milojevic also identifies Sound Forge as an accessible audio editing program. Like Adobe, it is screen-reader compatible. However, these programs are behind paywalls and are not free to use.

Because we recognize the many ways in which various recording software is inaccessible to users, we invite you to use any recording device for this activity. If recording is not available or possible at this time, we would encourage you to plan your episode thoroughly, practice reading your script aloud, and work on your platform analysis of podcasting apps. Your insight and analysis are critical to this conversation about technology, disability, and access.

# Creating an Audio Transcript

Throughout this module, audio transcripts have been mentioned as essential for using audio in accessible ways. We often think of transcripts as an accessibility measure geared towards Deaf and hard-of-hearing populations. While meeting the access needs of Deaf and hard-of-hearing populations is enough of a justification for creating transcripts for audio content, we can think about transcripts serving broader access and support needs as well. An interesting 2015 study by Manako Yabe went so far as to study university student willingness to pay additional fees for university courses offered with online captioned lectures. Yabe found significant numbers of university students, both with and without disabilities, who would prefer, and in some cases pay extra for, classes that were captioned. Students cited reasons such as increased understanding of course materials, ease of note taking, studying convenience, and becoming more effective workers as primary benefits of written transcription (p. 779). The impacts of writing a transcript are worth the effort.

The aims of this section are two-fold. This section begins with general tips, tricks, and exercises that are useful in thinking about producing audio transcripts. We will then move on to three specific methods for creating an audio transcript.

## Qualities of Strong Audio Transcripts

When we think about audio in terms of individual spoken words, transcription seems like a straightforward process. However, we now know that audio is much more than individual words. Take a moment to reflect on what you have learned about sound theory and use this to make some guesses about qualities that might be common in strong audio transcripts. Below is a list of possible answers to this prompt.

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=577#h5p-27>

# Developing a Transcript

## From a Script

Many audio projects might involve a written script. One benefit of creating a script for your audio project is that it provides a solid foundation for a transcript. However, providing a script is not a substitute for creating a transcript. As we learned earlier, audio transcripts do not merely capture spoken language in audio. Audio transcripts also provide information about music and its emotional impact, sounds used to set a scene, and vocal tones that are used to create, enhance, or challenge meaning. Additionally, it is highly likely that you have veered away from your script, at least to some extent. While it may feel like your final project is close to your script, the differences may be more substantial than you think. It is wise to return and re-listen to your audio and use this to edit your transcript appropriately. Keep the following questions in mind when using your script to create a transcript:

- Does the punctuation in your script match your tone of voice?
- Are there areas where you are relying on auditory signals such as voice volume or pitch to communicate meaning? Is this adequately captured in your transcript?
- Is there music or other sound effects in your audio file? Have you included both a description of the music or sound effect and an explanation of why you have chosen the clip/how you envision it adding meaning?
- Have you included timestamps periodically so your audience can follow along?

## Using Dictation Software

Not all audio projects have scripts to use as a foundation for creating transcripts. One way of creating a ‘foundation’ for your transcript is to use the dictate function offered in many popular word processing programs like Microsoft Word and Google Docs. To create a basic foundation, open your word processor of choice, locate the dictation function, and then play your audio file. This will give a rough transcript. It is then up to makers to add punctuation, reformat and attend to spacing, fix incorrect words, describe sounds other than spoken language, and add time stamps. This can be a task, but it does save significant time when compared to typing a transcript from scratch.

## Hiring a Transcription Service

Transcripts can be time-consuming, so some makers choose to hire a professional to transcribe their audio. There are a plethora of services available. Most services charge per minute of audio, but there may be extra charges depending on the services you need and even the type of audio you are transcribing. For example, services may charge more for transcribing content with specialized language, such as audio filled with medical and technical terms or audio that features words in another language. When hiring a transcription service, it may be useful to keep the following points in mind.

- Is outsourcing transcription work a viable option given the financial constraints of the project?
- Is the person or company I am hiring well-resourced in handling the content I need transcribed? (ex.- can they handle the technical terms used in my work?)
- Will the transcriber edit or refine the transcript upon your request?
- Is it ethical to hire outside transcription services? There may be situations where the audio you want to transcribe contains sensitive information meant only for a specific group of people. In this case, it is wise to consider ethics.

# Finishing touches and Reflection

## Final steps

1. Pick a theme song for your podcast. Why did you choose that song? If you have time, record a snippet of the song and add it to your file.
  - **Pro tip:** Audio clips under ten seconds in length are generally considered ‘free use’. Clips over ten seconds get a bit more complicated, and whether or not they can be used royalty free depends on factors such as type of use. More information on audio use as well as free-to-use creative commons sources can be found in the [additional recommended texts](#) section in the readings of this module.
2. Pick a one sentence slogan for your podcast.
3. Pick a cover image, logo, or mascot for your podcast. Why did you choose that image? Again, be mindful of images that are free to use and do not have associated copyright or royalties.
4. Share your podcast (or not!) with your friends and family, or on one of the many podcast-hosting platforms
  - The following article by Tal Minear (2022) gives a summary of some of the most popular platforms:  
<https://discoverpods.com/best-free-podcast-hosting/>. Note that new platforms come out often and a Google search for current platforms and reviews can help you make the best choice for your needs.



Take a few minutes to reflect on the process of creating and editing an audio file. Let the questions below guide your thinking:

- What was the goal of your podcast episode?
- What barriers or difficulties did you encounter through the process?
- Which reading aloud exercise was the most engaging or interesting? Which was the most challenging?
- How did you build access into your episode? If you had more time, what changes or additions would you make to create access?

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=590#h5p-30>

## Conclusion

Over the course of an average day we become so surrounded by audio with its sounds, vibrations, and constant stimulation, that we can easily forget that listening and attending to sound in a meaningful way is a learned and practiced skill. We hope that the theory and lessons within this module begin to capture the complexity of sound and its role in shaping our scholarship and our social world.

Reflecting on the work of sound scholar and activist Julian Treasure shows just how important that sound and listening, particularly conscious listening, is. Treasure (2018) writes,

“conscious listening is the key to everyone — individuals as well as organizations — taking responsibility for the sound they create, and for the sound they consume. Conscious listening is also the doorway to understanding” (p. 20).

Being conscious of our impact and interaction with our sonic environment and attending to the complexity of sound allows us to be better listeners, makers, and disability activists.

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# Video Workshop

This module was written by:

Jill Hoffman, MA, PhD Candidate, Western University, Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research, London, ON, Canada

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

\*name change pending Summer 2022

# Module 7 Readings

1. Jessica Kellgren-Fozard. (2021, Mar. 19). Deaf & Blind On The Internet with [@Molly\\_Burke](#)! [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXMNUXX6TXQ>
2. Hannah Witton. (2018, Aug. 28). Sex with a Stoma [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSYdKcXj3GM>
3. Annie Elaine. (2016, Mar. 18). What is Inspiration Porn? [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmGtGaXbJSQ>
4. Jessica Kellgren-Fozard. (2020, Aug. 11). Why #FreeBritney is a Disability Rights Issue [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRUkPZ1Fbqo>

## Suggested Readings

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# Introduction

From TikTok to YouTube, from high-end video equipment to the camera on the cell phone in your pocket, videos are everywhere. The appeal of video is wide-reaching. Portability, affordability, and wide-ranging possibilities in terms of style and content are clearly speaking to makers, perhaps even inspiring once-hesitant makers to take the plunge. In this module we expand on our description of these affordances and offer some cautionary words, move to a platform analysis, Maker Spotlight, and finally a workshop where we can try some video creation for ourselves.



In the prior two modules, we have discussed some of the ways makers interact with images and audio and interrogated some of the affordances and constraints of both methods. As we move to think about video, we can think about the ways it brings the visual and the auditory into conversation with one another. While video can be understood as offering many of the same affordances and constraints of both images and audio, video is not merely the sum of the constraints of audio and image and instead can be something richer.

Alex Bulmer, a blind maker and activist, has utilized the visual and vocal elements of video in different ways in different projects. As quoted in Johnson and King (2020), Bulmer says,

“I was leaning toward visual mediums in my practice as a way of giving the opportunity to disrupt them because I had been disrupted—visually.” (p. 63)

She also calls voice and sound a “more intimate way of knowing people” (Johnson and King, 2020, p. 63). In this, Bulmer is able to replicate and explore her lived experiences of blindness through careful attention to the ways her art calls on the senses. Bulmer continues to think about the ways that sound fills an entire environment and is experienced through the sides of the head, whereas vision directs one’s attention forward (Johnson and King, 2020). Here Bulmer plays with not only the senses video evokes, but the spaces these sensory inputs occupy.

## Three Qualities of Video Making

After considering what video is, we can think more about why makers are drawn to video as a method of interest. Portability, affordability, and variability of form are three qualities of video making that may be a potential draw for creators. Click the name of each quality in the accordion below to read how they contribute to the interest in and uptake of video as a digital method. We hope you will think of other unique qualities of videos and video making as you work your way through this module.

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=268#h5p-42>

You do not have to be a video maker to benefit from the prevalence of video making as a digital method. Discussions about the importance of disability representation are prevalent, but often they do not lead to meaningful change. In seeking out content created by disabled makers, people can find types of representation that are not found in more mainstream, corporate media. Sophia Stewart (2021) gives an example, explaining that when stuttering is brought into mainstream media it is often the punchline of a joke. Stewart notes that seeking out the vlogs of stuttering creators and seeing fellow stutterers navigating their lives and experiences of stuttering was empowering and has allowed her to take up space. Watching the videos of fellow stutterers became a tool she actively uses in embracing her pattern

of speech. When mainstream media fills the social world with representations of disability filled with troublesome tropes like inspiration porn and abled saviours (tropes we revisit below), the ability to consume media made by and largely for disabled people can be refreshing and a way of claiming voice and space.

The variety of voices and representations found in video can be empowering, such as the ways Stewart describes finding connection and validation in the videos of other stutters. However, some videos are crafted by people who are not familiar with basic principles of inclusion or aspects of disability rights and justice movements. While you do not need to be an ‘expert’ in disability to talk about disability, failing to reflect on the messages about disability that one consumes or distributes can reinforce ableism. It’s crucial to reflect on the messages we absorb and reproduce about disability, madness, and Deafhood, if only to avoid further harm.

Jan Grue (2016) defines inspiration porn as “the representation of disability as a form of disadvantage that can be overcome for the titillation of other people/observers” (p. 838). Typically these ‘people/observers’ are non-disabled and videos of disabled people are sometimes captured and distributed without consent. While these representations may be well-intentioned, they are uncritical inclusions of disabled people in film and can interfere with the agency and capacity of disabled people, who have their own feelings and desires related to appearing in videos. The term has been popularized by Stella Young, whose work like her 2014 TED Talk “I’m not your inspiration, thank you very much”, has become a staple in disability studies and disability activism. You can watch the video below:

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=268#oembed-1>

What can be tricky about inspiration porn and non-consensual filming is that oftentimes these video narratives are presented to us as ‘wholesome’, even claiming to break down some of the ableist barriers that disability rights movements have worked so hard to deconstruct. It is likely you have encountered many of these videos yourself. Alaina Leary (2019) uses

common examples to illustrate the familiar forms inspiration porn can take, such as an abled person asking a disabled person to prom and the ‘promposal’ going viral, or someone working to find a solution for an emergent access need. Leary points to the way this robs disabled people of agency, with some non-disabled others feeling compelled to ‘document and defend’ disabled people simply living their lives. Frances Ryan (2018) writes about some of these instances, ultimately arguing that these videos center the actions and needs of non-disabled people or even abled saviours. These types of videos are worrisome in part because “disabled people are turned into secondary characters in their own lives” (Ryan, 2018). Further, these videos may create an impression that the path to disability rights is through the actions of individual ‘heroic’ non-disabled people instead of more systemic changes in fields like policy and law.



Given these concerns, it is vital that we learn to create videos about disability and disabled people with our critical media lens. To prepare yourself for the video workshop to come, take a moment to reflect on what ethical video making might look like, recording your thoughts in the box below. Clicking to the second page will show you sample answers. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and you may find that some things are context and content-dependent. When you are done, you may save your thoughts. Review the list of goals for the module and navigate through the rest of the video workshop.

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=268#h5p-36>



In this module, we will:

- Perform a platform analysis of YouTube, interrogating the affordances, constraints, and accessibility of digital videos and video-sharing online.
- Explore and analyze the culture around online video production and circulation in the context of North American settler colonialism, capitalist, white supremacy, patriarchy, and ableism.
- Practice using new platforms and technologies by creating and editing our own disability-focused videos.

# Platform Analysis: YouTube



In this module we will continue to develop our platform analysis skills, this time focusing on the dominant video sharing platform YouTube. Use the questions provided below to guide your platform analysis. These questions are designed to allow you to analyze YouTube as a platform and to support you in critically examining some of the specific videos assigned in this module. If you would like to see some example responses to the various questions posed below, navigate to the end of this section and explore the accordion feature. How do the answers compare and differ from your own?

- How do you navigate to YouTube on your device?
- What is the home screen layout? How do you access content on YouTube?
- What are the affordances and constraints of YouTube? (What does it let creators and viewers do and not do?)
- In what ways is YouTube accessible? How is it inaccessible?
- What technological requirements are needed to access YouTube?
- Who owns YouTube? Who profits from YouTube content?
- What is the broader culture around YouTube?
- How do these makers use videos to advocate, educate, and centre disability?
- How does the media maker build access into their videos? How could they improve their access measures?

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=270#h5p-39>

# Maker Spotlights: Jenelle Rouse and Jeff Preston



This week we are highlighting media makers Jenelle Rouse and Jeff Preston. Jenelle is a deaf dance artist and the founder of Multi Lens Existence. Jeff is a professor of disability studies at King's College, Western University, motivational speaker and advocate. Please watch their interviews and reflect on the knowledge and experience that is offered. Consider the connections to your own life, experience, interests, and digital making in their artistic practices.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=272#oembed-1>

The transcript of Jenelle's video can be read at this link:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hqnl6lmu3C3o4xzMP9JRKMNG1fuFbLl9OiaS6iHqp2k/edit?usp=sharing>

The transcript of Jenelle's video with visual description can be read at this link:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PE3DYZpEwrW0aQ-jmcdpTlBBu6pyNc54jPYS8dlEPo/edit?usp=sharing>

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=272#oembed-2>

The transcript of Jeff's video can be read at this link:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/17VHVWeaNFm211dh9Hrd4hg0qUZ5S3EFv9fwYRA\\_NY8s/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17VHVWeaNFm211dh9Hrd4hg0qUZ5S3EFv9fwYRA_NY8s/edit?usp=sharing)

The transcript of Jeff's video with visual description can be read at this link:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/114MUG\\_8GCvI1daUiI7o\\_YfYT7ACv-ancZhOfn0ItBCI/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/114MUG_8GCvI1daUiI7o_YfYT7ACv-ancZhOfn0ItBCI/edit?usp=sharing)

After watching the Maker Spotlights, spend a few minutes reflecting on what you learned and how Jenelle's and Jeff's creative work makes you reconsider your own relationship to video narrative, visual media, social media, community, disability, technology, and creativity. Let the questions below guide your reflection:

- How do the makers describe their relationship to technology?
- How does Jenelle define 'maker'? How does Jeff? In what ways are they similar and different?
- How is disability central to their work?
- How do the makers create access in their art?
- What barriers to participation do Jenelle and Jeff identify?
- What did you find most interesting in these interviews?
- What resonated with your own experience?
- What was one thing you learned from watching/listening to these Maker Spotlights?
- Do these Maker Spotlights inspire you or make you think about your own digital storytelling in a new way?
- What is your own relationship to video technology? Has it changed over time?

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# Video Workshop: Writing and Preparation



Video creation can involve multiple steps. For ease of organization, this workshop is divided into three sub-sections: planning and pre-production, video creation, editing, and distribution. In an effort to support video makers working through their own creation process, we have included multiple activities, some of which may be of importance and interest to your project(s), and others that do not hold such appeal.

We cannot possibly begin to develop and share strategies for using all recording devices, editing softwares, and hosting platforms, nor would this be our desire. Instead, we encourage you to think of play and experiential learning as vital elements of digital methods and making. Our devices, apps, and streaming services are always changing, as are our technological needs and identities as makers. Therefore we operate under the belief that part of being a digital maker and engaging in digital methods is experimentation and willingness to try new things. Mastery is not the aim of these exercises.

As with past modules, we wish to offer a prompt to guide your video creation process. The prompt for this module is inspired by YouTuber Hannah Whitton and centers on technology and sex, dating, and/or relationships. Watch Hannah Witton's video "Sex with a Stoma" below:

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=274#oembed-1>

Relationships in this prompt are defined broadly and may or may not include sexual or romantic elements, with the recognition that not all of us are sexual or romantic, after all! For example, during COVID-19, many people isolated and socially distanced in an effort to curb the spread of the virus. During this time, people started or maintained relationships through technology such as Zooming with family members, texting emojis to our friends, or attending virtual dates on Nintendo's Animal Crossing. People's sex lives were not left out of this move to the digital world. Many people became more familiar with sexting, reading erotica online or on e-readers, or shopping for vibrators online.

If you are inspired by this prompt, pick a specific topic (like the examples provided) and perform an analysis grounded in accessibility and disability justice. Maybe you want to do a platform analysis of Tinder, Bumble Friends, or Literotica, highlighting the ways in which these platforms include or exclude disabled users. Perhaps you want to explore the representation of disability (or lack thereof) in dating simulation games. You may want to interrogate the relationship between technology and ageism, framed through your experience of struggling to stay in touch with loved ones who live in nursing homes. These are all welcome and important areas for conversation and analysis.

## **Planning and Pre-production**

Planning is an important creative step that can ultimately lead to better quality videos and less time in the filming and editing processes. Planning can also ease the nerves of some makers. What should you plan for? This is a great question and depends on the type of video you are making, your desired audience, and the mood and tone you are wanting to communicate. It also depends on who you are as a digital maker, what your priorities are, what tech you have, and what your access needs are. We encourage you to try some of the activities listed below and reflect on the ways they might be incorporated and modified into your own making practices.

# Freewriting and Mind Mapping Session

Every fully-actualized video was once a small idea expanded. Freewriting can be a great way to get our ideas out of our heads and onto the page (or device!). Mind mapping can also be useful to organize the thoughts that arise during freewriting sessions. Let's work through these processes together, first focusing on a freewriting session, and then moving into mind mapping.

Set a timer for 5-10 minutes and ensure you are prepared to focus intensely and solely on the process for the duration of your time. During this short time, write, type, or dictate every thought that comes to mind. Do not worry about writing mechanics— single words, short phrases, and even doodles are useful. This is not the time or place for editing. If it comes into your head, write it. Feel free to use the textbox below:

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=274#h5p-1>

It is okay if your free writing is messy! Take ten minutes to use the questions below to make a mind map of your ideas. These self-reflection questions can also be developed into a formal template if that aids in the video conceptualization process.

- What are the main content-related themes that continually come up?  
What does this tell me about the subject/content matter of my video?
  - Tip: try summarizing this in one sentence
- What information do I still need to seek out prior to filming?
- What information is better left out and/or covered in other ventures?
- What is the vibe and flow of the video I wish to create?

- What is the goal of my video, and what strategies can I employ to meet this goal?

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## Developing Your Script

Scripts can be useful, but they may vary depending on the type of video you want to produce. Makers who wish to establish a more casual, conversational, and connected video format may want to work from only a few notes, whereas those who are interested in a more formal presentation may write their script verbatim, including notes about timing, pauses, and transitions. Of course, your script can fall somewhere between as well. If you have a disability or disabilities, consider the ways you might build your access needs into your script, such as making note of places to pause for a drink of water or a moment to breathe. Perhaps a written out phonetic pronunciation guide for words that are tricky to pronounce would be useful. Some things you may want to consider adding into your script include:

- Words, phrases, and sentences that are important to your project and that trigger your memory
- Direct quotes
- Citational information such as important names, books, specific tv or podcast episodes, etc.
- Phonetic pronunciation guides for new or difficult words
- Timing guidelines to ensure you are on track and on time
- Pauses

Take ten minutes to consider these points alongside your own presentation comfort and style and create a script outline. You may wish to spend longer developing your script, especially if you are preparing for the remainder of this video-making workshop.

# Video Workshop: Creation

## Ready, Set: Choosing Your Filming Location Activity

Choosing a place to film your video is important. Your location can impact everything from mood to credibility, connection to artistic identity. Let's use our example of sex, disability, and video from earlier in the module. Say you decided to create a vlog about your favorite accessible sex toys. Now let's think about filming locations. How would the vlog be different if it were filmed while you were sitting on in your bedroom surrounded by fluffy pillows versus if you were sitting in an office? Take a few moments to reflect on the following questions regarding video, filming location, and creative impact.

- How does the setting impact the connection formed between the video creator and/or subject(s) and the audience?
- How does the setting of a video impact the framing of the subject of the video?
- Does the setting convey a sense of authority that is appropriate for the video topic?
- How might the background of a video aid in accessibility efforts? How might the background inhibit access for others? For example, does the background have flashing lights that may trigger photosensitive viewers? Could an overly-cluttered background impact viewers with anxiety?

Now the script has been written, the scene has been set and you are ready to make your video. There are a variety of types of videos and methods of filming. Find the method or methods that support you in creating the media you wish to make, and give it a try!

# Built-in Camera and Video Software

Whether you use Apple or Android, mobile or desktop, many of our most popular modern devices have built-in cameras and recording software. Apple offers Photo Booth on Mac computers and PCs often have Movie Maker and Video Editor. Tablets and smartphones also have built-in video cameras and apps available through their various app stores.

Relying on the built-in capabilities of your existing devices can be a great starting point for several reasons. First of all, the technology does not include any additional investment beyond the original cost of the device. Second, you are likely already familiar with your device, and thus the learning curve may feel gentler. Finally, it can be useful to work towards expanding your maker skills with your existing devices rather than feeling pressured to continually buy more additional tech, a cycle that can seem endless.

Supportive images, slideshows, tutorials, or other screen-based media might all be important to your video-making style and accessibility strategy, and you may therefore wish to capture or record the screen of your device in your video. Many platforms and technologies allow users to achieve this effect. One popular platform for screen capturing is Screencast-O-Matic (<https://screencast-o-matic.com/>). Like every platform, Screencast-O-Matic has its affordances and constraints.

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## Editing and Distribution

While individual makers working in video each have their own unique relationship to video making and editing, most of them agree that the end of

filming is not the end of the making process. Some makers may have a small list of tasks before putting their video out into the world, and others might still be relatively early in the making process with lots of editing ahead. This subsection offers a few activities that may be part of your video editing process. We encourage you to play with these strategies and to form your own.



## Editing Scavenger Hunt

Perhaps you are not sure where to start editing. If this is you, it is okay! Think of this activity as free play: pick an app and see what it can do. Play and experiential learning are great assets in navigating the continually changing world of digital making. What options exist? What options don't exist? Once you choose an app/program, please complete the 'video editing scavenger hunt' below.

Need a platform recommendation?

If you are using a **mobile device**, some good places to start are iMovie, Quick Video Editor, or YouCut.

If you are using a **laptop or desktop**, consider using Video Editor (the built-in program on your laptop, which you can find under the Start menu), Animoto (<https://animoto.com/>) or Canva ('Create a design' > 'video' <https://www.canva.com/video-editor/>).

For those that are looking for a **more advanced** editing platform, DaVinci Resolve (<https://www.blackmagicdesign.com/ca/products/davinciresolve/edit>) offers a free edition. We would encourage everyone, especially those who are new to figuring out their styles and identities as makers, to work with free

programs and platforms as a step towards challenging economic barriers to making.

Use the following steps to guide you as you complete this editing scavenger hunt:

1. Draw the icon of the app/program. What images, concepts, or feelings does it evoke? How is that appealing or unappealing to you as a maker?
2. Where is the button to upload a video? What does it look like?
3. Name 3 ways you can edit your video.
4. Pick 1-3 buttons that look intriguing but have an unclear function. Click on them. What do they do?
5. Name 2 barriers to using the app.
6. On a scale of 1-10, how user-friendly is the design of the homepage? How easy or difficult is it to find the tools and information you want?
7. Where is the save button?
8. Where is the saved file on your device?

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=853#h5p-30>

# Video Workshop: Accessibility Features

## Audio Captioning on YouTube

As we have discussed in earlier sections of this module, YouTube has a mixture of affordances and constraints, and its various approaches to accessibility and captioning are no different. Despite the common inaccuracy of auto-captions, one affordance of YouTube and its auto-captioning feature is that video creators can edit the auto-captions to improve accuracy. If you need more guidance in creating meaningful captions and/or outsourcing the labor of captioning, please refer to the [prior module on working with audio](#).

1. Navigate to the top right corner of the YouTube homepage. Click on the circular 'account' button.
2. Scroll through the dropdown menu and click the button that says 'YouTube Studio'.
3. Once you reach the YouTube Studio landing page, navigate to the 'your channel' scroll down menu on the left side of the page. Scroll until you see the 'subtitles' option and click. This will bring you to a dashboard that displays your videos and the languages subtitles are available in.
4. Move to roughly the middle of the screen and locate the dropdown menu in the 'languages' column of the video you wish to edit automatically generated captions for. Click on the dropdown arrow to see all of the available subtitles.
5. Scroll through the menu and locate English (Automatic). These are the automatically generated subtitles. Move to the right of this row and hit the 'duplicate and edit' option. This will open a new workspace with the video on the right side of the screen and an editable copy of the

- captions on the left. Navigate around this space and ensure that you have edited the captions to your high quality accessibility standards.
6. Once you are finished editing your captions, you can either save a copy or hit the ‘publish’ button on the top right corner of the workspace.
  7. After publishing your edited subtitles, you will now want to return to English (Automatic) caption row. Navigate to the three dots on the right side of this row and click. Then click the ‘unpublish’ button. This will ensure that the old and inaccurate captions are no longer available to those interacting with your video.

## Audio Description

Whereas captioning provides written description of the spoken word, audio description provides auditory descriptions of the visual world of the video. Audio descriptions are described as being either standard or extended. “The Ultimate Guide to Audio Description” by 3Play Media offers descriptions of both types of audio description. They note that standard descriptions are generally shorter than extended descriptions, allowing makers to incorporate the audio description into the existing lulls of the video. Extended descriptions are longer, and there may need to be a pause in the video to incorporate the description.

What are the qualities of a good audio description? The creators of “The Ultimate Guide to Audio Description” write:

“It is important to focus on what is essential for the listener to know in terms of plot development and character. For instance, this includes who is on-stage or on-screen, who is speaking, the setting and scene – including entrances and exits, furnishings, furniture, etc. – the lighting, costumes, facial expressions, movements, actions, mannerisms, gestures, fights, and dances.”

(<https://www.3playmedia.com/learn/popular-topics/audio-description/#audiodescription>)

In short, it is important for your audio description to include information about anything a sighted person would use in making sense of the video.

What is important about the visual information incorporated in your video? Could it be your setting? Does your outfit convey information about your topic or who you are as an expert? Maybe your cat popped in your video and you want to ensure that those using audio descriptions also have access to the excitement of a cat sighting! All of these are great things to include in your audio description as they support viewers in gaining the same access to information that their sighted or non-audio description using peers have. In this section, we offer two variations of an audio description activity that will help as we start to think about crafting audio descriptions for the videos we created in this workshop. For more information on creating meaningful audio descriptions, The Audio Description Project by The American Council of the Blind can be found at <https://adp.acb.org/ad.html>.



## Activity Version One

Watch your video with your eyes closed. What images come to mind? What parts of your video become unclear or less clear? Now rewatch your video. Even though you created it, you likely forgot some of the visual elements that you worked into your video. Once you stopped engaging visually, you no longer had access to that element of your video or the information it gave. Perhaps this even changed the way you understood your own content. Take a moment to reflect on some of these realizations. Then take a moment to jot down the top five things that need to be included in your audio description. Once you have done this, think about three things you might not have thought to describe, but will now.

## Activity Version Two

Show a family member, friend, or peer your video. Ask them to list what they would need to have described to fully understand the video even if they had their eyes closed or were not engaging with the video visually. Did they list something you had not thought? Perhaps they confirmed the need for part of the audio description you crafted. Asking others for help is a great strategy in digital methods!

# Video Workshop: Reflection



One point we hope to impress is that working with digital methods is a gradual and continuous process of learning, experimenting, and pivoting. Now that you have made a video and engaged in some pre- and post-production exercises, you likely have some new insights on video creation, your identity as a maker, and your relationship with this technology. These reflections are important for guiding future projects, so take five minutes to think about the questions below.

- What barriers or difficulties did you encounter through the process?
- How did you build accessibility into your digital story?
- If you had more time, what changes or additions would you make to create access?
- Which activity was most useful to you as you crafted a meaningful video? What is one piece of advice you would give future makers based on what you learned from that activity?

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## Conclusion

Video is a powerful method and has an ever expanding role in our daily lives. This is great in many ways, including a proliferation of diverse representations of disabled people and a spread of disability justice

movements and activism. Even more exciting is the fact that the technologies built into our existing devices are getting increasingly more powerful. However, this does mean we need to spend more time critically reflecting on our relationships with video, both as makers and consumers. Failure to maintain such critical reflection can lead to the spread of ableist tropes and ideologies as well as an increase in inaccessible content.

This concludes our section on crip making: images, audio and video. The next section of this Pressbook focuses on critical game design, narrowing in on the concept of critical play and opening opportunities for analyzing, playing, and making games.

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# Critical Play and Crip Game Design

This module was written by:

Juan Escobar-Lamanna, MA, PhD Candidate, Western University, Faculty of Information and Media Studies, London, ON, Canada

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

\*name change pending Summer 2022

# Module 8 Readings

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2. Dornieden, Nadine. (2020, Dec. 22). Leveling Up Representation: Depictions of People of Color in Video Games. *PBS*. <https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/leveling-up-representation-depictions-of-people-of-color-in-video-games/>
3. Explore one of the following two websites:
  - AbleGamers <https://ablegamers.org/>
  - SpecialEffect <https://www.specialeffect.org.uk/>

## Additional/Suggested readings

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# Module Overview

## Introduction



A black woman wears a VR headset and reaches out towards a computer graphic of a muscular robot figure. Im Source: Pixabay.

Over this and the next module we will be exploring how play and playfulness can be used to generate creative and interactive stories, games, arguments, essays, poems, and rants. We will perform platform analyses of different videogames and experiment with creating our own games to communicate our ideas.

This module will ask you to consider (and in many ways reconsider) not only the content of the games that you play, but also how you play those games. Games are meant to be played in a very particular way. Sports have rules that dictate what players are and are not allowed to do. Board games have rules which tell you how to set the game up, play, and ultimately win the game. Videogames have similar rules. While we often imagine videogames as allowing players to have agency and choice – a certain kind of freedom when playing – they are just as structured and filled with rules of what is and isn't allowed as any other game. In board games, other players/referees enforce the rules; i.e. your friends probably would not let you take money freely from the bank in Monopoly. In videogames, code, level designs, game mechanics, and hardware to act as these rule enforcers – the things that force us to play in a specific way. For some players, these rules may be barriers to the playability or enjoyment of the game. For example, players must use a certain controller based on the platform/console they are playing on. The design of controllers and the button inputs the game requires players make can be an accessibility barrier. If we want to think through accessibility in game design and crip game design (games designed with a disability orientation), we not only need to ask how games are designed but who they are designed for, who is able to play them, and who they appeal to.



By the end of this module:

1. You will have played digital games and have been asked to think and reflect critically about the design, the message, and the impact of these games.
2. You will have designed a short game that tells stories about access, justice, and society.

Some questions to keep in mind as you go through this lesson are:

- Who are games made for? Who is included or excluded from playing games?
- When we pay attention to the designs and 'rules' of games, what does this tell us about who these games are made for?
- How do we, as players, accept or reject these designs?
- If we reject these designs and/or ask for accessibility, what does this tell us about the normative orders the game is maintaining?
- How can we design games to be more accessible?
- How do games communicate stories and arguments?
- How do games function as tools of activism?
- What are the limits of access in game design?

# Critical Play



Today's module will be largely guided by Mary Flanagan's (2009) concept of "**critical play**." Before moving on to this module's activities, it is important to understand what critical play means for both players and designers, as well as for accessibility and inclusion in game design.

In the introduction to her book, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (2009), Flanagan writes,

"[Critical play] means to create or occupy play environments and activities that represent one or more questions about aspects of human life." (p. 6)

In other words, designing games that in some way address and interrogate our lives or society. These games could address any number of things but often focus on issues of social justice. Flanagan also argues that

playculture...is one in which participants find a space for permission, experimentation, and subversion" (p. 13).

Through critical play we can subvert and challenge harmful and unjust social structures or beliefs.

The critical play method is intended as a tool for future game makers, play designers, and scholars. The desired results are new games that innovate due to their critical approach, games that instill the ability to think critically during and after play (Flanagan, 2009).

Play provides both designers and players an opportunity for subversion, creativity, and resistance. Games teach us about the world around us and can intervene, disrupt, or critique culture and society. Games can act critically and function as activist tools. Play has the power to transform!

## Games Are Not Neutral

An important aspect of critical play is that technology is not apolitical; it is not free of biases or discrimination. Flanagan (2009) and many other people who study the intersection of technology and social justice, take up this idea. It is particularly important today when these injustices are becoming more and more visible because of advancing and ubiquitous technology usage. As Flanagan argues,

“games carry embedded beliefs within their systems of representation and their structures, whether game designers intend these ideologies or not.” (p.223)

If there is one crucial piece of information to take away from this module, it is: **games are not neutral.**

## Activist Games

A game’s narrative may present a story or characters which challenge social norms or injustices. Mary Flanagan (2009) calls these “serious games, games for change, or social impact games” (p. 243). She gives an example of the game *Darfur is Dying*, described as “an online game designed to raise awareness of the three million people in refugee camps” (p. 245). You can read about the game here:

<https://www.gamesforchange.org/game/darfur-is-dying/>.

The game, according to the Games for Change website, was designed to bring more widespread attention “[to] the genocide taking place in Darfur and empower college students to help stop the crisis” (gamesforchange.org, n.d.). However, the game was not developed by people who experienced or

were directly connected to the crisis. Instead, the game was “developed in cooperation with humanitarian aid workers” (gamesforchange.org, n.d.). Although we may classify *Darfur is Dying* as a serious game, it is also important to address who games are made by, as the developer’s worldview and positionality will inevitably affect the message and narrative of the game. As we will discuss later in this module, this is crucial when considering accessibility in gaming — for instance, like when disabled people are actively involved in creating accessible spaces.

Because video games have been historically advertised to, developed by, and made most accessible for able-bodied, affluent, straight, young white men, games that have content or characters which don’t follow this norm or are made by more diverse creators could also be considered activist games. An example of this is [\*Depression Quest\*](#). We will look at *Depression Quest* in-depth [in the next module](#) when we discuss Twine; it is a text-based choose-your-own adventure game about living with depression. In this game, critical play comes from the narrative/setting of the game as well as the style of play, which forces the player to think engage with and think critically about societal norms and forms of discrimination. Before continuing on, take a few moments to ask yourself:

- What games for change have you played (if any)?
- If you have, how were they games for change? What did they portray?
- What worldview were these games designed through?
- Did they confirm, reject, or transform the status quo?

It is important to note that while these games are activist tools (or games for change), that does not mean that traditional games are apolitical. Games that do not have a clear political message or meaning can be — and often are — political in their own way, in that they exclude or stereotype many of the groups that games for change often fight to represent (women, people of colour, LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit people, disabled people). Think about how games normally portray women, disabled people, and other historically marginalized groups. Nadine Dornieden’s article for this week, “Leveling Up Representation: Depictions of People of Color in Video Games” (<https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/leveling-up-representation-depictions-of-people-of-color-in-video-games/>), highlights the very clear

and problematic nature of many of these depictions and why it is important to consider them when designing a game – to design critically.

# Analyzing a Game



Think of a game you have played recently (any game, it does not have to be a videogame). Write down (even just a few words for each point) the following:

1. In what ways, if any, was the game inclusive or accessible in its narrative, characters, or forms of play?
2. In what ways was the game inaccessible in its narrative, characters, or forms of play?
3. Did it have any problems with representation in its design or story? How?

Keep this list, as we will revisit and build upon it later in this module.

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=666#h5p-30>

Take a few minutes to ask yourself how these narratives contribute to a need for us to consider modes of critical play.

- Why do we need to, as Flanagan (2009) says, “create or occupy play environments and activities that represent one or more questions about aspects of human life” (p. 6)?
- Why do we need to subvert and diversify games to be more inclusive?



Reflect on who is excluded from these games and what types of normative, oppressive understandings of gender, race, and disability they may perpetuate.

One example is Bethesda’s popular videogame *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (2006). At the start of the game, the player must create their avatar, the character they will play through the game as. Part of the character creation process is choosing one of many fictional races; Orc, Elf (high, dark, and wood), Argonian, Khajiit, and a few variations of Humans (Nord, Imperial, Breton, and Redguard).



All playable races from the Elder Scrolls games. Screenshots are taken from *Elder Scrolls: Skyrim* (Bethesda G under Fair Dealing).

Similar to Jerreat-Poole's (2018) point in their article "Mad/Crip Games and Play: An Introduction" that D&D campaigns present "racist and ableist racial essentialisms—like the -2 intelligence for Orcs, which reproduces the legacy of white supremacy," the character strengths/weaknesses in Oblivion are tied to historically racist, white supremacist views. Among the human races, Imperial and Breton (white characters) have higher intelligence and personality, while Redguards (the only people of colour in the game) have higher strength and endurance with low personality and intelligence ratings.

Through a framework of critical play, we can interrogate what this otherwise uninterrogated character creation menu means. We can think critically about the values represented by these games and design choices as being reflective of social values and norms. This critical play further highlights the need to have more diversity and accessibility in game creation. As Jerreat-Poole (2018) argues,

Access doesn't start and end with the player: we need more designers, artists, writers, and programmers with disabilities represented at all levels of the gaming industry. We need accurate and respectful portrayals of Mad and crip folx crafted by people with disabilities.

Think about how this quote, calling for creators with disabilities, differs from the following reflection from Mark Brown and Sky LaRell Anderson's (2021) article "Designing for Disability: Evaluating the State of Accessibility Design in Video Games,"

Game developers would benefit from hiring an accessibility consultant, an increasingly common practice in the games industry, or at least turn to players with various disabilities to playtest games to notice missteps that normative designers would not notice. (p. 713)

While having a consultant or having player input is certainly a step towards a critical play framework, this practice does not necessarily challenge the stereotypes of normative, inaccessible, and problematic game design. **Designing for critical play challenges these stereotypes, asks why they exist, how they can be changed, and how diversity, accessibility, and inclusion can become a central part of the game design process.**

# Critical Play in Action

So far, we have looked at some game narratives and how they can be harmful by reflecting and participating in legitimating social norms and oppression. We have also thought about how games for change subvert and challenge these norms. Now, let's think about how we play games, or what players are expected to do when playing games.

Games are designed for certain people with certain abilities, certain sensibilities, and certain values/politics. When playing any game (computer games, board games, a sport), players are expected to be able to overcome challenges – set by either designers or other players – and be able to physically and mentally complete the game while playing by the rules. As previously mentioned, videogames and their content are often designed by and for straight, white, neurotypical young men with money to purchase these games (Chess, Evans, & Baines, 2016). Rarely are games universally accessible unless they are designed to be so. Video game players often need to design their own controllers or ways of playing to make these games more accessible (See Liu, 2017: <https://perma.cc/JLN8-QJU9>). However, accessibility in game design/play is certainly not limited to physical barriers and more accessible controller design. As we will explore later in this module, accessibility barriers can come from game design elements that go unquestioned – game difficulty, controls that can't be adjusted, who the player controls in the game, and more can all present barriers. All these design choices and elements appeal to certain players, while excluding others.

## Batman: Arkham Asylum

This is what Adan Jerreat-Poole (2018) reflects on when they recall playing Batman: Arkham Asylum (2009), saying,

I didn't get to play Ivy. I had to play Batman. And Batman punished Ivy for being a Mad queer femme. He played the role of the legal system, and the legal system punishes people like her, like me. The logic of the game was patriarchal, sanist, ableist.

In order to function as a game, the game forces the player to control a certain character – in this case, Batman. This choice, made by developers with no say or influence from players, carries certain values, beliefs, and meanings for different people. **While games are often praised for being filled with player freedom and choice and openness, this assertion is often far from true.**

To continue this example, and as an example of what Flanagan (2009) describes as players unplaying, reskinning, and rewriting popular game worlds to offer “their own interpretations of play” (p. 48), some players have modded a later game in the Arkham Asylum series to allow players to play as Poison Ivy. The video below shows Catwoman/Selina modded into Poison Ivy, in the original Poison Ivy's lair. The video will start just before a scripted scene. If you continue to watch, please note the gameplay is violent.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://pressbooks.library.yverson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=671#oembed-1>

See this article for more information on the mod: <https://www.digitalspy.com/videogames/a655658/batman-arkham-knight-mod-allows-you-to-play-as-villains/>.

While we may not know why these players decide to make this modification to the game, it breaks a restrictive part of the game's design – forcing the player to play as Batman. These players rewrote and reskinned the structure of play in this videogame to offer their own interpretation of how they want to play the game. They aren't just playing the game – they are playing and designing their mods critically, offering a way to play which goes against the expected way of playing, allowing us to think critically about what it means to control a certain character in a game over another; to be forced to play in a particular way.

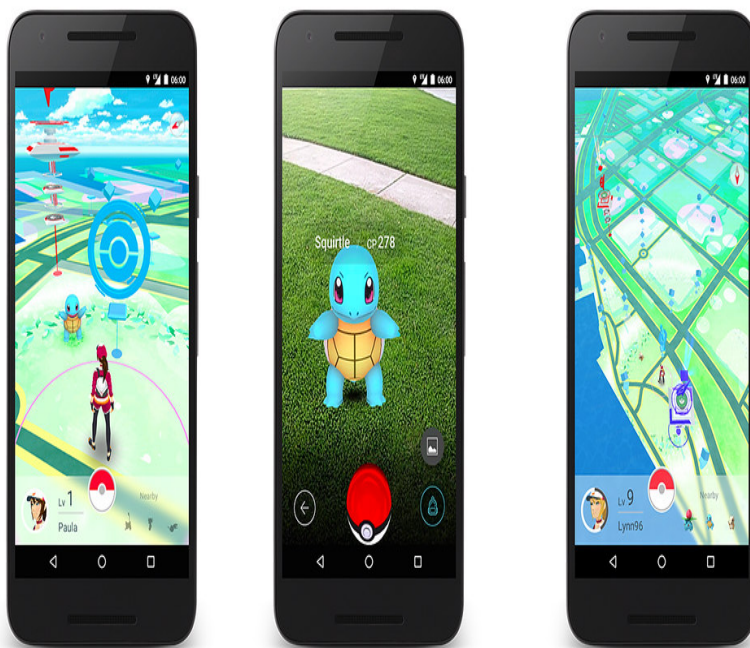
# Pokémon Go

To take this concept one step further, we can look at the pushback from some game developers against players who attempt to make their games more accessible. The popular mobile game *Pokémon Go* requires players to walk around outside in order to find and catch in-game Pokémon. Certain Pokémon are assigned to specific locations and so you must physically be able to move around in order to catch them. This gameplay has limitations – players who can run or move more quickly will be able to find and catch more Pokémon. Players who have mobility aids may not be able to move around certain areas or on certain terrain – again blocking off part of the game. One way players decided to make the game more accessible was by taking automated transportation as a way of moving around to catch Pokémon. However, as Jerreat-Poole (2018) writes in their article, this was met with new design elements – ones even more restrictive and less accessible than before.

“Since Pokémon Go has been out, Niantic has banned disabled players from the game for using third-party software to mimic physical travel and placed restrictions on speed, making it more difficult for disabled players to catch Pokémon using automated transportation.”

The quote above includes a link to this article about barriers in *Pokémon Go* for disabled players:

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/9a3n8e/pokemon-go-disabled-ban>



“Pokemon Go” by Hairy Potter 10 is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Games are often not made with a critical play design in mind and as a result players are forced to play within that restrictive, harmful and discriminatory framework (see this article for information on more of the access barriers present in *Pokémon Go*: <https://pokemongohub.net/post/article/opinion/lets-talk-about-accessibility-and-pokemon-go/>). In these instances, we can turn our attention to the action of players who may reskin or rewrite these games to make them function as spaces for critical play. However, as seen with *Pokémon Go*, sometimes developers will choose to put limitations on these actions, again making design choices that exclude certain people.

# Analyzing Accessibility in Games

When we think about critical play and inclusive game design, asking how games are accessible is crucial. Designing for accessibility is utilizing a critical play design method. It is important that when designing, playing, or even thinking about games, we are asking ourselves who they are designed for, and who is/isn't able to play them.

Another way to think about these ideas and accessibility is to consider what Jerreat-Poole (2018) writes,

“While charities like AbleGamers and SpecialEffect provide customized gaming setups for disabled players, this neoliberal model places the onus on an individual to seek accommodation rather than making gaming more accessible in the first place.”

For this module's assigned readings, you were asked to take a look at either the AbleGamers (<https://ablegamers.org/>) or SpecialEffect (<https://www.specialeffect.org.uk/>) sites to give you an idea of how players are making games more accessible when they are not designed with critical play, diversity, or accessibility in mind. Think about how these modifications and adaptive controllers challenge traditional game design, and “instill the ability to think critically during and after play” (Flanagan, 2009, p. 261). Also consider how it falls to players to make these modifications so they can play these games, and how rarely games are designed with considering their accessibility.



Visit Can I Play That? (<https://caniplaythat.com/>) and read at least three accessibility reviews.

- Try to find one review for a game that is **not accessible**, one that is **partially accessible**, and a **positive review** for a game's accessibility.
- As you read the reviews, think about what the reviews are discussing, as well as what they are reviewing positively/negatively about accessibility in games.
- Based on the positive review, ask yourself **how could the other two games have been made more accessible** – are there any tools/settings that could be implemented?
- Think about **who is in/excluded** from playing these games, and **what design choices** lead to this in/exclusion.

After reading three reviews, visit Game Accessibility Guidelines (<https://gameaccessibilityguidelines.com/full-list/>). This site provides game designers with a checklist and guidelines about what to include to make a game more accessible. This list is quite comprehensive, so feel free to browse for as long as you want to get an idea about what accessible game design elements look like.

Now go back to the same list of points/ideas you made for the Analyzing a Game Critically activity about a game you have recently played. Instead of looking at only the narrative of the game, ask:

- How is the game accessible?
  - Can you only play it in one way that is inaccessible?
  - Are there accessibility options?
  - Does the way you have to play the game seem inaccessible?
- In what ways could the game be made more accessible?
  - Is there anything players could do to reskin/rewrite it and make it more accessible?
- Using the game accessibility guidelines list any ideas you may have from reading accessibility reviews.
  - Choose a few design elements that could make the game you chose for the last activity more accessible.
  - How could they have been implemented in the game?

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=673#h5p-30>

Before moving on, consider how critical play opens spaces for more inclusive play by allowing disabled game creators, creators of colour, and LGBTQIA+ and two-spirit creators to create games for change, opening up ways for people to engage with unexpected topics and material. Consider how it also opens spaces for inclusive play by allowing players to break – to unplay, reskin, and rewrite – games and game spaces that don't engage with this critical material. What choices can game designers make to not only create spaces for critical play, but to encourage and promote these forms of critical play which opens and diversifies gameplay?

# Maker Spotlight: Squinky



The maker spotlight for this module is game designer Squinky. Squinky is a Montreal based new media artist and diversity consultant. Find their website here: <https://squinky.me/> To give you a quick idea of what Squinky does, here is an excerpt from the interview:

I'm D. Squinkifer, Squinky for short. Most people call me Squinky. And I am a game designer. And I make things ranging from experimental video games like interactive art installations, immersive theater performances, just like all sorts of playable experiences. I have recently co-founded a worker co-op called Soft Chaos. And we design playable experiences together. And also we're a co-op. So we basically share all of the decision making in a democratic and equitable way.

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=282#oembed-1>

The transcript of Squinky's video can be read at this link:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KaCZO-PEZ-jrZZABrF7ES8rq9qaAT0sem4GdP-VTGqY/edit?usp=sharing>

The transcript of Squinky's video with visual description can be read at this link: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Np9uO-WyC9rlSroK7Gt4723uU4LHNOj-6KvbEcOj2pY/edit?usp=sharing>

After engaging with Squinky's maker spotlight video, consider the following questions:

- How does Squinky describe their relationship to technology?
- What does Squinky mean by the ‘right to repair’? Can we connect this practice to [materiality and the production of digital devices](#)?
- Who is Squinky’s ideal audience?
- What challenges and/or barriers does Squinky describe?
- What is Squinky’s critique of the practice of ‘mastering difficulty’ in conventional gaming? How do they connect this critique to accessibility?
- Do you relate to parts of this interview? What is your relationship to games and interactive art/fiction?
- What was one thing you learned from this interview?
- If you could ask Squinky one question, what would it be?

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=282#h5p-30>

# The Wikipedia Game



In this section we will learn about, play and create our own Wikipedia Game. For those who aren't familiar, the game works by choosing two or more seemingly unrelated topics, objects, or people. The goal is to start on the Wikipedia page for the first word, and, by clicking on links within Wikipedia, eventually find your way to the page for the second word. Winning often means either getting to the second page first or using the fewest number of links. There are obvious limitations to this game—for example, the cultural policing of who or what does or does not have a Wikipedia page, which limits our choices.

What are we doing when we play this game? Rather than simply a form of entertainment, this game showcases the structure of the Wikipedia archive as a network of associated knowledge. Our ability to play the game ultimately demonstrates a certain amount of mastery in the performance of digital archival research. **Playing in the archive is a form of active knowledge practice, in which we hone our skills in constructing links between data and in retrieving information.** Different players employ different strategies in the game—some prefer to click semi-randomly, hoping to discover/uncover hidden connections in the archive. Others read the entire Wikipedia page looking for close connections and employ their previous knowledge of the cultural objects in order to plan a pathway before clicking. In the first instance, the player is exploring the archive and discovering links between two seemingly unrelated objects/events. In the second, players are retracing collective memories that are likely shared culturally. There is no right or wrong strategy to use when playing the game.



In this first game, we are going to draw a connection line between **Disability Justice** and **Beyoncé**.

1. Navigate to the Wikipedia page for disability justice:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disability\\_justice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disability_justice)
2. Next, following links in Wikipedia, try to find your way to Beyoncé.
3. Try to keep track of the links you followed, or go back when you're finished and write them down.

Take 5 minutes to play the game!

### **Instructor's Path**

First Playthrough:



1. Disability justice
2. Mia Mingus
3. Barack Obama
4. List of Barack Obama 2012 presidential campaign endorsements
5. Beyoncé

## Second Playthrough:

1. Disability justice
2. Audre Lorde
3. Black feminism
4. Misogyny in rap music
5. Beyoncé

For those of you finished with the first pathway, or simply want to try a different story, we're going to play the game again. This time, we're going to start with **coltan**, and we'll end with **Taylor Swift**. Here is the link to the Wikipedia page for coltan to start: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coltan>



Take a few minutes and reflect on both or either of your paths in the Wikipedia Game. Go back and make a list of the links you followed. Let the questions below guide your analysis.

- What was the chain of associations that you followed?
  - How did you make decisions about what links to follow in the game?
- What was the most unexpected connection you made?
  - Why was this an unexpected connection?
- What stories were told by associations, keywords, and links?
- What themes emerged?
  - Were any of the themes unexpected or surprising?
- How did your story engage with cultural, societal, and political topics and issues?
- Did your story cross borders or span timelines/histories?
- Were there moments of friction or tension in your story?
- Did it make you uncomfortable?
- How do the start and end points shape the narrative we are telling?

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### **Instructor's Thoughts**

In the first playthrough, connecting disability justice to Beyoncé through Barack Obama took a political and nationalist turn, associating Obama and Beyoncé in a way that seemed to link Obama and the American Presidency with disability justice and Black feminism, a troubled connection.

In the second playthrough, the pathway took a different turn, connecting disability justice with Audre Lorde and Black lesbian feminism and making a critique of misogyny in rap culture before ending with Beyoncé.

Due to the tenuous link to Obama on Mia Mingus's page, the first pathway made a false connection between disability activism and political parties/governments. In contrast, it was good to see issues of racism and sexism emerging in the second playthrough. Positioning of Beyoncé as an inheritor of Audre Lorde's Black feminist activism is an interesting idea.

In this first game, by drawing disability justice together with Beyoncé, there is a tenuous claim that the two are connected. Thus, the game design can lead players to associate Beyoncé with political activism and Black feminism. In contrast, by associating Taylor Swift with coltan, the game is designed deliberately to critique white feminism, American nationalism/imperialism, and capitalism. These design choices matter, as they make suggestions about how and what cultural objects are connected and carry meanings that are absorbed by players.



# Designing Your Own Wikipedia Game

The Wikipedia Game can be an example of critical play. When you are designing your own game, engage in critical play design by asking yourself: What associations do I want players to make?

How they make those associations will be up to them, but the beginning and end points that you choose will shape the narrative and how they interact with that narrative.

Now you're going to design your own Wikipedia Game!

1. Ask yourself:
  - What story do I want to tell with the player?
  - What interactive, collaborative message am I trying to convey?
2. Pick a theme related to disability justice that you want to explore and plan your Wikipedia pages accordingly—maybe you want to connect straitjackets to racism, Justin Trudeau to lead poisoning, or your hometown to Mad Pride or Disability Pride marches.
3. Questions to ask yourself:
  - Why have I chosen these points?
  - Have I left space for player agency, choice, and unexpected connections?
  - What are the main connecting lines I'm drawing with my framework—do they cut across time, borders, or disciplines?
4. Create the game and then play it twice, marking down the different pathways you took.
5. As an additional challenge, try 'breaking' your game on one of your playthroughs. Try to play critically and challenge the message you were trying to convey with your start/end points by making unexpected connections that subverts your initial message!



Spend a few minutes reflecting on the stories that emerged through clicking different links.

- Were you satisfied or not satisfied with the outcomes? Why or why not?
- What challenges did you face in designing your own game?
- What challenges or connections do you think players could make when playing your game?

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=280#h5p-30>

# Platform Analysis: Wikipedia

The last part of this module returns to a platform analysis. Similar to our analysis of accessibility in games, you will critically interrogate the accessibility of Wikipedia as a platform and the website's relationship to broader structures of power. Use the following questions to guide your analysis, thinking about the accessibility guidelines and accessible design elements that you have encountered thus far:

1. In what ways is Wikipedia accessible? In what ways is it inaccessible?
  - Can you access Wikipedia on a range of devices? Do you need high speed internet?
  - Can you play the Wikipedia game with a screen reader?
2. What skills, abilities, and bodily norms are required to play the Wikipedia game?
3. In what ways can Wikipedia be harmful?
4. Who can contribute to Wikipedia?
5. What is the criteria for being added to Wikipedia (hint: look up 'notability' in Wikipedia)?
6. What absences can we mark in the Wikipedia archive? Who is not present? Who is overrepresented?

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=698#h5p-30>

## Conclusion

In their analysis of accessibility in game design, Brown and LaRell (2021) observe,

One perplexing trend [in game design]...is that a number of games are adding necessary accessibility options several months after a game's

release, in the form of downloadable software patches.  
(p. 713)

While players and some developers are becoming increasingly aware of and fighting for inclusive, diverse, and accessible game design, it is clear that this practice is still not the standard for game development. These ‘accessibility fixes’ are often patchwork solutions to appeal to a broader audience rather than a fundamental part of game design. While games for change and critical games are becoming more popular and widely discussed, it is clear that many popular games still convey problematic and discriminatory messaging. This week, we have thought about **how we can challenge these norms through critical play and critical game design, and how players can take on a similar role through playing in ways that challenge and disrupt these normative design choices**. Having more diverse games in the creation process – having more creators of colour, more LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit creators, and more creators with disabilities – can ensure that the critical design method becomes a standard form of game design, rather than something that players have to continually fight for or create themselves.

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# Interactive Fiction/Twine Workshop

This module was written by:

Juan Escobar-Lamanna, MA, PhD Candidate, Western University, Faculty of Information and Media Studies, London, ON, Canada

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow, Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

\*name change pending Summer 2022

# Module 9 Readings

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2. Boluk, S. & LeMieux, P. (2017). [Scene]: Disability and Games. In *Metagaming: Playing, Competing, Spectating, Cheating, Trading, Making, and Breaking Videogames* (pp. 168-170). University of Minnesota Press.

Read the book chapter here:

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt1n2ttjx.6?seq=48#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt1n2ttjx.6?seq=48#metadata_info_tab_contents)

## 3. Play two games from the list below:

These two games are text based choose-your-own-adventure games like the ones you will be making later in this module. They are more accessible than the following two games, and are played by clicking the hyperlinks that appear in the text on each screen.

- Tremblay, K. (n.d.). There Are Monsters Under Your Bed [Online Game]. <https://philome.la/kaittremblay/there-are-monsters-under-your-bed/play/index.html>
- Squinky, (n.d.). Imposter Syndrome [Online Game]. <https://games.squinky.me/impostor/>

The following two games involve a little more interactivity than the previous two, and as such are less accessible.

To play Administer Naloxone, drag the word box at the bottom of the screen onto the word that appears red from the text on the screen. Sometimes there will be no options available and a clickable arrow will appear in the bottom right corner of the screen to continue.

- Gollydraft. (n.d.). Administer Naloxone [Twine Game]. <https://texturewriter.com/play/gollydrat/naloxone>

To play Loneliness, click anywhere on the screen to begin, and use the arrow keys to move the square at the bottom edge across the screen.

- Magnuson, J. (n.d.). Loneliness [Flash Game].  
<https://www.necessarygames.com/play/loneliness/?q=my-games/loneliness/flash>

## Suggested Readings

McGonigal, J. (2011). *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*. Penguin Books.

# Module Overview

Welcome to module 9 of Digital Methods for Disability Studies and the second module on critical game design. This module delves into the world of interactive fiction; you will be playing and experimenting with choose-your-own-adventure stories and will learn how to use the free program Twine (<https://twinery.org>) to create your own interactive narratives. This part of the Pressbook turns to engaging with critical game design and the construction of meaningful games, as well as its intersection with accessibility. Before moving on, [play two of the games listed in “assigned readings for this week”](#) in order to have a frame of reference for the kinds of games and themes this module engages with.



Interactive stories bring the reader into the scene and make them an active participant in the process of constructing a narrative. Interactive stories can be immersive and engaging. They allow players to make choices that can affect the outcome or ending of a story, giving those choices emotional consequences. They also allow game designers the freedom to experiment with branching narratives that have different endings, or to share additional backstory, lore, or other information. However, as we will learn, interactive stories also offer designers the exciting opportunity to subvert this power of choice in creative ways which can make their narrative's message even more powerful. Use the module activities to experiment with structure and shape, and be as creative as you'd like.



This module builds upon ideas of critical play to think about how we can bring illness, disability, access, care, and health into our games in powerful, critical, and constructive ways. You will be invited to share your own experiences through game design and to reflect on the potential of immersive/interactive narratives to communicate and share emotions with the player.

Some questions to guide this lesson:

- How do game designers create access in their work?
- How do mad, sick, mentally ill, and disabled creators use games to challenge ableism, to educate, advocate, and/or to demonstrate care for the player?
- In what ways are games accessible/inaccessible?
- What participation barriers (physical, attitudinal, social, cultural, emotional) exist on game platforms and gaming communities more broadly?
- What comes to mind when you think about accessibility in games and accessible forms of play? What do accessible games/game design look like to you?
- What digital skills are needed to play and make these games? How are those skills acquired?

# Introduction to Interactive Storytelling

As a brief introduction to Twine and interactive fiction, we invite you to spend a few minutes playing the two Twine games provided:

1. Zoë Quinn is an American video game developer. Her 2013 game, *Depression Quest*, is a choose-your-own-adventure game about living with depression. Quinn's thoughtful game illustrates the possibilities of using Twine as a medium for artistic, political, and self-expression, and explores empathy role play and the limits of choice. <http://www.depressionquest.com/>
2. *Nonbinary: A Choose-Your-Own-Adventure* is a game published by Adan Jerreat-Poole (2019) about being a nonbinary video game scholar. This game explores justice and inclusion in academia and gaming communities. <http://www.firstpersonscholar.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/nonbinary-twine.html>

Please note that the transcript of this game is available here:

<http://www.firstpersonscholar.com/nonbinary-text/>



After playing one or both games, take a few minutes to jot down your thoughts on the experience. Let the following questions guide your analysis:

- What choices were available to you? What choices do you wish had been available?
- How was the story told?
- What kinds of access were provided? In what ways were the games inaccessible?
- What story was being told and how did you participate in its creation?
- What emotions did the game evoke?

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=291#h5p-30>



## Interactivity and Choice

If you would like to read more about the emotional impact and potential of games, *How Games Move Us: Emotion By Design* (Ibister, 2016) and Jane McGonigal's (2011) *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* are excellent resources.

In *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2003) explain the impact of making choices in a game. Salen and Zimmerman argue that meaningful play requires meaningful choices that impact the narrative (p. 64). This argument is something that is often echoed in

game scholarship – that the active role players have, through decision making and the direct impact these choices can have on narrative, is crucial to the meaningfulness of play.

In her book *How Games Move Us: Emotion by Design*, Katherine Isbister (2016) frames meaningful play as emotional responses from players, writing,

“Actions with consequences – interesting choices – unlock a new set of emotional possibilities for game designers. Ultimately, these possibilities exist because our feelings in everyday life, as well as games, are integrally tied to our goals, our decisions, and their consequences.” (p. 2)

Isbister argues that making choices allows players to experience unique emotional responses in games, such as responsibility and guilt (both emotions we may not immediately think of when we think about playing videogames). Essentially, choice is how games carry their meaning.



Before moving on, think about your experience playing either *Depression Quest* or *Nonbinary: A Choose-Your-Own-Adventure*.

- What choices in the games led to the most meaningful emotional impact for you?
- Were they choices that felt like they had consequences to them?
- And were the emotions created by these choices ones you would normally associate with videogame play?

Feel free to write your reflections in the text box below:

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=291#h5p-30>



## Limited Choices

We just learned about how creating in-game choices for players that affect the game’s narrative opens a space for meaningful play and evokes powerful emotions. However, there is also value in limiting choices. In *Depression Quest*, for example, players lack choice in their decisions; this limited playstyle allows players to ‘play’ the experience of living with depression as conveyed by Zoë Quinn. An example of this limited choice from the game is in Figure 1 below:

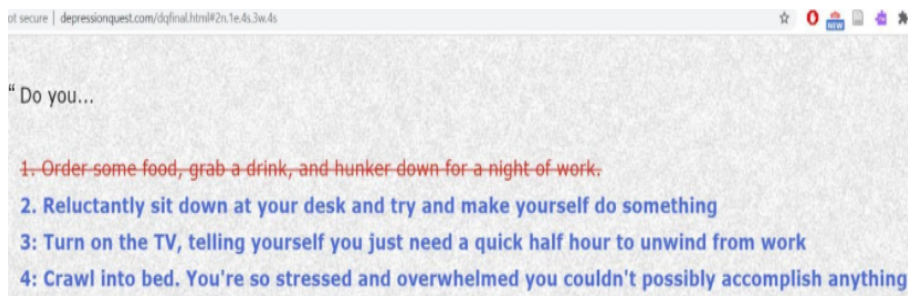


Figure 1. *Depression Quest* screenshot showing four choices. One of the choices is crossed out.

In this example, Quinn takes a choice away to cleverly evoke emotion in the player. In thinking about representation and disability, this playstyle also serves to educate and perhaps challenge preconceptions players may have about depression.

## Engaging Players with Interactivity

Interactivity as a whole is what creates space for meaningful engagement with narratives and games, whether this interactivity is through agency afforded to players with choices or by the lack of choice. This interactivity and engagement with a narrative can be especially affecting because, as touched upon in previous modules, digital worlds are not separate or closed off from our lived experiences in the real or physical world. Players carry their beliefs, their experiences, and their values into game worlds. Through choice (or lack thereof) and interaction with narratives, game designers can directly engage with these values, experiences, and beliefs to challenge them or reaffirm them.

### Key Takeaway

Consider what kinds of choices you have encountered in games and the emotions they elicited. How might a choice that does not affect the outcome of the situation – meaning that both option one and two arrive at the same conclusion – elicit a different response from a player than one which offers players more control over choosing the outcome? Similarly, how can a lack of choice, such as what Quinn uses in *Depression Quest*, function in a critical play design method which interrogates social issues or beliefs?

## Whose Choices?

It is crucial to keep in mind that choices in games are designed and framed by game creators, meaning these choices and emotions, as well as the narratives that house them, can reflect the values of those creators. In [the first assigned reading for this module](#), Kara Stone (2019) asks,

“What if we made games that activated melancholy, or self-reflection, or tenderness? [...] I think games are emotionally powerful, and it’s time we start channeling that power into a wider emotional landscape. We need to make reparative games, games that can help us heal.”  
(n.p.)

Stone builds upon the idea that game designers can create unique and emotionally charged experiences through choice and interactivity, but calls into question the emotions designers choose to create. For example, [in the maker spotlight for this week](#), Kaitlin Tremblay reflects on how

“some people have very specific ideas of what games should be or who should make games, and these people don’t always want to accommodate outside of their understanding of that.”

Kaitlin says using horror and “productive discomfort” is a way she communicates her experiences of trauma and mental illness to players.

Remember how we discussed the importance of having disabled game creators. If the games we play are not rooted in disability experience, then the choices in those games, and subsequent emotional responses, cannot properly address the “wider emotional landscape” of human experience that Stone discusses. It is within these choices that disabled game creators have some of the most powerful tools to challenge ableism and educate players.

# Accessibility and Twine



Twine is an open-access videogame creation platform that allows creators to make games that are playable in internet browsers. The program uses text boxes with branching connections and a simple coding language.

Adi Robertson (2021) describes the interface as,

“An architect’s drafting table crossed with a conspiracy chart. Users start by creating a “passage,” or a simple text field, that can be linked to new passages. When you’re done with the story, you “publish” it as a single web file, which you can load in any ordinary browser.”

Twine is an interesting platform when considering accessibility and diversity in games and game creation. Importantly, Twine allows creators to make games with few financial resources, often by themselves or in small groups. As a free-to-use game creation platform, Twine empowers creators from disabled, transgender, or other marginalized communities to explore themes and stories that they would otherwise not be able to in ways that are typically not present in mainstream triple A games. Twine games are often likened to zines, in that they allow people to tell personal stories free from commercial constraints.

Robertson (2021) writes,

“In an industry obsessed with photorealistic graphics, focus-tested gameplay, and ever-evolving open worlds, Twine’s simplicity felt liberating. It imbued games with the DIY spirit of homemade zines, many of them weirder, sharper, and queerer than their mainstream counterparts. According to some of its biggest fans, Twine was nothing

short of a revolution.”  
(n.p.)

As Benjamin Nicoll (2019) argues in his book *Minor Platforms in Videogame History*:

“[Twine] developer and player communities are largely made up of people whose voices have, historically, been diminutized or excluded in this culture. These communities have mobilized Twine as a videogame-making tool partly in response to the exclusionary values, cultural discourses, and gendered subjectivities that took root in videogame culture in the 1980s and 1990s... but that still remain active today... They often explore themes unacknowledged (or deliberately avoided) by mainstream videogames, such as sexuality, gender, mental health, identity, race, and discrimination. Often, their play structures focus on experiences of disempowerment and marginalization as opposed to agency and power.”  
(p. 158)

Similarly, Brendan Keogh (2018) writes in *A Play of Bodies: How we perceive videogames*,

“Because Twine opens up the possibilities of videogame creation to a broader audience, it risks destabilizing the dominant values sedimented in core videogame culture and is thus seen as a threat”  
(p. 187)

However, as a platform, Twine also presents accessibility issues, as its operation is designed for people with certain abilities. These constraints will be discussed in detail below.

## **Affordances and Constraints of Twine**

Twine opens possibilities for creators to make their games and allow other players to experience them in ways that have not been available in the past. While dominant videogame cultures do not usually engage with themes of representation, diversity, or accessibility, Twine enables creators to make these games with a free, widely available program.

It is important to also consider the kind of games that Twine allows creators to make: predominantly text-based interactive stories. Twine games are not the open-world sandbox games developed by large game studios that offer players as much freedom of choice, player movement, and control as possible. These more mainstream games typically demand a mastery of controls (e.g. quick reaction time and coordination) and environment (e.g. in-depth knowledge of game mechanics and patterns) which can be inaccessible. Forcing players to master skills to advance through games can be read as a kind of ableism, as it demands a certain ability-based playstyle. Additionally, Triple-A games typically promote player choice (or at least the illusion of choice) as much as possible and are meant to appeal to a very broad audience to be commercially successful.

Twine narratives, on the other hand, are heavily shaped by creators, and so too are the choices available, or not available, to players. For example, as we saw in Zoe Quinn's *Depression Quest*, restrictions placed on player's choice are critical to the gameplay, a sentiment echoed by Keogh (2018) when he writes,

“Videogames by marginal developers often communicate more explicitly through a lack of freedom of movement by means of the various constraints placed on the player in videogames.”  
(p. 185)

However, it is also important to consider how Twine and similar platforms are restrictive to developers and disabled people in their design. Twine, as a platform, can still gain profit from creators making games that are typically distributed for free. Additionally, these games can serve as a kind of research for large game design companies – they may see Twines depicting issues of mental health as becoming popular and decide to incorporate these elements into their game as a way to sell more copies and become more popular in the public eye. Furthermore, it is crucial to consider the

affordances Twine does not provide to players. As Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux (2017) write in *Metagaming*,

“Although videogames always operate as open platforms and elastic equipment for making so many metagames, their screens, interfaces, and protocols can be inaccessible and disabling for many players.”  
(p. 170)

Despite being free to download, an internet connection and a device that can connect to the internet are needed to use Twine. Twine does not provide accessibility settings like screen reader support – the user must self-accommodate in these situations. Creators must also follow the logic of Twine and make games the way the platform forces them to. These barriers (and others) may preclude some individuals from being able to use this platform to make games.



So while Twine may be a more open and accessible creation process than many others, it still has certain limitations and barriers because it is primarily a visual, computer-based program. It is reliant on the logic of the platform which, like design choices in games, carries certain values and will inevitably preclude some creators. As discussed in [the previous module on critical play](#), games have rules and limitations, and so too does game creation – even game creation that seems widely accessible. However, thinking about play, and playing critically with these platforms and ways of making games, can open up this inaccessibility. In *Play Matters*, Miguel Sicart (2017) argues,

“We need to see play as both playing systems and playing with systems, as appropriation and resistance of systems. Computers give us the pleasure of bound, limited, logical experiences; play gives the pleasure of breaking those boundaries and making them ours.”  
(p. 98)

Playing (with) these games critically allows us to interrogate those boundaries and create more accessibility in games and game design.

# Accommodation Simulation



What is accommodation? Who gets accommodated? Who does the accommodating? How is self-accommodation distinct from institutional accommodation? Are these practices and processes themselves accessible?

“Accommodation” is a common term connected to disability, and while it has a relationship to ‘access,’ it is a distinct—and narrower—concept. One of the ways to frame this distinction is in terms of timeline: accessible spaces, classrooms, and events anticipate the presence of disabled users and incorporate accessibility into their design (with ramps, captions, etc.). In contrast, accommodation is something that a disabled person requests, and is added to the spaces (physical or digital) later—it was not built into the design itself. Accommodations can create access, but the process of having to apply for formal accommodations is also fraught with barriers and often limits the kinds of access that are created.

[Module 8 looked at accessibility in videogames](#) and how organizations like AbleGamers and SpecialEffect create modifications and adaptive controllers to accommodate disabled players. These organizations are examples of accommodation in gaming, as the core structure of videogame play is often not accessible – changes and modifications must be made to allow more players to be able to access and play these games. In contrast, a critical play design method takes accessibility into consideration from the onset. This difference in design not only means that accessibility settings (such as screen reader support, high contrast modes, adjustable audio levels, customizable controls) are included in the game, but that this accessibility becomes central to game design – not accommodation that must be requested or, in many cases, fought for.

“Self-accommodation” is a term we can relate back to Kelly Fritsch and Aimie Hamraie’s (2019) article on crip technoscience, and “the hacks disabled people utilize for navigating and altering inaccessible worlds” (p. 3). When access is informally created by disabled people, they are self-accommodating. This labour is often invisible. Disabled gamers who create and adapt a standard controller design by modifying it are self-accommodating so that they can use the otherwise inaccessible controller design to play a game. Disabled people and communities can be incredibly creative when it comes to self-accommodating. However, it is important to remember that self-accommodation does not replace the need for access.

Consider what it means that in gaming settings, people often have to self-accommodate, and that while the tools to do so may be available, this type of access is not a normative form of game or technology design. Also consider that accommodation and adaptive controllers for videogames often cost money, and how this can preclude some players and create another barrier to access



You may already be very familiar with the laborious process of accommodations. If you are not familiar this, the next activity will simulate this process.

First, navigate to the Ryerson Academic Accommodation Support website: <https://www.ryerson.ca/accommodations/>. Using the information available on this website, answer the questions in the box below.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=1166#h5p-49>



## ACTIVITY

For this Pressbook we have designed an interactive Twine narrative about accommodation, disability, digital media, and higher education.

“Accommodation Simulation” was created by Killjoy Games, a studio based in Toronto, ON, and founded by Emily Flynn-Jones. From their website, <https://www.killjoygames.fun/>:

“We are beautiful, marginalized and diverse folk making games for diverse audiences. We prioritize storytelling, representation and social engagement above technologies and use the right tools to tell the best tales.”

“Accommodation Simulation” explores the intersection of access, accommodation, and digital media in higher education. Please navigate to the link below and play through the game at least once. However, you are encouraged to play through the game multiple times in order to identify the different pathways and endings that are available to you.

<https://x-university.itch.io/accommodation-simulation>



## REFLECTION

Once you’ve played “Accommodation Simulation” once, consider the following questions:

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=1166#h5p-50>

# Twine Workshop: Storytelling

Twine is a platform that predominantly uses two types of storytelling: horizontal and vertical. As you move into working with Twine to create a choose-your-own-adventure game, you should know about these two types of storytelling and how they can shape the scenarios and gameplay you are creating.

## Horizontal Storytelling

In horizontal storytelling, the interactivity takes the reader horizontally through the text, offering additional information, quotations, poems, or moments of reflection on the main story. **The choice of the player to interact with these elements does not move the story forward** but instead provides context, nuance, or additional details to enrich gameplay.

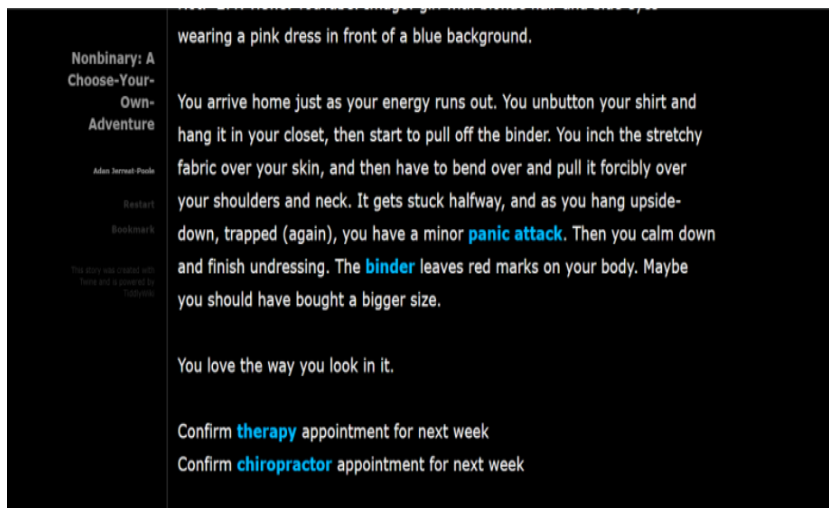


Fig 1. Non-binary game screenshot

For example, in the screenshot above from *Non-Binary: A Choose-Your-Own-Adventure*, there is a paragraph with a few links that a player can engage with, as well as two linked actions or choices at the bottom of the page. The player is still able to make the choice of clicking on the ‘panic attack’ link in the body of the descriptive paragraph and see how that may affect their game but since this is a horizontal choice, the player is taken to the next screen (the player, in the context of the story, has a panic attack):

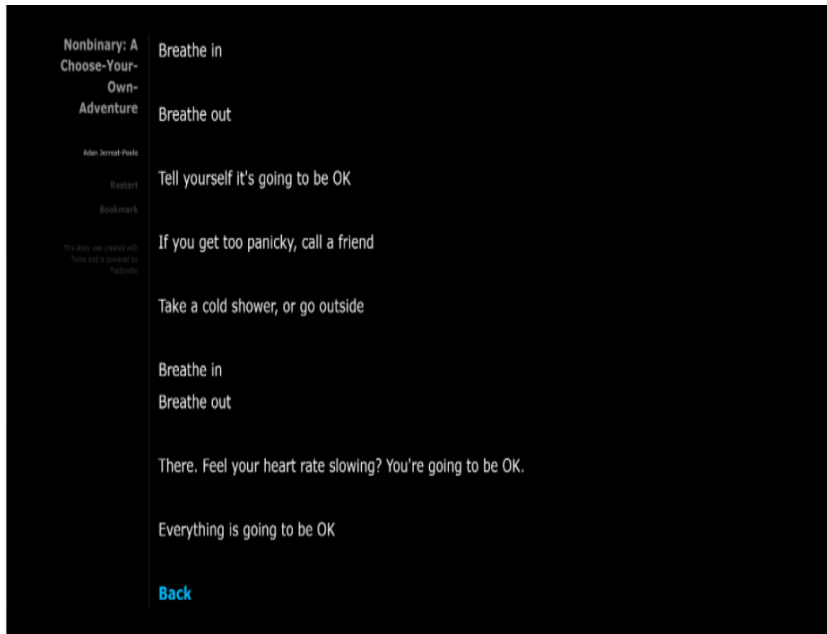


Fig 2. Non-binary game screenshot 2

There are no more links on this ‘panic attack’ screen, no choices to make except clicking back. In this way, the player is moved horizontally from the previous screen to the next (and back again) without any diverging pathways – choosing ‘panic attack’ or ‘binder’ does not preclude the player from making other choices or seeing other screens.

## Vertical Storytelling

In vertical storytelling, the reader makes choices that impact the narrative arc and shape how the story develops, influencing plot development and perhaps even how the story ends. **This tactic shares the narratorial role with the reader and gives them more agency about how the story unfolds and/or how the story ends.** This may mean that once a choice has been made, the player will be ‘cut-off’ from experiencing the story branch that the unchosen option leads to. The figure below shows a vertical storytelling map, which is a common way to organize vertical storytelling, branching scenarios, and/or Twine stories. In this map, if the player chooses option A as their first choice, they will only see the consequence of that choice and so on (i.e. given option C or D and not option E or F and their subsequent path).

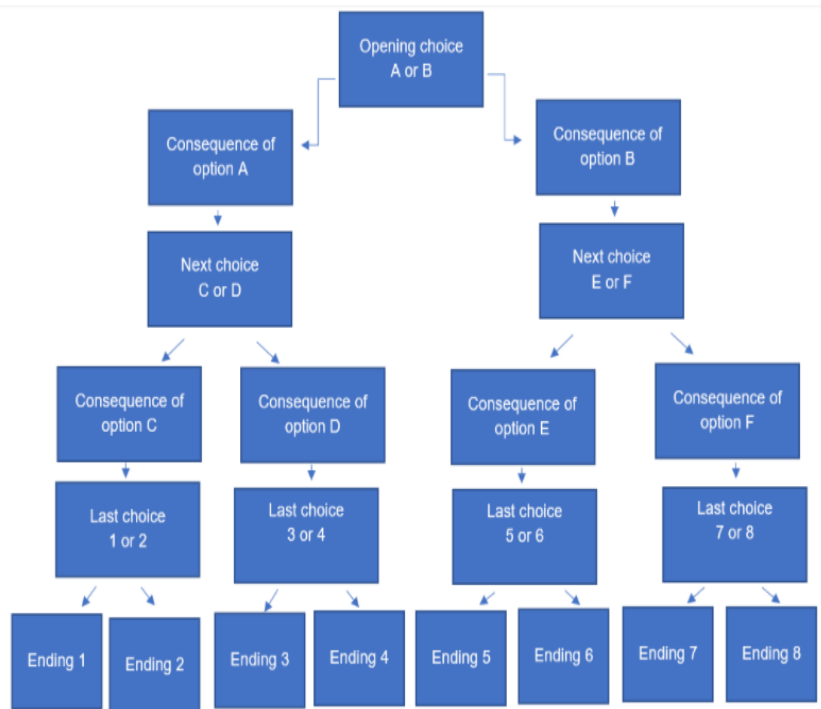


Fig 3. Vertical storytelling branching map.

In this way, vertical storytelling works a little like a flow chart, drilling down and branching out with each choice until endings are reached. A good question to gauge whether your interactive game involves vertical storytelling is: is there a clear ending or multiple endings? You may or may not have vertical storytelling in your interactive game, depending on the narrative structure you are working with.



## Begin to develop your story

For this activity, choose a previous analysis or narrative you have created or create a new script on a topic related to disability and digital media. Here is a quick reminder of some of the notes/reflections you may have created and downloaded throughout this Pressbook:

1. Your reflection on your personal relationship with an object in your space ([module 2](#)).
2. Your analysis of the representation of disability and technology in [advertising](#) or [science fiction](#) (module 3)
3. Your [global map](#) following the production of electronic devices (module 4)
4. Your narrative/analysis of technology for [podcasting](#) (module 6)
5. Your reflection on [video creation and technology](#). (module 7)

Once you have chosen a reflection to work with, follow the following steps.

**Note:** for this activity, you can use any text editor such as Microsoft Word or Google Docs, or even pen and paper, whatever works best for you!

You can also follow the following link to make a copy of a Google Doc that has the questions embedded within it: [https://docs.google.com/document/u/3/d/18lyOctDE7L8mN8idYHnh664iopMp-Ab0uZzHY\\_rs-ps/copy](https://docs.google.com/document/u/3/d/18lyOctDE7L8mN8idYHnh664iopMp-Ab0uZzHY_rs-ps/copy).

1. Cut and paste the transcript or notes into a new document.
2. Rearrange your notes into a series of steps or use your notes to create an endpoint you want players to arrive at. Use the questions below to guide your writing:
  - What part of the text would be the very first screen?
  - What scenarios, joys, or barriers would have to happen to create the situation described in your notes?
  - What options would players have to move through the story?
  - Create at least 2 different endpoints for players to arrive at.
3. Within these steps, highlight 3-5 words you would like to expand on in some way.
4. Write 1-3 sentences to accompany each word. This might be additional information about the object or concept, a personal story, reflection, critical analysis, or a quote from one of the readings. Be creative and experiment!

Save these notes to use in the next chapter where we will learn more about and play with Twine!

# Twine Workshop: Getting Situated

This section will take you through the basics of using Twine. This may be your first time using Twine. As such, **the focus should not be on creating a finished and polished story but instead on experimenting with a new platform and way of thinking/making games.** Troubleshooting is part of the process of using digital media and glitches, errors, mistakes, and failures are all valuable parts of the learning process. Glitches and errors can also be viewed as disruptions or challenges to an otherwise highly structured and logical process. [As discussed previously in this module](#), Twine has a logic it requires designers to follow and if that logic is broken (for example, if you want to design a different type of game), the game will not function; it will glitch, there will be errors, and failures in the platform. If these platforms and their enforcement of a particular value-laden logic can be read as an accessibility barrier through the preclusion of certain creators, then the disruption of that logic can be read as a disruption to that barrier and preclusion. Glitches are one way to think through playing with and appropriating systems in an attempt to make them more accessible – a form of unintentional and disruptive critical play.

## Resources:

- Download Twine 1.4.2 here: <https://twinery.org/>
- “Introduction to Using Twine” can be found here: <https://opensource.com/article/18/2/twine-gaming>

Please note that if you are unable to download Twine, you can still participate in the game design activity by mapping out your game in a Word document or Google document. Signal the choices the reader or player can make clearly. For example, in a story about interacting with a computer, a choice may be represented to your player like so:

1. touch the computer
2. remember when you bought the computer

## Twine Introduction: Terminology

Storyboard: the main design screen that lets you look at the overall shape of your story and all of the individual passages and links.

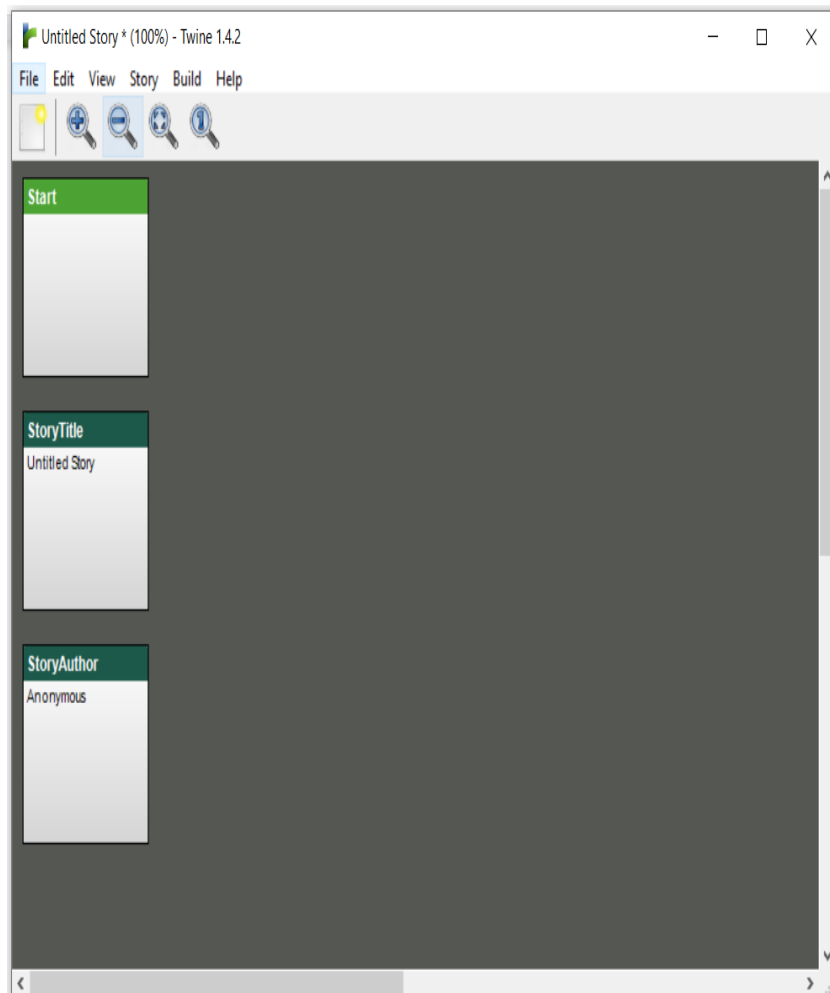


Figure 1 – Storyboard

Passage: the individual text boxes that are the building blocks of the game



Figure 2 – Passage

Twine Syntax: These are the rules that are used in Twine’s programming code. For example, if you want to create **bolded** text that reads, **Tired**, you would place the text in quotation marks, like so “**Tired**”.

| Function       | Syntax                |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| clickable link | [[text]]              |
| italics        | //text//              |
| bold           | “text”                |
| underline      | __text__              |
| heading        | <h1>text</h1>         |
| centred        | <center>text</center> |
| smaller font   | <small>text</small>   |
| bigger font    | <big>text</big>       |

## Images

Want to add an image to your game? No problem! Use the drop-down menu.

## Story —> Import Image

Once added to the storyboard, images will need to be linked to a specific passage: i.e., with `[[image file name]]`.

### Note on the use of the second person

The traditional point of view for interactive fiction is the second person “you,” placing the player as the protagonist. However, this convention doesn’t mean that you are required to use the second-person perspective in your stories. Take a moment to think about the relationship between the player and the game. Do you want the player to imagine themselves as the protagonist or to play as a distanced/separate entity?

# Twine Workshop: Using Twine

With Twine open and your saved notes from the ‘[Developing your Story](#)’ activity for reference, follow these steps:

1. Open the “**StoryAuthor**” passage by double-clicking. A new, small window will open. Add your name or alias. Then exit the passage by clicking the X on the top right-hand corner of the window.
2. Open the “**StoryTitle**” passage and add a title. Then exit.
3. Open the “**Start**” passage and create a title page for your story. Write the title and format appropriately (i.e., as a heading, using the HTML `<h1>title </h1>`).
4. Use the drop-down menu at the top left-hand side of the storyboard screen and follow “**Build —> Test Play**” to see how the game looks in your browser.
5. Go back to your storyboard and the “**Start**” passage again.
6. Add a link to your title page that will start the narrative (i.e., `[[start]]`, `[[begin]]`, `[[enter the room]]` or `[[login]]`, depending on how you would like players to begin their immersive experience).
7. Oh no! If you used `[[start]]`, there is an issue! We already have a passage titled “**Start**” so Twine won’t make a new link. What do we do?
  - We can’t have two passages with the same title—but we don’t want to have to limit which words we turn into links.
  - Use a | (vertical bar; shift + \ on most standard keyboards) to separate the **word or sentence you want visible to players** from **the name of the new passage**. For example, you might write `[[Start|start2]]` or `[[Start|opening scene]]`. Remember, the more links we have and the longer the story is, the more confusing it can get, so having a numbering system can help the game designer keep track.
8. When you go to exit the passage, Twine will ask you if you want to create the linked passage `[[Start|start2]]`. Select yes, and a new passage and link will be created.

- Clicked ‘no’? No problem! Right-click anywhere on the storyboard and create a new passage. Title that passage ‘**start2**’, or whatever you put after the | in the following step, to connect it to your previous passage.
- 9. Add the opening scene or description to your new passage. Use the text from your notes that you decided would be the very first screen.
- 10. Add a **horizontal link**. In our activity, we highlighted words we wanted to expand on. Find a word in this passage that you want more information on and make it into a link. Have the link lead to a passage with text, images, or any other information you would like. Make sure to include a **[[return]]** or **[[go back]]** link that will take the player back to the previous passage!
- 11. Add a **vertical link**. In our activity, we thought of some options that the player might have when they move through the story. Create links to two separate passages that represent these options.
- 12. Play! Experiment! Have fun! Use the Twine Syntax chart and resources above.
- 13. Before you exit, make sure to save your game using the drop-down menu: “**File —> Save story**”.



After using and creating your own Twine game, take a few minutes to jot down your thoughts on the experience. Consider the following questions:

- What was your experience using the platform?
  - Was it easy to use/learn? Difficult?
- What connections and associations were you trying to create through your links?
  - What experiences or emotions did you want to portray through these connections?
- How did you choose the words/phrases that would become horizontal links? Vertical Links?

- Did you have any unexpected hiccups/errors occur?

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=1180#h5p-30>

# Maker Spotlight: Kaitlin Tremblay



The Maker Spotlight in this module features Kaitlin Tremblay, a game designer from Toronto. Kaitlin has worked in both triple A and indie game development and is currently the lead narrative designer at Capybara (Capy) Games.

**Content Warning:** Please note this video touches on eating disorders, abusive relationships, and death from violence

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=379#oembed-1>

The transcript of Kaitlin's video can be read at this link:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BZmy8Pt4uBsZlXuVWQbJMVadsq98rSoHXccmtxMwHtg/edit?usp=sharing>

The transcript of Kaitlin's video with visual description can be read at this link: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1\\_UQfK-fHI4TT1bTi0PFaDN8nvCVcaey\\_Gp2iMIy8KXw/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_UQfK-fHI4TT1bTi0PFaDN8nvCVcaey_Gp2iMIy8KXw/edit?usp=sharing)

After the interview, answer the following questions:

- What is Kaitlin's relationship with digital media?
- How does Kaitlin use game design to explore trauma, abuse, and grief?
- What advice does Kaitlin offer for marginalized people who are interested in getting into game design?
- What did you learn from the interview?

- What do you want to learn more about from this interview? What made you curious?
- Did any of Kaitlin's insights resonate with your own experiences?

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=379#h5p-30>

# Digital Gaming Analysis



At this point in the module, you have played multiple Twine games and have created your own interactive experience using the platform. Now, we're going to use our critical disability knowledge and our personal experience to perform a platform analysis. Revisit "[Accommodation Simulation](#)" and/or your own Twine project. Consider the kind of games Twine allows players to make as well as the process of making those games.

Let the questions below guide your analysis:

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=300#h5p-51>

## Conclusion

As an interactive medium, videogames offer makers unique opportunities to elicit powerful emotional responses in players through choice. While we can consider these emotions in the traditional context of games (emotions of success, accomplishment over mastering and beating a game, joy at completing a difficult part of a game), we can also look at how emotions can challenge players by presenting experiences and situations not usually portrayed in mainstream triple-A games. These otherwise uncommon experiences in videogames can be those of trauma, disability, and depression among many others in order to foster healing, care, or perhaps challenge players and their beliefs. In this context, Twine offers

marginalized creators a platform that can be effective in portraying these narratives and experiences due both to it being free-to-use as well as its text-based structure. However, as we have seen, Twine can also be interrogated from an accessibility standpoint, as its use is still based upon a certain technical literacy and in this way it is restrictive. When we consider gaming, game making, and accessibility, it is important to remember the need for access not only in games but on creation platforms, and consider the ways in which we can play on and with these platforms to make them more accessible.

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# **The Labour and Ethics of Crip Making**

This module was written by:

Adan Jerreat-Poole, PhD, Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow,  
Ryerson University\*, School of Disability Studies, Faculty of Community  
Services, Toronto, ON, Canada

\*name change pending Summer 2022.

# Module 10 Readings

1. Bailey, Moya. (2015). #transform(ing)DH Writing and Research: An Autoethnography of Digital Humanities and Feminist Ethics. *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 9(2).

Read the article here:

<http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/9/2/000209/000209.html>

2. Clare, Eli. (2017). A Note on Reading This Book: Thinking About Trigger Warnings. In *Brilliant Imperfection*. Duke University Press.

Read the article here: <https://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/790795/9780822373520-002.pdf>

# Module Overview

This module encourages critical reflection and discussion on the labour and ethics of digital design and project creation. Questions to guide our reflection on the process of learning and playing with digital storytelling tools and methods include:

- What forms of labour go into designing, crafting, and revising multimedia stories?
- How does this work impact our diverse bodyminds? What pressures do we face under capitalism as digital makers, artists, and academics?
- What ethical questions arise when we engage in personal storytelling?
- What are the ethics of using social media or digital gaming as storytelling platforms?
- How do we practice an ethics of care and accountability as we share our work with diverse audiences?

# Digital Labour

What kinds of labour go into creating and revising digital narratives? Popular depictions of digital media—particularly the future of digital media—imagine a shift away from the body, characters disappearing into data, avatars, and digital fantasies. Yet in every module, we have identified the very real physical impact of using screen technologies. From eyestrain to repetitive motion injuries, there are very real physical side-effects to using communications devices and digital media. Furthermore, digital projects require intellectual, emotional, and creative labour. Adjacent to these projects (but not to our bodies, or to a course centred on disability justice) we also find care work and the labour of self- and collective care, rest, and recovery.

## Types of Labour

We are going to reflect on the kinds of labour and the specific activities completed during the planning, drafting, and revising stages of a digital project. Expand the accordion below to see examples of each kind of labour.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=306#h5p-38>

## Measurements and Milestones

Timecards and deadlines, word counts and presentation. We can measure our work by time, by energy, by output, by errors. Each form of measurement tells us something about what is being valued, and what kind of work we

recognize as work. Do we only value the finished product? Do we value the process of learning? Do we value rest and care?

Measuring only by output or final product erases so much of the work we do thinking, planning, drafting, revising, failing, trying again, encountering a technological glitch, and having to change our plan last minute. We run out of time. We run out of patience. We think about our project on the bus and have a breakthrough over breakfast. We stare at the blank, pulsing screen of the computer for hours, stuck. We panic. We rest. We take care of ourselves. We take care of others. We make countless cups of tea. We put the project down and go for a walk, or a nap. We binge an entire season of our favourite sit-com in a single afternoon.

How do we honour and acknowledge all the different kinds of labour we do in our lives that intersect with our creative and academic work?

## Ways to Measure a Creative Project

The chart below was created to broaden the way we measure success and progress, starting from a traditional measurement of time and product, and then moving toward less conventional ways of understanding and valuing our labour. Copy the chart to your preferred document and fill out your own thoughts, reflecting on a digital project you worked on or thought about through this Pressbook, and adding at least two of your own personalized methods of measurement.

| Measurement                                           | Answer (based on your course project) | What forms of labour does this measurement acknowledge? |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Hours (thinking, planning, drafting, troubleshooting) |                                       |                                                         |
| Days                                                  |                                       |                                                         |

Weeks

Product/Assignments

Word count

Glasses of water drunk

Things I learned

Naps

“I can’t do this”

Headaches

Number of file versions

ADD YOUR OWN

ADD YOUR OWN

## **Milestones**

The chart you just completed focused more on the process than the product by acknowledging critical moments in the project development. Another

traditional mode of marking progress as we move through a large project is through checking off a list of milestones, ticking tasks off one at a time from step 1 through 10.

An example might look something like this:

1. Topic selection
2. Project proposal
3. Narrow topic to be more specific
4. Project outline
5. Finalize medium/platform
6. Project draft
7. Final version of project

These steps may look familiar, as this is a standard format used in school and/or office work to measure and record project milestones. However, this system still erases many other forms of labour—such as care work (for ourselves and others) and troubleshooting our troublesome technology, and flattens the creative process to a series of specific, goal-oriented points.

How would our understanding of progress and process shift if we added other milestones, ones that introduce the complexity of our lives and the needs of our bodyminds into the project framework? What might these milestones look like? What would it mean to “crip” the narrative of project creation?

### **Example crippled project experience:**

1. Topic selection
2. The first time I went down an Internet rabbit hole researching the topic and ended up finding a new favourite TikTok
3. Topic outline
4. First time working on the project in bed during a severe chronic pain flare-up
5. Stopped working on the project due to chronic pain flare up
6. First time working on the project on my cell phone waiting at the bank
7. Failure/writer’s block/lost my direction when working on the project
8. Project draft

9. Crying that the project won't be good enough and deciding I should quit academia
10. Final version



Read the two project experience lists above and then answer the following questions:

- How does this version differ from the first one?
- What has been added?
- What has become visible?
- Do you have a clearer vision of the experience or the person?

In the space below, draft your own project milestones, including any moments or experiences that stood out to you during the course of creating your digital narrative. Add as many as you need!

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# Ethical Research

## Vulnerability & Risk

Surveillance. Harassment. Symbolic violence. Copyright and ownership. The digital sphere—and the Internet—are not and have never been safe spaces. How, then, do we navigate the risks we take as users, learners, and researchers, and the risks that exist for our research subjects? Let the following questions guide your engagement with digital ethics:

- In what ways does digital storytelling and labour open us up to harm?
- How does the use of social media potentially harm the communities we write about?
- Are there ways to mitigate this risk?
- Who owns our work?
- How do we protect ourselves and our communities while doing digital work?
- How might performing digital labour harm our own bodyminds?

Consider the different ethical issues that arise from sharing your work on different digital platforms. The chart below breaks down some of the questions you may consider when you use or share your work with each platforms.

| Platform                  | Ethical Questions & Potential Problems                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Twitter                   | If I create a Twitter account, do I make it open (to reach more people), or closed (to prevent trolling and online harassment)?                                                                                         |
| Instagram                 | If I create a Instagram account, do I make it open (to reach more people), or closed (to prevent trolling and online harassment)? Do my image descriptions reinforce or resist dominant and limited views of the world? |
| Facebook                  | If I share pictures on Facebook, does Facebook have the right to use them?<br>How do I protect my copyright?                                                                                                            |
| University-hosted webpage | What if the host institution webpage does not have adequate access options? (e.g your university or college's webpage)<br>How much does it cost to own and run a website?                                               |
| Personal webpage          | What happens if the app/program I'm using crashes or becomes obsolete?                                                                                                                                                  |
| Online academic journal   | If I publish in an academic journal, who will and will not be able to access my work? How much does a subscription to a journal cost?                                                                                   |

## Accountability & Community

As disabled or non-disabled scholars, we are not only accountable to ourselves for the research we do and the materials we produce. We are accountable to the communities that we write about, to the many people living under oppression and with pain. Remember [the discussion in module 7](#) around representation and consent in video making, or how the makers in each maker spotlight describe their work and community.

When you do your work, ask yourself:

- How will other disabled readers view this?
- How might they feel?
- Am I representing a range of experiences outside of my own, or am I only writing about what it's like to be a disabled white settler?
- If I am discussing experiences that are not my own, what accounts and research am I drawing on?
- Is it a respectful and accurate representation?
- If my work will make someone vulnerable to harm, have I anonymized them effectively?
- Most importantly, if I am writing about fan fiction, or a private Instagram account, have I obtained permission from the creator to use their work?

In one of the assigned readings for this week, Moya Bailey reminds us that sharing our or other people's stories online can be dangerous. In her work with Black trans women in digital spaces, Bailey explains that "acts of violence also coincide with increasing visibility and advocacy by trans women of color, particularly through digital media outlets and in online media" (7). Thus, in reflecting on her own research practice, Bailey writes that "Given the frequent attacks on trans women, particularly trans women of color, I wanted to be sure that my scholarly inquiries about the hashtag were welcome and did not bring undue negative attention to the community" (14). Ultimately, Bailey's research on trans hashtag activism was based on non-hierarchical collaboration with the community she wanted to support, rather than stealing or appropriating their data and images. Another question Bailey raises in her article is that of remuneration: how do we compensate research participants for their time and energy? (25).

Consent. Accountability. Risk. Visibility. Vulnerability. Compensation. These are some of the topics and ethical questions we grapple with as digital scholars.

Part of accountability is also attending to the audience of your research project, and how they might encounter your work or even be harmed by it. When creating projects to share with an audience, ask yourself:

- Who will be reading/playing/watching this work?
- Who might be harmed by my work?
- Am I using trigger warnings and key words? Are there some images or descriptions I decided to cut out because they might be triggering?
- Have I listed the accessible features?
- Have I ensured there is no strobing, and that the piece is as accessible as I can make it at this point in my journey as a digital media maker?



1. Write down your ideal audience for your project.
2. Write down your actual audience.
3. List who might be interested in your work.

## Trigger Warnings

Next, ask yourself: how can I create a caring, accessible experience for this diverse group of people?

Eli Clare tells us that "Trigger warnings are in essence tools for self-care and collective care." In his own trigger warning for the book *Brilliant Imperfection*, he tells the reader:

“You can stop listening to or reading this book. You can read it fast or slow. You can read it out loud with your sister, partner, neighbor across the street. You can yell, type, breathe. Sign, sing, drink tea. Connect with your dog, cat, hamster, favorite tree. Call, text, Skype, Facebook, FaceTime with your friends. Lie in bed, roll, walk, dance, run.” (xx).



## ACTIVITY

Next, we are going to create trigger warnings for the digital work you’ve completed in this course as a way of creating access and demonstrating care for our audience. Follow the instructions below.

1. Create a list of content warnings or trigger warnings for your work, listing specific topics that you think might be triggering or emotionally challenging to engage with.
2. Expand these warnings to communicate if the topic is
  - mentioned briefly in passing
  - explored in-depth
  - uses graphic description or visuals.
3. Note what page number, slide number, or time stamp (for videos and podcasts) these triggers appear on.
4. Create a broader list of key words that tell the reader/viewer what topics will appear.
5. Create your own version of Eli Clare’s invitation to “stop listening to or reading this book.” Write a few sentences instructing the viewer/reader/listener on how they can engage with (or disengage from) your project. What care tactics would you recommend? How might they be accessing this material? Does your narrative need to be encountered linearly? Can readers skip parts?

Consider appending some or all of these trigger warnings and instructions to your final project.

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<http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/9/2/000209/000209.html>

Clare, Eli. (2017). A Note on Reading This Book: Thinking About Trigger Warnings. In *Brilliant Imperfection*. Duke University Press.

# Apple Voice Memo

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=6#oembed-1>

# Wavepad

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<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=6#oembed-2>

# Audacity

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.ryerson.ca/digitaldisabilitystudies/?p=6#oembed-3>

# Glossary

## *abled saviours*

‘Heroic’ non-disabled people who want to ‘help’ disabled people without necessarily taking guidance from disabled people themselves

## *Affordances*

What a digital platform, technology, or site allows us to do

## *audism*

the privileging of hearing and hearing people over Deaf people, and spoken language over signed language

## *bodymind*

The idea that our bodies and minds are impossible to fully comprehend as separate or distinct from each other

## *constraint*

### *Constraints*

The limitations that a digital site and/or medium impose on us

## *Convergence culture*

The flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want (Jenkins, 2006)

## *critical play*

To design games that in some way address and interrogate our lives or society.

### *Deaf gain*

"a term given to the idea that the unique sensory orientation of deaf people leads to a sophisticated form of visuospatial language and visual ways of being" (Murray, 2016)

### *Digital technology*

Of signals, information, or data; represented by a series of discrete values (commonly the numbers 0 and 1), typically for electronic storage or processing. (OED)

### *epistemology*

Theories of knowledge - how do we know what we know, how did it become accepted as 'knowledge'

### *Global North*

Countries located primarily in the northern hemisphere, that have historically been identified as "first world" by their relative wealth, technology, and global dominance.

### *Global South*

Countries located primarily in the southern hemisphere, that have historically been identified as "third world" by their relative poverty, technology, and lack of global dominance.

### *inspiration porn*

The portrayal of people with disabilities as being inspirational to able-bodied people, on the basis of existing with their disability (Wikipedia)

### *Instagram*

A photo and video-sharing social media platform, currently owned by Facebook/Metaverse

### *Judith Butler*

Judith Butler is a Professor in the Departments of Rhetoric and Comparative Literature at Berkeley. She is the author of many widely read texts in Feminist and Queer Theory and a central figure in theorizing the performative construction of gender and sexuality.

### *multimodal listening*

A holistic approach of situated, embodied sound experience which focuses on the ways we filter sound through contexts and feel sound throughout our body

### *New Media*

According to Jenkins (2006)

- "access, participation, reciprocity, and peer-to-peer rather than one-to-many communication."
- "a changed sense of community, a greater sense of participation, less dependence on official expertise, and a greater trust in collaborative problem solving."

### *podcast*

The term 'podcast' is a portmanteau of iPod and broadcast, used to describe talk radio-style audio shows accessible on most Internet-connected devices and smart phones. Podcasts cover a wide variety of topics and genres with shows about true crime investigations, news and pop culture reviews being some of the most popular.

### *reskinning*

Changing the appearance of a playable video game character

### *Rosemarie Garland Thompson*

"Rosemarie Garland-Thomson is a professor of English and bioethics at Emory University, where she teaches disability studies, bioethics, American literature and culture, and feminist theory. Her work develops the field of critical disability studies in the health humanities to bring forward disability access, inclusion, and identity to a broad range of institutions and communities." -

<http://english.emory.edu/home/people/bios/garland-thomson-rosemarie.html>

### *Sunaura Taylor*

Sunaura Taylor is an artist and writer. She works at the intersection of disability studies, environmental humanities, animal studies, environmental justice, and art practice. Taylor is an Assistant Professor of Society and Environment at UC Berkeley." -

<http://www.sunaurataylor.com/>

### *Technologies*

The tools that we use in our everyday lives. They are the application of scientific, mechanical, technical, and digital innovations.

### *Technology*

- The branch of knowledge dealing with the mechanical arts and applied sciences; the study of this.
- The application of such knowledge for practical purposes, esp. in industry, manufacturing, etc.; the sphere of activity concerned with this; the mechanical arts and applied sciences collectively.
- The product of such application; technological knowledge or know-how; a technological process, method, or technique. Also: machinery, equipment, etc., developed from the practical application of scientific and technical knowledge

### *To crip*

Fritsch and Hamraie: The non-compliant, anti-assimilationist position that disability is a desirable part of the world.

McRuer: Like 'to queer,' gets at processes that unsettle, or processes that make strange or twisted.

### *to mod*

modified, altered, and edited the code and assets of; click here for more information on mods: <https://www.makeuseof.com/mods-video-games/>

### *triple A games*

high-profile, high-budget "blockbuster" games typically produced by large and well-known game publishers.

### *Web 1.0*

The early internet, characterized by the ability to access information online and connect via email.

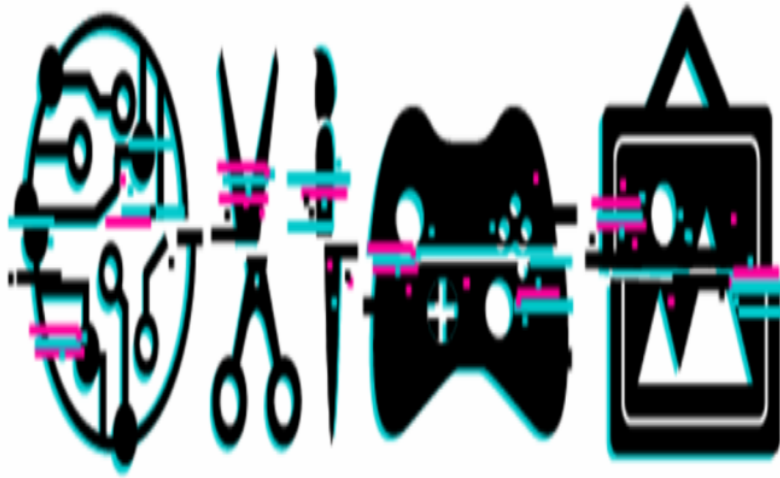
### *Web 2.0*

Characterized by participation, social media, and the collapse between private and public. Users are actively involved in creating content online, and much of what is consumed was created by other users rather than traditional media conglomerates or corporations.

### *Zines*

Zines are paper (or more recently digital) publications made outside of commercial or professional contexts, usually circulated in small batches within communities.

# Sample Syllabus



## Syllabus Scavenger Hunt



1. Download the PDF or Word version of the syllabus onto your device.
2. Highlight three times the word “access” appears. Does the meaning shift in different contexts?
3. Underline, circle, or otherwise mark a word or statement that you don’t understand.

4. Name 2 ways you can participate in the class.
5. Name 3 different formats your final project can take.
6. Place a symbol (star, asterisk, arrow, heart, etc.) beside a topic you're looking forward to learning about.
7. Add a comment/note beside an activity or assignment that makes you anxious or worried.
8. When is the Project Proposal due?
9. Highlight an activity that you're curious about or have questions about.
10. In your opinion, what is the most unlikely or unexpected word in this document?

## Course Description

The Digital Research Methods course will introduce students to a range of technologies and teach them to think critically with and through media objects, practices, and processes. Students will ask critical questions about digital methods and explore how these methods work with other forms of knowledge production. Students will develop their critical thinking, close-reading, textual analysis, platform analysis, visual analysis, and critical game design skills. This course will offer students an opportunity to both interrogate the digital realm as a site of inequality, and to harness digital tools in addressing complex social challenges with attention to the intersections of dis/ability, race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality. The course speaks to the technological innovations and transformations shaping the lives of disabled people and responds directly to the expressed needs of students for content that will prepare them to navigate digitally mediated community, work, learning, and cultural spaces.

## Course Objectives

In this course, students will:

- Identify the affordances and constraints of media platforms and technologies, with attention to access and disability justice and reflect critically on the labour and ethics of digital making.

- Gain proficiency with two or more digital storytelling platforms or practices.
- Develop an understanding of the social and techno-scientific innovation that proceeds from and accounts for body-mind difference.
- Craft stories about specific digital devices, linking objects to broader global, political, cultural, and societal narratives about disability, materiality, and capital.
- Generate interactive narratives using play and collaborative storytelling to explore a contemporary issue relevant to disability justice.
- Identify the digital divide and its impact on disabled people related to inequitable economic, physical, geographic, and infrastructure access to digital resources.
- Interrogate and analyze the intersections of medicine/psychiatry and digital media.
- Become familiar with the discourses of new media, crip technoscience, crippling digital media, and critical game design and apply them in cultural and social environments.

## **Method of Instruction/Teaching**

This course is primarily asynchronous. Lessons will be posted as word documents on D2L alongside assigned media (which may include essays, TikTok videos, YouTube videos, podcasts, Instagram accounts, etc.). Short informational videos highlighting key terms or concepts may be posted, and discussion boards will be used to generate conversation amongst the class.

I am also offering an optional synchronous component to the course. Each week the instructor will host a one-hour work session. This session will provide an opportunity for students to troubleshoot, practice digital storytelling, and have live discussions with their peers.

## **Accessibility Statement**

It is assumed that everyone learns differently and experiences learning in different physical, intellectual, sensory, and emotional ways. This class

strives to provide a safe, accessible, and inclusive learning environment conducive to basic principles of Universal Design for Learning and in-line with anti-oppressive space-making (i.e., respecting people's choice of personal pronoun, etc.) and within the limitations of D2L. I expect that as a class we will collectively attend to all these needs and be in conversation with each other about how we may make the course more accessible. This commitment to accessibility should be engendered in all presentations (by students, the instructor, and guest lecturers).

If you recognize other circumstances that may negatively affect your experience in this class, please let me know so that we can work together to design strategies to make the course more accessible. My experience is that such strategies are best taken up sooner rather than later; you are welcome to communicate with me via email at [instructor email]

Digital access: Online courses are not inherently more accessible than in-person ones. I recognize that glitches, slow wifi, screen fatigue, back pain, and other difficulties associated with online learning may impact your engagement with the course. I encourage you to take breaks as needed and to explore different forms of engagement if possible (using voice to text, for example, or writing drafts in an analog format with pen and paper, etc.). We will be troubleshooting technology glitches as a community, but I invite you to reach out if lack of internet or tech access is impacting your learning.

## Assignments and Evaluation

Detailed assignment instructions are available in the next chapter titled "Assignment Descriptions." Below is a list of assignments, their mark value, and their due date.

| Assignment       | Mark | Due date         |
|------------------|------|------------------|
| Project Proposal | 15%  | October 1, 2021  |
| Project Outline  | 20%  | October 22, 2021 |

|                        |     |                   |
|------------------------|-----|-------------------|
| Project Draft          | 25% | November 19, 2021 |
| Showcase Participation | 10% | December 3, 2021  |
| Final Project          | 30% | December 10, 2021 |

## Assignment guidelines

- Please note that for written assignments, the font Arial size 12 is preferred.
- Assignments must be submitted to the appropriate drop box on D2L as attachments.
- A note on late marks: I don't do them. I'm happy to give you extensions (working within the limits of the university and the deadlines we have from the institution). In some cases, extensions may not be possible (for example, the final project has to be submitted in time for the TA and I to mark them before our own deadlines for submitting grades to the university). Please contact me if there's more we can do to help you, and I will try to accommodate, as long as it won't be extremely hard on me or our teaching assistant. We want to take care of each other. If you do need an extension, please tell me, but remember that I don't need to know why. It's not an instructor's place to assess whether or not a request is valid. Furthermore, your personal life is none of my business, and I'm not here to surveil you. I'm here to teach you. So let me know what you need, and I'll tell you if it's possible, and if not, we can try to come up with other solutions or compromises.

## COURSE POLICIES

## MANAGEMENT

Students are required to adhere to all relevant University policies: <https://www.ryerson.ca/senate/course-outline-policies/>

Several key policies are pasted below.

# Academic Integrity

## Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity

This policy is premised on the commitment of the University to foster and uphold the highest standards of academic integrity, the fundamental values of which are honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, courage.[1] These values are central to the development and sharing of knowledge.

All members of the University community, including faculty, students, graduate assistants (GAs), and staff, have a responsibility to adhere to and uphold them in their teaching, learning, evaluation, research, and creative activity. This includes a responsibility to take action if they have reasonable grounds for thinking that academic misconduct has occurred.

Academic Misconduct is any behaviour that undermines the university's ability to evaluate fairly students' academic achievements, or any behaviour that a student knew, or reasonably ought to have known, could gain them or others unearned academic advantage or benefit, counts as academic misconduct. Included in academic misconduct are: Plagiarism, including self-plagiarism; contract cheating; cheating; misrepresentation of personal identity or performance; submission of false information; contributing to academic misconduct; damaging, tampering, or interfering with the scholarly environment; unauthorized use of intellectual property; misconduct in re-graded/re-submitted work. While this list characterizes the most common instances of academic misconduct, it is not intended to be exhaustive. A more comprehensive list of inclusions can be found in Appendix A within the Policy.

Suspensions of academic misconduct may be referred to the Academic Integrity Office (AIO). Students who are found to have committed academic misconduct will have a Disciplinary Notation (DN) placed on their academic record (not on their transcript) and will normally be assigned one or more of the following penalties:

- A grade reduction for the work, ranging up to an including a zero on the work (minimum penalty for graduate work is a zero on the work)

- A grade reduction in the course greater than a zero on the work. (Note that this penalty can only be applied to course components worth 10% or less, and any additional penalty cannot exceed 10% of the final course grade. Students must be given prior notice that such a penalty will be assigned (e.g. in the course outline or on the assignment handout)
- An F in the course
- More serious penalties up to and including expulsion from the University

## **Unauthorized Use of Intellectual Property:**

The unauthorized use of intellectual property of others, including your professor, for distribution, sale, or profit is expressly prohibited, in accordance with Policy 60 (Sections 2.8 and 2.10). Intellectual property includes, but is not limited to:

- Slides
- Lecture notes
- Presentation materials used in and outside of class
- Lab manuals
- Course packs
- Exams

For more information please visit the Academic Integrity Office website (<https://www.ryerson.ca/academicintegrity/>). Important Student Resources such as: informative videos, a list of available workshops along with writing and citing guidelines are provided to assist with your success as a student.

[1] International Centre for Academic Integrity (2013)

## **Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities**

This policy establishes guidelines for the academic accommodation of students with disabilities in order for them to access and demonstrate

learning in a university context while maintaining the integrity of course content and objectives, as well as ensuring fairness for all students.

Ryerson University provides academic accommodations for students with disabilities in accordance with the terms of the Code and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (“AODA”). The University strives to make its academic programming accessible to all students.

The University is committed to preserving academic freedom and high academic standards. The University will provide academic accommodations to assist students with disabilities to fulfill the academic requirements of their programs without alteration in academic standards or outcomes. The nature and extent of accommodations shall be consistent with and support the integrity of the curriculum and the University’s academic standards.

The University re-affirms that all students are expected to satisfy the essential requirements of their program of studies and recognizes that students with disabilities may require academic accommodations to do so, including alterations to how the student demonstrates that she or he has acquired the necessary knowledge and skills.

Accommodating students with disabilities is a shared responsibility and a collaborative process. To this end, the University is committed to educating students, faculty and staff about the requirements to accommodate students with disabilities, the provisions of the Code and AODA, and the resources available to provide additional information and guidance.

For more details on academic accommodation at Ryerson and how to register for these services, please see details on their website:  
[ryerson.ca/studentlearningsupport/academic-accommodation-support](http://ryerson.ca/studentlearningsupport/academic-accommodation-support)

## **Direct Links to Other Important Ryerson policies:**

Academic

Consideration: <http://www.ryerson.ca/studentguide/IfYouHaveAProblem2.html>

Email Policy: <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol157.pdf>

Missed Tests/Examinations Policy: <https://www.ryerson.ca/senate/course-outline-policies/missed-tests-examinations-course-management-policy-166/>

Examination Policy and

Procedures: <http://www.ryerson.ca/studentguide/AcademicMatters21.html>

Medical Certificates: <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/forms/medical.pdf>

Religious

Observance: <http://www.ryerson.ca/studentguide/AcademicMatters3.html>

# RESOURCES

## Writing

- Please access the Ryerson Student Learning Centre (SLC) for online writing support. The SLC has several online resources available here: <http://www.ryerson.ca/studentlearningsupport/online-resources/index.html>
- You can make online appointments for writing support by following the link below. Appointments fill up fast, so do book early. SLC offers three types of appointments: English Speaking and Listening, Grammar/Supported Self-Editing, and Academic Writing: <http://www.ryerson.ca/studentlearningsupport/writing-support/index.html>

## Access

- Centre for Student Development and Counselling (virtual counselling appointments): <https://www.ryerson.ca/student-wellbeing/counselling/>
- Online OCR Tool (converts handwritten notes or assignments into digital text): <http://apps.library.ryerson.ca/ocr/>
- Accessible Format Production (requires formal registration with Accommodation Services. Please contact Adan if you are having

difficulty accessing the course material and are not eligible to use this service): <https://library.ryerson.ca/services/disabilities/accessibility/>

- Accommodation Services (Fall intake deadline: October 22, 2021): <https://www.ryerson.ca/accommodations/>

## **Student Advocacy and Support Groups**

- RyeACCESS: <http://www.rsuonline.ca/ryeaccess>
- BIPOC Student Collective: <http://www.rsuonline.ca/bipoc-students-collective>
- Centre for Safer Sex and Sexual Violence Support <http://www.rsuonline.ca/csssvs> (support line for survivors of sexual violence to access peer support: #416-260-0100)
- RyePRIDE <http://www.rsuonline.ca/ryepride>

# Sample Class Schedule

Notes:

- All materials are available via D2L. Assigned media will be available under the corresponding week subheading.
- Please feel welcome to approach your instructor if you have any questions or need support to access the materials.

# **Part 1: Introduction to Disability and Digital Media**

## **Week 1, September 7-10: Introduction: Affordances, Constraints, Access, and Harm**

- Assigned media: Johanna Hedva “Sick Woman Theory,” Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha “So Much Time Spent in Bed” and “For Badass Disability Justice, Working-Class and Poor-Led Models of Sustainable Hustling for Liberation”

## **Week 2, September 13-17: Screen Media Cultures**

- Assigned media: Imani Barbarin, TikTok video on disability representation, Aimi Hamraie and Kelly Fritsch “Crip Technoscience Manifesto”

## **Week 3, September 20-24: The Materiality of Media**

- Assigned media: Toby Miller “The Price of Popular Media is Paid by the Effluent Citizen,” Jasbur Puar “Preface: Hands Up, Don’t Shoot!” excerpt, Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario “Permanent Online Landlord and Tenant Board Hearings Are Having Devastating Consequences,” Erin Knight “If a crisis like COVID-19 hasn’t pushed government to take action to improve broadband access, what can?”

# Part 2: Crip Making

## Week 4, September 27-October 1: Image Workshop

- Assigned media: choose two (2) photo essays from the list provided on D2L
- Assignment Deadline: Project Proposal is due October 1st

## Week 5, October 4-18: Audio/Podcasting Workshop

- Assigned media (podcast episodes): “Tech Talk: Disability Benefits & Algorithms — Talking Tech W/ Lydia X. Z. Brown & Alexandra Givens,” Jodie Mitchell and Sofie Hagen “[€2 Million Dino Skeleton & Therapy: Not Your Mother’s Erotica](#),” The Digital Graveyards Project “Episode 2: Interview with Stine Gotved,” @TangledArtsTO Twitter post “How do you make podcasts more accessible?”

## October 11-15 is Reading Week.

There will be no lessons or scheduled work sessions during this time.

## Week 6, October 18-22: Video Workshop

- Assigned media (YouTube videos): Jessica Kellgren-Fozard “Deaf & Blind On The Internet with [@Molly\\_Burke!](#)”, Hannah Witton “Sex with a Stoma,” Annie Elaine “What is Inspiration Porn?”, Jessica Kellgren-Fozard “Why #FreeBritney is a Disability Rights Issue”
- Assignment Deadline: Project Outline is due October 22

# **Part 3: Critical Game Design**

## **Week 7, October 25-29: Critical Play and Crip Game Design**

- Assigned media: Mary Flanagan “What Are Activist Games?”, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman “Anatomy of a Choice,” Adan Jerreat-Poole “Mad/Crip Games and Play: An Introduction”

## **Week 8, November 1-5: Choose-Your-Own-Adventure/Twine Workshop**

- Assigned media: Kara Stone “Mental Illness + Making Games”

## **Week 9, November 8-12: Advanced Interactive Fiction**

- Assigned media: choose two (2) of the games from the list on D2L to play

# **Part 4: Reflection and Revision**

## **Week 10, November 15-19: The Labour and Ethics of Digital Making**

- Assigned media: Eli Clare “A Note on Reading this Book: Thinking About Trigger Warnings,” Moya Bailey “#transform(ing)DH Writing and Research: An Autoethnography of Digital Humanities and Feminist Ethics”
- Assignment Deadline: Project Draft is due November 19.

## **Week 11, November 22-26: Work Session for Troubleshooting Projects**

- No media has been assigned for this week. Additional live work sessions will be scheduled.

## **Week 12, November 29-December 3: Digital Showcase of Student Projects**

- No media has been assigned for this week.
- Assignment Deadline: showcase participation/peer feedback due December 3

Assignment Deadline: final, revised projects are due December 10.

# Sample Assignment Descriptions

## Class Participation – 10%

Due: throughout course

Your participation grade is based on your engagement online as well as your attendance and active involvement.

Here are some key ways to participate:

- Attend webinars
- Add to the Collaborative Google Docs
- Engage in online discussion

You will receive two participation marks:

- One at the midpoint just after reading week
- One at the end of the term.

Generally speaking, online discussion is not oriented around instructor questions—although you will find some embedded in the lectures each week. Instead, I want to engage with you in a much less structured conversation about what you take (or find you cannot take!) from both the readings and the lectures. Your participation mark is based on not just the number but the nature and quality of your posts, and the way you engage in the ongoing D2L dialogue that we develop together as a class. I will be present in the discussions and engaging with you.

- To get a **BASIC** participation grade, you will post at least one comment in response to the module discussion exercises/questions each week. Your posts should integrate what you think and write about what you grasp from the module readings (even if partial). Also, think

about what you ‘don’t get’ about the readings. Where does it leave you puzzled or frustrated? Being able to express your uncertainties, confusions, and struggles to understand is also part of good scholarship.

- To get a **GREAT** participation grade, you need to establish your presence as a learner, thinker, and writer in relation to this course material and to your classmates. In most cases, I am not looking for a ‘right question’ or a ‘right answer’ each week. Rather I look for you seeking your honest, critical response to the material, from confusion or outrage to insight, excitement, and celebration! Demonstrate your emerging knowledge, as well as your ongoing questions. What is your process as a reader from an area of study that may be currently quite strange to you? Are your ideas changing as you go along? (And if they are, that’s a good thing!)

Here are some general guidelines that are useful for online discussions:

- Read an entire thread and respond to what has already been posted. In other words: **Be part of a conversation.**
- **Ask questions.** Respectfully take people up on what they write, and as sure as you can ask questions be sure to respond to questions posed in your direction. You are not expected to fully understand everything in the course readings, so use the discussion board as a place to work through new/unfamiliar concepts.
- **Avoid repetition.** Read the entire thread before you post and say something different from other posters.
- **Be respectful.** Keep in mind that each person is moving through an exploratory process of understanding themselves in relation to course concepts, and this will manifest differently for everyone.
- **Write clearly,** but don’t get caught up in writing perfectly. Avoid the use of acronyms or other jargon we may not understand, but at the same time don’t be afraid to try writing in new ways: poetry, freewriting, notes, etc. are all useful methods of writing as we move through our discussion.
- **Post regularly.** Visit the discussion board two or three times per week and speak up when you feel moved to do so.

- **Be specific where possible.** If you are using quotations from readings or relying on other sources be sure to cite them.
- **Keep it brief.** You do not need to write an essay. Your discussion post is not an assignment-length paper. Rather, it is a method of participation. So focus on being present, rather than being perfect!

## Project Proposal – 15%

Due: October 1

The project proposal is a 150–250–word pitch describing the project you intend to develop for the course. The proposal should include the following:

1. The main topic or theme you will explore in your project.
2. Two or three ‘curiosity questions’ about your theme/topic that you want to explore further in your project.
3. Two or three sources that will shape or influence your project.
4. The medium you intend to use (audio, video, photo essay, game, etc.).
5. The platform you intend to use (i.e., Twine, Instagram, Canva, PowerPoint, etc.)
6. Two questions about access.
7. Two concerns and/or potential barriers that might impact your project.

### Example

Please follow the formatting of the example when composing your proposal (warning: spoilers for Black Widow below!)

**Topic:** My project will explore the representation of disability in Marvel’s 2021 film Black Widow, focusing on Antonia.

**Curiosity Questions:** How is Antonia’s disability represented? What is the relationship between disability and gender in this film? What is Antonia’s relationship with technology?

**Sources:** My project will be shaped by Ellen Samuels article entitled “Prosthetic Heroes: Curing Disabled Veterans in Iron Man 3 and Beyond” and Imani Barbarin’s TikTok video on disability representation in popular culture.

**Medium:** My project will take the form of an interactive narrative/game.

**Platform:** I will create my project in Twine using my laptop computer(Windows).

**Access Questions:** how do I make my game accessible for visually impaired players? How can I discuss or explore trauma in a way that is respectful and not triggering to players with PTSD?

**Concerns and Barriers:** My laptop is getting old and sometimes shuts down randomly. This might make it challenging to develop a game. I'm also not sure yet how to turn my topic into an interactive story—do I write a story from the perspective of Antonia? Or as a pretend film editor making changes to the movie that highlight disability or change the representation? Or as a film viewer who experiences feelings and thoughts when watching the film?

## Project Outline – 20%

Due: October 22

The project outline is a more detailed summary of your narrative arch as well as the goals for your project. The outline also requires students to consider access and barriers in the process of creating a digital narrative. Submit your responses to the questions below. Please feel welcome to submit as a chart/table.

| Question                                                                     | Answer |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| How does the story start?                                                    |        |
| What key points or critical moments appear in the story? (list at least two) |        |
| How does the story end?                                                      |        |
| What do you want the viewer/listener/player to learn from your story?        |        |
| What terminology from the course appears in your story? (list at least two)  |        |

How are you using your chosen medium to communicate your story?

How will you cite the sources you're using?

How will you build access into your digital narrative?

What barriers have you encountered so far?

## **Project Draft – 25%**

Due: November 19

Students will create a full draft of their digital narrative. The narrative will explore a theme/topic related to technology and disability. The story will include a critical analysis of a specific digital practice or platform, paying close attention to access and privilege (however, this critique may take the form of a traditional academic argument, a personal narrative, a creative story, etc.). Stories are also invited to explore the relationship between disability and other identity positions in their work (i.e., race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, etc.). The story will be told through a digital medium. Options include: a photo essay, a video, a podcast episode/audio recording, or a digital game. Other mediums/platforms may be used if approved by the instructor.

Here are a few themed prompts for inspiration:

1. Your personal relationship with tech/media and disability/health/illness.
2. Pop culture representations of disability and technology.
3. The global production of screen technology.
4. Platform study/access analysis of a specific platform or device.
5. Technology, disability, and relationships, dating, and/or sexuality.
6. Digital violence and harm.
7. Technology and access in education.

8. Technology, access, and fashion, entertainment, or the arts.
9. Technology and healthcare.
10. Technology and mental healthcare.

## **Showcase Participation 5%**

Due: December 3

Students will be invited to share their project drafts with their peers in a Digital Storytelling Showcase during the final class (week 12). At the showcase, students will be expected to write 3–5 positive and supportive comments about their peers' work. This feedback should be specific, noting a particular element of a particular project that you enjoyed or found engaging or educational.

## **Final Project 25%**

Due: December 10

Based on the feedback they received from both their peers and the instructor, students will revise their digital story and submit a more polished version. Students will be expected to engage with the feedback they received from the instructor or TA, and the final version should be different in some way from the draft.