

LEARNING ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE

Human Dimension

36

Digital Story

Complexity involved in	
Preparation	MODERATE
In-class implementation	LOW
Analysis	HIGH

Brief Description

Digital storytelling is the practice of using computer-based tools, such as video, audio, graphics, and Web publishing, to tell stories. The stories may be personal or academic, but for either focus, students share relevant life experiences as they attempt to connect to an audience about a given issue.

Purpose

This LAT also provides students with a creative outlet for self-authorship and for curating their lived experiences. Because students tell their own stories, they situate themselves within the context of the course subject area. They often tell about their lives through their interactions with others, thereby providing visible documentation of their learning in the Human Dimension. It also taps into their emotions, which can also improve their caring about a given topic.

The Learning Artifact is the digital story itself. This artifact provides teachers with rich data through multiple media from which to assess student learning and development. The stories provide evidence of student ability to reflect upon their learning and to connect it with their own lives and past experiences. The technique also provides evidence of student engagement and of multimedia literacy. Moreover, through sharing their own stories with an audience, and through intentionally connecting themselves and their stories to individuals in their lives, this technique provides strong evidence of student learning in the Human Dimension. This LAT is typically done at the end of a unit of content or even at the end of the course as a culminating experience to document student learning.

Key Learning Goals

- Interpersonal skills
- Self-confidence
- The capacity to make wise decisions
- The capacity to think for themselves

- A commitment to upholding their own values
- A commitment to their own emotional health and well-being

Implementation

Preparation

- Create a prompt for the assignment that establishes the content or topic area of the story (e.g., “Create a digital story that documents your journey as a student in higher education,” or “Create a digital story that tells about your connection with a public health issue”).
- Set the parameters of the assignment, such as length, time frame for completion of the work, and so forth.
- Ensure that students have adequate technical skills or alternately adequate technical support. Many students already know how to use technical tools such as iMovie, YouTube, and other technologies that can support this activity. Many institutions have student media centers that will support students working on technical projects. If your students do not have these skills and you don’t have technical support available to them, you can either provide that support yourself or alternately allow students to do a “spoken word” real time presentation of their stories without technology.
- Determine who will be involved in the assessment and why. You will likely want to include self-assessment, and peer assessment can provide additional useful information as well.
- Create a rubric for assessing the digital stories. Sanders (2009, p. 18) identifies three main approaches for assessing digital stories that may be useful for rubric creation:
 - The storytelling approach focuses on particular elements of stories:
 - Story finding
 - Story telling
 - Story expanding
 - Story processing
 - Story reconstructing
 - The “levels of reflection” approach draws upon Moon’s Model of Reflective Learning (Moon, 2004) and focuses on different levels of reflection:
 - Noticing
 - Making sense
 - Meaning making
 - Working with meaning
 - Transformative learning
 - The use of multimedia in reflective learning draws on student facility with the technological tools available for story telling:
 - Continuity editing
 - Audio editing
 - Lighting
 - Graphics
 - Animation

The University of Wisconsin Stout (nd) provides an example of a rubric for assessing student video projects, shown in Table 10.18.

Table 10.18 Video Project Rubric

Activity	Exemplary	Proficient	Partially Proficient	Unsatisfactory	POINTS
Use of Resources and Citations During Research and Note Taking	<p>12 points</p> <p>Note cards indicate research questions, sources of information, and graphics and identify relevant pro and con arguments (if appropriate to the topic). Sources of information and graphics are properly cited using citations.</p>	<p>8 points</p> <p>Note cards show research questions, relevant information from multiple sources of information, and evaluate alternative points of view (if appropriate for the topic). All sources of information are clearly identified and credited using citations.</p>	<p>4 points</p> <p>Note cards show a few research questions from a few sources of information and fail to identify relevant counter-arguments (if appropriate for the topic). Most sources of information are identified using proper citation.</p>	<p>0 points</p> <p>Note cards do not include research questions or, sources of information and ignore alternative points of view. No citations are included.</p>	<p>___/12</p>
Storyboard	<p>6 points</p> <p>The storyboard illustrates the video presentation structure with thumbnail sketches of each scene. Notes of proposed transition, special effects, sound and title tracks include text, background color, placement and size of graphic, fonts—color, size, type for text and headings. Notes about proposed dialogue/harration text are included. All sketches are numbered, and there is a logical sequence to the presentation.</p>	<p>4 points</p> <p>The storyboard includes thumbnail sketches of each video scene and includes text for each segment of the presentation, descriptions of background audio for each scene, and notes about proposed shots and dialogue. All sketches are organized and numbered in a logical sequence.</p>	<p>2 points</p> <p>The thumbnail sketches on the storyboard are not in a logical sequence and do not provide complete descriptions of the video scenes, audio background, or notes about the dialogue.</p>	<p>0 points</p> <p>There is no evidence of a storyboard.</p>	<p>___/6</p>
Content/ Organization	<p>18 points</p> <p>The content includes a clear statement of purpose or theme and is creative, compelling, and clearly written. A rich variety of supporting information in the video contributes to understanding the project's main idea. The project includes motivating questions and advanced organizers that provide the audience with a sense of the</p>	<p>12 points</p> <p>Information is presented as a connected theme with accurate, current supporting information that contributes to understanding the project's main idea.</p>	<p>6 points</p> <p>The content does not present a clearly stated theme, is vague, and some of the supporting information does not seem to fit the main idea or appears as a disconnected series of scenes with no unifying main idea.</p>	<p>0 points</p> <p>The content lacks a central theme, clear point of view, and logical sequence of information. Much of the supporting information in the video is irrelevant to the overall message. The viewer is unsure what the message is because there is little persuasive information and only one or two</p>	<p>___/18</p>

(continued)

Table 10.18 (Continued)

Activity	Exemplary	Proficient	Partially Proficient	Unsatisfactory	POINTS
Introduction	<p>6 points</p> <p>The introduction is compelling and provides motivating content that hooks the viewer from the beginning of the video and keeps the audience's attention.</p>	<p>4 points</p> <p>The introduction is clear and coherent and evokes interest in the topic.</p>	<p>2 points</p> <p>The introduction does not create a strong sense of what is to follow.</p>	<p>0 points</p> <p>The introduction does not orient the audience to what will follow.</p>	<p>___/6</p>
Production Quality					
Video Continuity/Editing	<p>12 points</p> <p>The tape is edited with only high-quality shots remaining. Video moves smoothly from shot to shot. A variety of transitions are used to assist in communicating the main idea and smooth the flow from one scene to the next. Shots and scenes flow seamlessly. Digital effects are used appropriately for emphasis.</p>	<p>8 points</p> <p>The tape is edited throughout with only quality shots remaining. A variety of transitions are used. Good pacing and timing.</p>	<p>4 points</p> <p>The tape is edited in few spots. Several poor shots remain. Transitions from shot to shot are choppy, and the types of wipes and fades selected are not always appropriate for the scene. There are many unnatural breaks and/or early cuts.</p>	<p>0 points</p> <p>The tape is unedited and many poor shots remain. No transitions between clips are used. Raw clips run back to back in the final video.</p>	<p>___/12</p>
Audio Editing	<p>12 points</p> <p>The audio is clear and effectively assists in communicating the main idea. Background audio is kept in balance.</p>	<p>8 points</p> <p>The audio is clear and assists in communicating the main idea.</p>	<p>4 points</p> <p>The audio is inconsistent in clarity (too loud/too soft/garbled) at times and/or the background audio overpowers the primary audio.</p>	<p>0 points</p> <p>The audio is cut-off and inconsistent or overpowering.</p>	<p>___/12</p>
Lighting	<p>3 points</p> <p>Additional lighting is used to eliminate shadows and glares. All scenes have sufficient lighting for viewer to easily see action.</p>	<p>2 points</p> <p>Additional lighting is used. Few shadows or glares are apparent.</p>	<p>1 points</p> <p>Some scenes are too dark or too light to determine what is happening.</p>	<p>0 points</p> <p>Only ambient (available) light is used. Most scenes are too dark or too light to determine what is happening.</p>	<p>___/3</p>

Camera Techniques (Exposure/Focus)	12 points All shots are clearly focused and well framed. The camera is held steady with few pans and zooms. Close-ups are used to focus attention.	8 points Most shots are clearly focused and well framed.	4 points Some shots are unfocused or poorly framed.	0 points Many shots are unfocused and poorly framed. Excessive panning and zooming distracts the viewer.	___/12
Graphics	6 points The graphics and/or animation assist in presenting an overall theme that appeals to the audience and enhances concepts with a high impact message. Graphics explain and reinforce key points during the presentation.	4 points The graphics or animation visually depict material and assist the audience in understanding the flow of information or content.	2 points Some of the graphics and/or animations seem unrelated to the topic/theme and do not enhance concepts.	0 points The graphics and/or animations are unrelated to the content. Graphics do not enhance understanding the content, or are distracting decorations that detract from the content.	___/6
Copyright	6 points Copyrighted information for photos, graphics, and music is clearly identified by source and nature of permission to reproduce.	4 points Every photo, graphic, or music is either original or permission for its use is documented.	2 points Some sources of photos, graphics, and music are not clearly identified with references, and permission to reproduce is missing.	0 points There is no reference to copyright information for photos, graphics, and music.	___/6
Moving Images	3 points Motion scenes are planned and purposeful, adding impact to the story line. "Talking heads" scenes are used when crucial to telling the story.	2 points The video includes some "talking heads," and backgrounds and video effects add interest. Most motion scenes make the story clearer or give it more impact.	1 points The video includes "talking heads" and a few motion scenes are added but do not improve understanding of the story line.	0 points The video features "talking heads" with little or no action to add interest or the video uses action excessively.	___/3
Timing	3 points Video clips show no slack time. "Three beat" timing (three actions per clip or three clips per event) is evident.	2 points Most video clips are edited to remove slack time and to emphasize action.	1 points Some video clips need to be edited to remove slack time and increase action.	0 points Video clips begin and end with slack time or no action.	___/3
TOTAL POINTS					___/99
A—Exemplary: 86–99 points					
B—Proficient: 76–85 points					
C—Partially Proficient or Unsatisfactory: Needs to be resubmitted—fewer than 75 points					

Process

1. Announce the prompt.
2. Provide students with time to work as well as some guidance about how to proceed. The following suggestions are adapted from Lambert (2010):
 - Own your insights. Storytellers should find and clarify what their stories are about. We start with the question: “What’s the story you want to tell?” and then as a follow-up, “What do you think your story means?”
 - Own your emotions. Consider the emotions in the story and determine how to convey these to an audience.
 - Find the moment in the story. Identify a single moment that can illustrate your insight. What was the moment things changed? When were you aware of the change?
 - See the story. How do visuals and sound bring things to life for the audience? How can you use them as part of the story?
 - Hear your story. The recorded voice of the storyteller is what makes a project a “digital story,” but you can add music or other sounds. Both those other sounds are an excellent way to convey tone. Consider whether the story would be enhanced by additional layers of sound.
 - Assemble the story. What structure will you use? Chronological? Most important to least important? Vice versa? Consider what the necessary parts of the story are and how to order those pieces to engage the audience.
 - Share the story. Ask: “Who is your audience? What was your purpose in creating the story? Has the purpose shifted during the process of creating the piece? In what presentation format will the story be viewed? Will the story continue to have life after its presentation?”
3. Have students present their digital stories in class.
4. Collect the Learning Artifact by gathering together the URLs where students have their stories hosted.

**Online**

This LAT is easily completed in an online environment, particularly given its “digital” format. Simply have students share links to their videos, whether through an LMS discussion forum or alternately through posting replies to a course blog or wiki.

Analysis and Reporting

Use the rubric you created and look for anything unique in the individual responses. Because of the extensive amount of work that goes into preparing for, implementing, and assessing this LAT, teachers typically assign a significant grade to the activity, and indeed many students will want these projects to “count” given the amount of effort they take to create. However, Sanders (2009) found that some students are concerned about the use of Digital Stories for summative assessment, and while they valued the activity, they preferred them to be used for formative assessment purposes. Consider student characteristics and interests when making a determination of whether to assign a significant grade to this activity or not. To report to students, develop a written response to individuals that includes both rubric scoring and your comments about any issues.

Use one of the rubrics to aggregate results. Tally the number of responses for each item. Look across the comments that you wrote to notice any patterns in the information. Consider using a table to document results. In a narrative, describe your interpretation of results.

Examples



Onsite: Public Health

The professor of this course wanted students to engage in public health topics related to the lived experiences of those who have encountered issues. He wanted students to become aware of the “human” factor in health and health care, so he decided to ask students to create Digital Stories based on their own experiences with any issue related to public health issues.

He first announced the activity and asked students to work in groups to brainstorm topics. Each student then selected a topic. He was pleased to see a wide range of issues, including affordable care, autism, diabetes, pollution, women’s reproductive health, water sanitation, and so forth. He provided students with time to work on their Digital Story in class, holding two class sessions in a computer lab, which allowed students to provide each other not only with advice and suggestions for their stories but also with technological support. He noted that students with more advanced technological skills were helping students who were not as advanced technologically.

The instructor invited other faculty to an “opening night” in which students introduced their stories, presented them live, and then reflected on the experience while doing them. He was thrilled with the results. Students had warmed to the activity and had obviously put great time and effort into their work. They had connected with the topics in real and meaningful ways, both their own stories and those of their peers. They said they had not previously thought about the real people involved in these issues and how they might experience them. To provide a formal assessment, he collected information from students on their own work, on the work of others, his colleagues, and his own work. He used the chart in Table 10.19 to guide his work, which he adapted from the University of Houston’s guidelines for assessing Digital Stories.

Table 10.19 Guidelines for Assessing Digital Stories

	Assessment Tools			
Evaluator	<i>During the design process</i>	<i>During the development process</i>	<i>During the screening</i>	<i>After the project is completed</i>
<i>The Creator(s)</i>	Story specification Checklist of story artifacts	Graphics checklist Audio checklist Story draft Story board	The presentation	Reflective paper
<i>Creator’s Peers</i>	Story ideas	Suggestion list	Notes on the presentation	Peer evaluation
<i>The Teacher</i>	Evidence of planning process	Interview with creator about development process Development rubric Checklist of story artifacts	Notes on the presentation	Rubric Narrative evaluation of story traits such as engagement, character, and development



Online: Introduction to Higher Education

The professor of this course was a new assistant professor who had to be reviewed annually for progress toward tenure. In addition to having high expectations for research, the department also had high expectations for teaching. They required individuals to demonstrate teaching excellence every year of the six-year process leading up to tenure.

The professor was assigned to teach an introduction to higher education course. While most of the courses in the program were offered at the graduate level, this course was an undergraduate course. The professor wanted students to come to understand their own journeys that led them to higher education and their own places in the institution. He decided to ask them to use Digital Stories to document their own experiences as learners and how this had led them to seek matriculation into that particular institution.

The students worked for weeks to develop their stories. While they had some time in class, a good bit of the work was done as a homework assignment or in the institution's media lab. The students shared their stories with each other in class. They all had interesting stories to share that brought up many important issues about higher education. Many students were first generation students who talked about their struggles and the "imposter syndrome." Many students were minority students who shared their experiences related to being enrolled in a predominantly white institution. Some students identified as gay or lesbian and shared the challenges they faced, whether as members of fraternities or sororities or simply their coming out experiences. Some talked about coming from a poor rural background and having had insufficient preparation for what they would experience in college. Some students talked about the financial challenges they faced, taking out student loans. Some had fewer challenges to share, but wanted to share what it was like being away from home for the first time, or gaining the freshman 15 pounds and not knowing what to do about it. All in all, through their shared experiences, the students brought to light many issues that they would investigate further in class. All expressed how moved they were to hear the stories of their peers.

The professor collected information from the students, not only through their stories, but also through self- and peer review of the experiences and their products. Through an analysis of all of the information sources, the professor created the matrix shown in Table 10.20 for inclusion in his promotion and tenure dossier.

Table 10.20 Assessment Matrix

Student Learning Outcomes	LAT	Findings and Interpretations	Actions to Be Taken
Students will understand their own journeys that led them to higher education and their own places in the institution.	Digital Story	Students used digital stories to make meaning of their educational journeys. They were best at research and resources used during story creation. They were excellent at story boarding and using technology. They were not as proficient at citing sources and getting clearance to use copyrighted images.	Because an important aspect for the course is learning to find and use sources appropriately, in the future, I will spend time discussing citation format and also copyright and intellectual property and how to respect ownership.

Variations and Extensions

- Instead of having students work on Digital Stories alone, have them work together to create a Digital Story about their shared or collective experiences.
- Instead of having students tell their own stories, have them interview others and tell the stories of their interviewees.

Key References and Resources

- Lambert, J. (2010). Digital storytelling cookbook. <http://static.squarespace.com/static/505a3ab2e4b0f1416c7df69a/51684d91e4b0cbd5dcd536fd/51684d91e4b0cbd5dcd536ff/1332882649047/cookbook.pdf>.
- Sanders, J. (2009). Reflect 2.0: Using digital storytelling to develop reflective learning by the use of next generation technologies and practices. JISC.ac.uk. <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/documents/reflectfinalreport.aspx>.
- University of Houston. (2015). Assessment and evaluation. Educational uses of digital storytelling. <http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/page.cfm?id=24&cid=24&sublinkid=43>.
- University of Wisconsin Stout. (nd). Video project rubric. <https://www2.uwstout.edu/content/profdev/rubrics/videorubric.html>.