Unit 3: Creating Digital Text – What is a Digital Text?

What is a digital text?

A digital text is any text intended for consumption by its audience in a digital form. Therefore the means of delivering the message in the text must be digital. Most digital texts offer some form of interactivity which should be considered as essential when producing real world websites or blogs for Unit 3. This interactivity should take the form of links but may also involve the user making comments and introducing content of their own. Ease of accessibility is also important to consider when creating a digital text.

What is not considered a digital text?

Texts produced by word processors, design software or presentation software are **not** designed to be viewed in a solely digital form. Word processors and design software are intended to produce printable texts or components to be used in digital texts, not the digital texts themselves. Presentation software is meant to produce texts that are delivered with a human presenter and so not purely digital in the delivery of its message.

Although these pieces of software can be adapted to produce website like documents, they are not real world applications of this software type and so are not considered digital texts. The test of this will be the level of interactivity enjoyed by the audience, as a website by its nature should encourage the audience to click and browse and is likely to be multimodal (containing more than one mode of communication e.g. sound, moving images, graphics, etc).

Who produces digital texts?

Digital texts make writing and publishing entirely democratic. Anybody can produce and publish a digital text. Just because a text is not from an official, recognisable company does not make it invalid for study or analysis as a digital text. Part of an analysis of any text should include a critique of authorship. Therefore a digital video review of a film produced in someone's bedroom and posted on YouTube is as interesting for study as a digital video posted on the BBC I-player as part of a long running TV series.

Who consumes digital texts?

This is an important question for most companies and one that they invest a good deal of money investigating. As with other media products they split the audience using socio-economic indicators; therefore, age, gender, profession, nationality, etc are all crucial. The difference with digital texts is that the writers and publishers can learn about us through our clicking habits and therefore be much more specific in the choices they make. Sites such as Google mail and Facebook take this to an extreme; by using tag words from our posts and emails that mean they can offer bespoke advertising targeted to an individual not a mass group.

Generally, the consumers of digital texts are able to be more selective due to the wealth of material aimed at them. Therefore, the producers of such texts have to make more sophisticated choices to capture the intended consumer. Alternatively, digital texts can also go viral and therefore find an audience maybe not intended by the writer. The complexity of the relationship between producer and consumer is what makes analysis of digital texts so interesting.

What are the important questions when beginning to study digital texts?

There is little difference in the way you approach the study of digital texts to the study of any text. You begin with writer's intention and then you consider how writer's choices reveal these intentions. You also consider readers' response and how the choices made by the writer elicit this response.

The differences are small. Firstly, you tend to call the reader "the user" when writing about digital texts. This suggests a much more active participation in the reading process, as it should, because a digital text is also produced by users as well as received by them. The role played by the user in the text is much more sophisticated and should therefore be considered in a lot more depth.

The only other major difference is the component parts that make up the text. Language, image and presentation are still important choices made in a digital text and should be explored for their literal as well as inferred meaning – as with any text studied in an English lesson. However, added to this are more interactive components such as camera shots, sound, links, animation, web-like page structures, frames, etc. These should be selected, identified and considered for purpose, intent and impact in the way we would with a metaphor or the use of bold text.

Therefore, the important questions become: What choices has the writer made? Why did they make these choices? How do these choices impact on the user?