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*ing the Written Word: Digital Humanities Methods for Book History

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The reception of Digital Humanities (DH) case studies in the humanities is still mixed. On the one side, scholars foresee the potential disruptive value of DH and the need for new methods to address digital sources. On the other side, other scholars have a hard time finding a clear immediate contribution of DH in studying the history of reading that is comparable with traditional studies. Furthermore, DH is a natural interdisciplinarity case bed, and a gateway for research not grounded on the state of the art in Book History but still addressing the challenges of the Humanities.

Acknowledging these issues, we can hopefully make a step further in building the condition for a legitimate citizenship of DH in Book History.

In this contribution, we provide a perspective aimed at addressing the methodological gap concerning the evolving state of the DH field. Firstly, we will stress that for generating value as a Humanities study, the DH paradigm must combine computational analysis of text and humanities-based in-depth analysis. Indeed, computational studies of and automatic extraction of meta-data are essential but cannot replace the centrality of reading the text and in-depth text analysis.

To conclude, we present and discuss four main DH best-practice patterns for exploiting computational methods while still framing the study within the Humanities.

These four patterns articulate in-depth and computational analysis at different stages: 1) generating and verifying hypotheses, 2) identifying representative and relevant sources, 3) making sense of large-scale phenomena and 4) navigating sources.