CHAPTER 2

Workflows of Digital Scholars*

Observing technology-related changes in scholarly practice from the perspective of an individual scholar affords insights into the nuances and daily challenges of digital scholarly work. Although scholars commonly belong to formal or informal communities of practice that influence their research, the choices concerning the implementation of disciplinary or institutionally established uses of technology occur on an individual level. This initial empirical chapter of the present book thus compares, contrasts, and analyzes how individual scholars integrate digital technologies into their research workflows, exploring the ways in which transformations in digital scholarship occur from a bottom-up perspective.

In order to describe and analytically break down complexity of these workflows, I developed the following model (see figure 2.1) to represent the general process as well as the following activities: collecting, finding, organizing, and analyzing research data and materials; writing up, annotating, and citing research data and materials; reflecting upon, sharing, communicating, and archiving research data and materials. The research activities presented in the model were not intended to be either comprehensive or mutually exclusive, but rather to serve as a heuristic for understanding the complexity of scholarly research process.

The diagram also served as a visual prompt in my fieldwork. As explained in chapter 1, I carried out an ethnographic study.

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Amongst Digital Humanists between 2010–2013 at 23 educational, research and funding institutions in the United States and Europe, with 258 study participants. Through observations and in-depth interviews, the research focused on the minute details of scholarly workflow, examining how scholars integrate digital research tools and methods at different stages of the research cycle. Although the study focused on understanding humanists’ engagement with digital technologies, it employed a comparative, multidisciplinary perspective to analyze how scholars across disciplines—including sciences, social sciences, and humanities—incorporate digital technologies into their work. This multidisciplinary approach was important for understanding the specifics of humanists’ digital workflow as part of digital scholarship.

I began each interview asking the respondents which digital tools they use in their research. Following the response, I showed each respondent my Research Workflow diagram (figure 2.1) and asked the respondent to use the chart to guide me through specifics of his or her digital technology use in each of the phases shown in the diagram. Commonly, respondents would then list a set of digital tools not mentioned in the previous answer, explaining that they had forgotten about a particular research activity and a corresponding tool.