



---

**[DHQ] Editor Decision**

---

**From** R. B. Faure via Open Journal Systems <dhq@northeastern.edu>

**Date** Fri 6/7/2024 2:25 PM

**To** Smith, Margaret <margars@siue.edu>

You don't often get email from dhq@northeastern.edu. [Learn why this is important](#)

Dear Dr. Smith,

I am writing with feedback on your DHQ submission, "Null Results: Documenting Failure in the Digital Humanities". The submission was reviewed by external peer reviewers and the DHQ editorial team, and I'm happy to report that we are interested in publishing it, pending some minor revisions.

Overall, the reviewers and editors had high praise for this submission! We feel that it is vital work and a pleasure to read. However, there are a few areas where it needs revision in order to reach its full potential. Here are the primary points we would like you to address:

- Reviewer 1 notes several areas where the submission would benefit from some additional explicating material, and we agree that small changes in these areas would take little time but be very helpful to readers. They are as follows:
  - developing the connection between the " 'ugly feelings' failure produces" and the "sympathetic research imagination" in the second paragraph of the "Benefits to the Field" section.
  - providing a clearer definition of "genuine failure" in the "How to Document Failure" section.
  - Adding additional description for the bolded sections of your case study.
- Your current conclusion addresses the case study admirably, but we agree with Reviewer 1 that it would strengthen the article were you to make your current conclusion a "reflections" section and write an overall conclusion that returns to the overarching points and argument you built in your introduction.
- Reviewer 2 suggests reviewing your introduction for repetitive passages. We do not feel that this is necessary for your introduction to be effective, but you are welcome to do so if you think it would improve the introduction.

The attached reviews provide more detailed feedback and suggestions, including notes on a few missing citations. Please be sure to consult them thoroughly. When making your revisions, please do the following:

- Check all links and make sure all citations are listed in the bibliography in Harvard Reference Style (our citation guide can be found at <http://digitalhumanities.org/dhq/submissions/citationGuidelines.html>). If you use Zotero, please also send us an export of your bibliography in TEI.
- Copyedit carefully for grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- Please include an updated abstract, send us a short biographical paragraph for each author and confirm your current contact emails.
- If you haven't already done so, please upload final versions of your images as separate files (PNG or JPEG) from your final revised draft.
- Send ORCID IDs for all authors who have one (if you do not have one, please consider making one at [ORCID.org](https://orcid.org)).
- Choose two or more applicable keywords from the DHQ keywords list: <https://github.com/Digital-Humanities-Quarterly/dhq-journal/wiki/DHQ-Topic-Keywords>.

When you've completed your revision, please upload the revised version to the OJS record for the original submission, along with any updated versions of illustrations or other related materials. We will give it another round of internal review to confirm your changes, and may be in touch with a few additional requests depending on the nature of the revision.

We are very excited about this piece and we so appreciate your choosing DHQ! We look forward to working with you on the revision and production process.

Warmly,

RB Faure

Managing Editor, *Digital Humanities Quarterly*

-----  
Reviewer 1

Recommendation: Revisions Required  
-----

**Comments for the author 1:** Please provide suggestions for improving the argument of the paper. Is the argument clearly stated and easy to follow? Are there weaknesses in the argumentation that could be fixed? Are the introduction and conclusion interesting, and if not, how could they be improved?

Incredible article! The writing is exceptionally clear, and lays out a series of strong and significant points/insights. The examples provided (such as of Rawson and Munoz's work) and the arguments that transparent work can change discourse and practice were particularly cogent for me as a reader. Argument was clear, easy to follow, and persuasive.

When you get to the case study, you model not only the possible format and sections of a failure charter but also--and this is key--what productive reflection looks like. For instance, the section on breaking project into definable steps. You explain what you did, followed by how your thought changed based on that experience and what you would do differently/how the project would benefit from altered procedure. Both types of modeling will be helpful for readers.

**Comments for the author 2:** Please provide suggestions for improving the research quality of the paper. Does the paper provide sufficient context for the research being presented? Does it cite appropriate prior work? Are there important references of which the author is unaware, that might affect the conclusions being presented? Has the author identified the useful boundaries of the research problem, or is it artificially limited? Are there further implications the author should explore?

Research seemed on point for me--both the connections to other authors' work and the examples of research/digital projects.

**Comments for the author 3:** Please provide suggestions for improving the address of the paper. Does it address its audience appropriately? Does it provide enough background for a non-specialist to appreciate the significance and relevance of the research, and if not, can you suggest ways of fixing this? Does it use avoidable jargon?

Tone, structure, and word choice all contributed to clarity. This is an article that both DHers and non-specialists could use to generate discussion around failure, documentation, and project transparency.

**Comments for the author 4:** Please provide suggestions for improving the overall organization and mechanics of the paper. Is it clearly written? Could it be improved by changing the order in which it presents evidence, arguments, etc.?

Excellent article, timely and important intervention, with a clear and logical structure.

A few suggestions:

(1) In Benefits to the Field--there is an empty citation () in the first paragraph. Then, can you develop the second paragraph more--move more slowly and systematically between the "'ugly feelings' failure produces" and the "sympathetic research imagination." Excellent connection that readers would benefit from hearing more about, it just felt a little fast.

(2) How to Document Failure--close parenthesis needed somewhere in the first paragraph, and--maybe I completely missed it--but I saw 2, not 3 genres of project documentation (Charters and the Digital Documentation Process). Double check that the 3rd is there. Finally, can you define "genuine failure" in the last paragraph of this section--I know what you mean, but since you defined the secret successes of productive failure, this would differentiate productive from genuine failure.

(3) A Case Study--empty citation in the last paragraph

For the Case Study portion overall--Very helpful to have an example that offers structural criteria and models the type/tenor of reflection and transparency discussed at the beginning of the article. Right now, though, it reads like two halves. To maintain that metacommentary and pedagogical direction of the article (in terms of teaching readers why and how to create this documentation), could you provide a description/suggestions/guidance for each of the bolded sections you lay out for us? For instance:

How can you break your project into definable steps? What defines success for each of these steps? (in bold)

(in italics). In this section, explain how you progressed through your research/project and reflect on where your initial plan and ultimately actions diverged. What did you learn? What would you have done differently?

(in regular font) All the writing you included in your example.

Structuring the suggested failure charter this way would carry that through-line of reflection and metacommentary about failure throughout the article, instead of a sense of disjunction between commentary and stand-alone case study.

The Conclusions section offers a fabulous model of the reflective takeaways we can arrive at via a failure charter. But it threw me for a second. As a reader I thought this was the conclusion for the article. I suggest shortening the failure charter conclusions section and change the section heading to italics (to signal that it's still part of the charter) and change to the word "Reflections." Then write a conclusion for the article that returns readers to the arguments you made in the beginning--about the importance of null results/failure and the need for a framework of discussion and documentation.

-----

-----

Reviewer 2

Recommendation: Accept Submission

-----

**Comments for the author 1:** Please provide suggestions for improving the argument of the paper. Is the argument clearly stated and easy to follow? Are there weaknesses in the argumentation that could be fixed? Are the introduction and conclusion interesting, and if not, how could they be improved?

This is a thoughtful and detailed consideration of methodological practices that prevent documentation and insight when projects produce null results (or failures). The contribution is detailed, covers a range of methodological issues especially in regard to historical topics in the digital humanities, and demonstrates self-reflexivity and nuance. The first part, however, tends to repeat some arguments and could be tightened.

**Comments for the author 2:** Please provide suggestions for improving the research quality of the paper. Does the paper provide sufficient context for the research being presented? Does it cite appropriate prior work? Are there important references of which the author is unaware, that might affect the conclusions being presented? Has the author identified the useful boundaries of the research problem, or is it artificially limited? Are there further implications the author should explore?

The context of the argument is presented clearly, and ample referencing provides a solid background to the arguments and recommendations brought forward. The research problem is a real one, and the provocative and methodologically aware discussion is important and relevant. A longer version could go more into the issues of funding that require "success" in previous projects and thus tend to invisibilize "failure", possibly through self-censorship in a competitive "market" for positions and grants, but the focus on methodology in this contribution has the merit of clearly delineating and

describing the issues without veering off to much off-topic, so this is more a suggestion for future work.

**Comments for the author 3:** Please provide suggestions for improving the address of the paper. Does it address its audience appropriately? Does it provide enough background for a non-specialist to appreciate the significance and relevance of the research, and if not, can you suggest ways of fixing this? Does it use avoidable jargon?

The address is entirely appropriate for the journal and the audience.

**Comments for the author 4:** Please provide suggestions for improving the overall organization and mechanics of the paper. Is it clearly written? Could it be improved by changing the order in which it presents evidence, arguments, etc.?

No suggestions here, I enjoyed reading the article.

-----

The DHQ Editorial Team  
Northeastern University