

GitHub as Scholarly Communication: A community-sourced starter guide

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What is this?



In May of 2022, Britt asked Twitter for help finding sources to make the argument that sharing code via repositories like GitHub could be considered a form of Scholarly Communications. (This was when Twitter was Twitter.) Her tweet generated a lot of discussion and several responses included tips, resources, things to be aware of, and projects to follow. Thinking that access to the crowd-sourced resources could be useful to others, she opened a Google Doc, copied all of the tweets, organized them roughly, and then shared that document with the academic Twitter community. The document lived on her Google drive for 3 years. In 2025, she decided to archive the document and moved it to the HSS Commons.

Special thanks to Jamie Takaoka for the labour they put into compiling tweets for an earlier version of this document.

GitHub? “It definitely counts!”

Stefanie Haustein (@stefhaustein): Oh absolutely, sharing data and code is scholarly output in the context of open science/scholarship. The problem is that the academic reward system doesn't (fully) acknowledge that (yet).

...

Map of Early Modern London at UVic(@MoEMLondon): Sharing code via GitHub IS absolutely a form of scholarly communication if it's documented.

...

Matthew Murray (@MidniteLibrary): It definitely counts! This is why I've taught Git/GitHub as a scholarly communications librarian in the past. Tweeting about putting code on GitHub is also scholcomm.

Britt (Brittany) Amell (@balloonleap): Okay, yes. I need to back-up for a minute. Bc I'm only a little familiar with scholcomm lit. Does scholcomm distinguish between academic publications and scholcomm? I understand how laden the notion of publication is, so perhaps you can't speak to this q

Matthew Murray (@MidniteLibrary): Hahaha. Fair! I think that data publishing is also a part of scholcomm. Some folks would view code as "data" and not include it as a "publication" while others would see code as an academic publication. I'm happy to include things like podcasts, zines, videos, posters, games, and code as "academic publications," though I think in regards to code it can depend on exactly what is being shared how it's being shared (e.g. how much documentation is included?). I think one of the barriers you may run into is people who want "academic publications" to be "peer reviewed" and not accepting how someone else using your code for their project could also be seen as a form of "post publication peer review." Does this make sense?

Britt (Brittany) Amell (@balloonleap): Yes. Oh neat. OMG so much here. Brain exploding. >> Wait. Has scholcomms moved on from debating what is / isn't considered an academic "publication"? Do they have ways of distinguishing between forms of publication (or has this proven to be a useless avenue)?

Matthew Murray (@MidniteLibrary): Oh, no, I'm sure that debate will go on forever. The folks I know on Twitter tend to have a pretty broad definition I think? I'm really interested in "non-traditional academic output/publications."

I think there's probably an unfortunately large large gap between what librarians on Twitter think ScholComm is/can be and what a tenure review committee thinks.

Britt (Brittany) Amell (@balloonleap): Lol. Yes. & maybe it should, right? I mean if scholarship is alive & well, then it's evolving & fluid. So why not ask those Qs? But also, I worry that some are too caught up in the questioning that they block others who are just... Out. There... doing, you know, scholarly things.

Matthew Murray (@MidniteLibrary): I think about the podcast I co-host ([@bookclub4m](#)) that has been downloaded many, many times more than any scholarly work I've written and has been used in classrooms (and been on syllabuses I think?). . . .

(And would, presumably, be considerably less valued by many than a single peer reviewed article would be.)

...

Dr. Laura Ridenour (@imparseable): It's not a stretch, but it also isn't a frozen instance of collaboration like a publication. It's more fluid?

Britt (Brittany) Amell (@balloonleap): Yes to this. I'm thinking maybe more akin to preprints [1] and *maybe* registered reports [2]?

[1] "Preprints and Scholarly Communication: Adoption, Practices, Drivers and Barriers" by Andrea Chiarelli, Rob Johnson, Stephen Pinfield, Emma Richens, F1000Res, [doi:10.12688/f1000research.19619.2](https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.19619.2)

[2] "Registered Reports: Genre Evolution and the Research Article" by Ashley Rose Mehlenbacher, Written Communication, doi:10.1177/0741088318804534.

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The problem with GitHub? (Convo)

Sherry Lake (@shlakeuva): Also part of the problem is relying ONLY on GitHub. Copy software and code to an Institutional Repository for preservation.

...

Jonathon (@JonathonBohan): . . . the problem with GitHub is that it is not a trustworthy repository, when the researcher is self-depositing their code they can also self-remove it.

Samuel J. Huskey (@SamHuskey): That's an important point. [@OSFramework](#) is perhaps a more trustworthy repository for that reason. The researcher is still self-depositing, but the framework is more research-oriented than GitHub, which is open for pretty much everything.

@JonathonBohan: Open [@ICPSR](#), a university repository, [@OSFramework](#) all good choices. Do they offer a persistent identifier - DOI, handle, etc.? Then they are probably OK.

@SamHuskey: To be fair to GitHub, you can put a doi on a repository with [@ZENODO_ORG](#)

@JonathonBohan: That is good to know. I'm curious what happens if the researcher deletes their repository.

@SamHuskey: It's gone, unless someone has forked and/or cloned the project. That brings up an important point: researchers should really put some thought into what will happen to their digital assets and projects after their death. [#thatgotdarkfast](#)

@JonathonBohan: This is something I often need to address with researchers, they often want to have us notify them when someone wants to download their code and I have to gently remind them that they won't always be around to give permission.

...

Journals, Groups & Projects

Journal of Open Source Software

Kelly Fitzpatrick (@fitzbub): I remember the Journal of Open Source Software (<http://joss.theoj.org>) doing some work on code-as-scholarship (ie, what if we made a journal where code was cite-able as a contribution in the same way as traditional formats, re: articles, etc).

Open-review academic journal published on GitHub

Kevin Brock (@brockoleur): It's not necessarily just code, per se, but about a decade ago [@stolleydotdev](#) experimented with an open-review journal published on Github: <https://t.co/GsLli1gd2B>

Journal of Cultural Analytics

Cultural Analytics is a platinum open-access journal dedicated to the computational study of culture. (from [@CulturalAnalyt](#) twitter bio). www.culturalanalytics.org

Reviews in Digital Humanities

Pilot-project-journal that showcases many forms of digital scholarship/DH projects; may include some examples on projects using coding as scholarship.
<https://reviewsindh.pubpub.org> **Note: No specific section on GitHub or coding as scholarship specified - if found, please add**

Code is Science (Group)

Jay Clark (@jennbot3000): I think [@codeisscience](#) might be relevant to this!

Code Is Science (@codeisscience) -- Working with the scientific coding community to champion Open Source code, helping to ensure code is peer reviewed and FAIR.
<https://codeisscience.com/>

Next-Generation Dissertations

This website is a 2021 project of Syracuse University and Katina L. Rogers of Inkcap Consulting, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Project leads at Syracuse are Christopher Flanagan and Glenn Wright.
<https://nextgendiss.hcommons.org/>

Investigating & Archiving the Scholarly Git Experience (Project)

Vicky Rampin (née Steeves) @VickyRampin: I collaborated on a whole project on this!! IASGE -- <https://investigating-archiving-git.gitlab.io> I'll flag this 3 part post from [@snewyuen](#) especially:

- 1- Scholarly version control, community, & method tracking with Git hosting platforms (GHPs)
<https://investigating-archiving-git.gitlab.io/updates/git-hosting-platforms-in-scholarship/>
- 2 - Scholarly Git Experiences Part II: Git for Education
<https://investigating-archiving-git.gitlab.io/updates/git-for-education/>
- 3 - Scholarly Git Experiences Part III: Quality Assurance
<https://investigating-archiving-git.gitlab.io/updates/git-fo>

Computational Publishing

Peter Suber (@petersuber): Examples of executable code running inside books
<https://copim.pubpub.org/pub/computational-publishing/release/1>

The Open Digital Archaeology Textbook

Shawn Graham (@electricarchaeo): did I mention ODATE? Getting a bit creaky, but an attempt at code/book admixture...
<https://o-date.github.io/> : An introduction to the issues, methods, and techniques of digital archaeology, integrated with working code and virtual computing environments or 'notebooks' written in Python or R.

LiterateProgramming (Zotero Shared Library)

Ryan Cordell (@ryancordell): I started a zotero group to compile your wonderful literate programming examples, so others can benefit from the replies on this thread—please join/contribute if this topic is of interest!
<https://www.zotero.org/groups/4731524/literateprogramming>

Visible Research Software Interest Group

Tim Sherratt (@wragge): Also worth checking out the work of the @ARDC_AU Visible Research Software Interest Group & @orchid00
Launching the Visible Research Software Interest Group: “Last year, the ARDC released its draft Research Software Agenda for Australia, with a call to *see, shape and sustain research software* in order to be recognised as a first-class scholarly output,

alongside journal papers and, increasingly, research data....”

<https://ardc.edu.au/news/visible-research-software-interest-group/>

Promotion and Tenure Cases

Dr. Ryan Cordell (@ryancordell)

I cited code repositories in my tenure & promotion statements (<https://ryancordell.org/statehttps://t.co/ArOkJseu7aments/#research...>) and include it as a section in my cv (https://cv.ryancordell.org/#Published_Data). More to the point, if you need someone to help argue for its value, there's a community to draw on in DH.

Dissertations (Cases)

Dr. Cara Chaos (@cara_messina)

Yes absolutely! My dissertation, the Critical Fan Toolkit, includes detailed computational essays that break down my analysis. I have them on both GitHub and my diss website. I don't specifically argue about GitHub, but I advocate for sharing code! <http://Criticalfantoolkit.org>

Dr. Amanda Wyatt Visconti (@Literature_Geek)

Hi, all! Code shared on GitHub was one of the formally evaluated pieces of my no-chapters completed literature dissertation (<http://dr.amandavisconti.com>). Code here: <https://github.com/amandavisconti/infinite-ulysses-dissertation/tree/master/The%20Code>
Explanation: <https://t.co/tLfWDu3Hu>
... [@mkirschenbaum](#) had the good idea of a manifest listing all the pieces of diss scholarship I wanted formally evaluated, so brief lay-language explanation of what code & why it's scholarship:
<https://github.com/amandavisconti/infinite-ulysses-dissertation/blob/master/About%20the%20Dissertation/MANIFEST.md#code> & more explication in debriefing
<http://dr.amandavisconti.com/AmandaVisconti>

Field specific concerns/efforts

Agent-based social stimulation

Mario Paolucci (@mario_paolucci): For my field, agent-based social simulation, this is a long standing need. I was making this argument just a couple of days ago - we do not read each other's code, bad.

Open Source, Open Science, and the Replication Crisis in HCI (Pub)

Florian Echtler (he/him) (@floemuc): Oh yes, fully agreed! @maximilianh and I tried to make the same argument for our own field a few years ago: <https://t.co/jvr3kuR58A>

Publications

Highly Available Dissertations: Open Sourcing Humanities Scholarship (Pub)

Lisa Tagliaferri (@lisaironcutter): I wrote about open source code in terms of the dissertation in this (free, open access) chapter: <https://t.co/hcoFVQyh9C>

Value all research products (Pub)

Heather Piwowar (@researchremix): Yup I make that point here, <https://nature.com/articles/493159a>, as do many others (see force11 software citation principles) and you can use zenodo to get a doi for a snapshot of your github repo and archive it :) <https://docs.github.com/en/repository>
... the paper is really out of date now, but ones that cite it might have up to date arguments :)

Guide to Software Best Practices (Pub)

Sherry Lake (@shlakeuva): Here are a couple of articles on Software best practices. I have more if you want. <http://arxiv.org/abs/2012.13117>
<https://software.ac.uk/resources/guid>

Review, Promotion, and Tenure Project: How can research institutions incentivize openness and accessibility?

Researchers collected & analyzed more than 850 RPT guidelines from research insts across Canada & the US to assess the degree to which they incl guidelines specific to OA, open data, & open ed. From the scholcomm lab: <https://t.co/jkTdMuxYY4>

Kee, K., & Graham, S. (2014). Teaching history in an age of pervasive computing: The case for games in the high school and undergraduate classroom.

Games can and should be used as “texts” in a class versus as a “tool” (which is how they are traditionally positioned). Computer code can be used as a language to express thinking. Discusses ways to assess this (pp. 285-288) and provides a rubric (p. 287). In K. Kee (Ed.), Pastplay: Teaching and learning history with technology (pp. 270–291). University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv65swr0>

Software Sustainability Institute: “Top tips”

Less in-depth than guides, these “top tips” are written by experts in the field who have been there / done that. A range of topics are covered including how to describe the software used in your research, how to promote your work, and how to make a case for funding a software developer. Software Sustainability Institute:

<https://www.software.ac.uk/resources/top-tips>

Open access for social simulation

Bruce Edmonds (@BruceEdmonds): Argument in favour of open licensing for social simulation software (circa 2007). Polhill, J.G., & Edmonds, B. (2007). Open access for social simulation. *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation*, 10(3).

<https://www.jasss.org/10/3/10.html>

'Citing Bits': Sources and Suggestions for Citing Software, Platforms, Code, Corpora

Liu, A. (n.d.). 'Citing Bits': Sources and Suggestions for Citing Software, Platforms, Code, Corpora, [Editable spreadsheet]. Google Docs.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Qc8VZDIn_N3JHGEkk6QKPwRIGxM3DjB9hn1tIRsQA0/edit#gid=0

Documenting Digital Projects: Instituting Guidelines for Digital Dissertations and Theses in the Humanities

Shirazi, R., & Zweibel, S. (2020). Documenting Digital Projects: Instituting Guidelines for Digital Dissertations and Theses in the Humanities. College & Research Libraries. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.81.7.1123>

Rhetorical Code Studies (Brock)

Kevin Brock. (2019). *Rhetorical Code Studies Discovering Arguments in and around Code*. University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10019291>

Search suggestions

Using "github" and "scholarship" in JSTOR

Peter Binkley (@pabinkley): searching for "github" and "scholarship" in jstor gives some interesting browsing - this looks useful for your purposes (emphasizing the reproducibility aspect), but there's lots more there <https://jstor.org/stable/j.ctvpb>
... I'm going to spend some time with this one: "I Have No Damn Idea Why This Is So Convolved": Analyzing Arguments Surrounding Code <https://jstor.org/stable/j.ctvnd>

Using "h-index github code" in Google Scholar

Michael Muller (he/him) (@michael_muller): I took a quick look at G**gle Scholar ("h-index github code") and found some convergent arguments. Some of the papers argue for broadening our ideas of academically influential contributions to additional types of communications. Good luck.

Tools

Zenodo (For permanence)

Ted Underwood (@Ted_Underwood): I don't think it's controversial to say that code counts as publication. But for permanence you may want something like Zenodo that gives you a DOI. . . . It pairs with GitHub quite seamlessly and creates permanent DOIs for your GitHub releases.

Scott Kleinman (@sekleinman): Coming to this late, but the GitHub/Zenodo model is the one I have used for both Lexos and [WhatEvery1Says](#). The integration between the two services helped me choose Zenodo over other repositories, and you can have version-controlled DOIs.

Scott Kleinman (@sekleinman): This is superficial, but Zenodo's citation style and citation export functions can be a useful way to document the work as scholarship. Scroll down in this example from [@WE1Sproject](#): <https://zenodo.org/record/4959834>.

Heather Piwovar (@researchremix): you can use zenodo to get a doi for a snapshot of your github repo and archive it :) <https://docs.github.com/en/repositories>

Glamorous Toolkit (For enabling new conversations about software development note--in dev)

Tudor Girba (@girba): We are building <http://gtoolkit.com> with the specific intent of enabling a new conversation (and research) about software development. And the environment itself comes with a book inside.

Funding

Killam Fellowship

Dr Max Liboiron (@MaxLiboiron): The Killam Fellowship in Canada uses sharing datasets as an example of prize-worthy research communication. The fellowship is one of The Fancy Ones.

<https://programmekillamprogram.powerappsportals.com/en-CA/fundingopportunities/fodetails/?foid=4b490485-049f-ec11-b400-002248d5186d>