

# Chapter 12

## Tablet Computer Reading: The What's

### 12.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have focused on e-books and eTextbooks, concentrating on the how's of tablet computer reading: how the act of reading, or learning to read, is altered in the transition from print to digital and how the reading matter is presented in a tablet environment. Peripherally, I have included a few suggestions regarding what is available to read. In this chapter, the what's are the focus. The central question is, what kinds of reading matter are available across the curriculum?

In Chap. 11, I suggested that the nature of tablet technology provides learning designers with many options for using reading as a doorway into acquiring knowledge, skills, strategies, and understandings across various populations of learners and the full range of the subject matter. The number and variety of digital books are growing exponentially. Consequently, learning designers at all levels are required to become researchers and curators. They must find, analyze, and organize an ever-changing collection of learning materials suited to their purposes and drawn from an ever-expanding universe of possibilities.

The idea of learning designers—whether curriculum planners or classroom teachers—as digital curators is an important concept. Curation, mentioned in Chap. 11, often is spoken of in library contexts, but the vast availability of the learning matter on the Internet makes curation a role that all educators must adopt. In the words of school librarian Joyce Kasman Valenza (2012), “Digital curators can prevent oversaturation by filtering and diverting the onslaught and by directing what is worth sharing into more gentle and continuous streams.”

The Book Format Decision Chart (Fig. 11.1) provides a simple rubric for considering format features that will best match learners' needs in the context of a given learning design. In this chapter, I explore some sources for digital texts that can be examined to determine whether they meet those needs.

## 12.2 Original Sources

In Chap. 10, I reviewed several options for finding digital reading matter related to literature study, including Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org>), which also offers free e-books in other subject categories, such as music, the sciences, fine arts, social studies, and so forth. The website lists 23 categories holding some 42,000 free books. This Internet site and others like it are ideal for locating original sources—in other words, historical texts. Most of these texts are free because the material is long out of copyright.

It should be borne in mind that the maxim “you get what you pay for” applies. Free digitized texts, often merely digital facsimiles of print, do not necessarily provide the features associated with more sophisticated e-reading, such as dictionary lookup, Web links, and searching. However, the type of features available also can depend on how the e-book is downloaded. For example, Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* is available from Project Gutenberg in several formats. If it is downloaded to a Kindle app, then while the look of the text may not be as tidy as some paid e-books, the Kindle features still function. Text can be highlighted, dictionary lookup works, and so on.

Learning designers searching for e-books can check the Internet using “free ebooks” as a keyword. Adding “for kindle,” “for nook,” or “for android” can help refine the search. Another way to search is to include the subject descriptor in the keyword, such as “free science ebooks.” Among the results for this last keyword, for instance, will be Science Books Online (<http://www.sciencebooksonline.info>). Books and articles on this website are organized in nine categories, from astronomy to physics, and the available texts include both historical works (e.g., Vernon L. Kellogg’s *American Insects*, 1904) and more recent works (e.g., M.E. Cates’ lecture notes on “Complex Fluids: The Physics of Emulsions,” 2012). Many of the works can be read directly online using a tablet computer or downloaded as a PDF. The PDF often is a straightforward facsimile, purely text and whatever illustrations might have been included in the print edition. However, PDFs can be opened in different ways. If opened in iBooks on an iPad, for example, the reader will have access to standard iBooks PDF features, such as dictionary lookup. The features are not as numerous as for books in iBooks but are more than the reader will find when simply reading a PDF as digitized print pages.

## 12.3 Digital Libraries

An increasing number of libraries maintain digital holdings that they make available to patrons. In many communities, this applies to the local public library as well as nearby university libraries. And, of course, more and more school libraries are following suit. The Digital Age also is marked by expanding globalism, which means that digital library resources are not limited to geographic localities.

As an example, Cambridge University in England maintains a digital library on the Internet: ebooks@cambridge (<http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/ebooks/free.html>). The free e-book collections encompass the arts, the humanities, social sciences, science, technology, medicine, and a miscellaneous category titled “multidisciplinary.” Within the arts category, for instance, there is a link to open access e-books for film studies, which listed (as of July 2013) more than one hundred free e-books, most with copyright dates in the 1980s or more recently. For example, Nanna Verhoeff’s 2012 book, *Mobile Screens: The Visual Regime of Navigation*, could be downloaded, complete with its color cover and various illustrations, as a PDF and then read through iBooks or a comparable Android app.

While Cambridge University’s digital library is open to use without much effort, other e-book collections require logins or accounts. For example, the New York Public Library has a digital library website at eNYPL (<http://ebooks.nypl.org>). Patrons need to have an e-account—a library card or PIN—to log in and access the collection.

Another key difference between libraries like Cambridge and New York is resource usability. “Open access” at Cambridge allows users to download *and keep* the materials. The New York Public Library *lends* e-books, meaning that registered patrons may download an e-book only for a designated length of time. The eNYPL allows patrons to borrow up to a dozen digital titles, with the lending period varying from title to title. Lending periods often vary in accordance with the terms of agreements with publishers of digital content. Different publishers, therefore different terms.

In some cases, digital rights management (DRM) software is used to limit lending, downloading, and copying of e-books. DRM, digital copyright, and related matters remain controversial and, from both legal and logistical standpoints, are largely unresolved as yet. This is a consideration for learning designers to keep in mind as they look at ways to acquire reading matter to fulfill learning objectives.

## 12.4 Government Repositories

Government or quasi-government entities offer a great deal of freely available information, including a vast range of digital content. An excellent starting place for any learning designer seeking e-books or other digital texts is the Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov>). The library’s Digital Collections and Services Department is a gateway into a trove of resources, particularly for readers interested in history, culture, government, journalism, and the arts. One of the subsites in this department is the American Memory collection. Designing a lesson on African American history and want to read what Frederick Douglass had to say? Go to The Frederick Douglass Papers (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/doughtml/doughome.html>) and download some of his writings, including his autobiography, published in 1855, *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Or perhaps it’s a lesson on the great American sport of baseball and how it developed. The *Spalding Base Ball Guides, 1889–1939* will

offer original source information about the sport. That's also in the American Memory collection.

Publications.USA.gov (<http://publications.usa.gov>) is fairly user-friendly and offers digital reading matter on numerous subjects. This website is a function of the Federal Citizen Information Center (FCIC) and functions similar to a repository for materials from various government entities. For example, readers who find a short, free e-book on *Back Yard Bird Feeding* will actually be linked to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (<http://library.fws.gov>) Conservation Library to read it online. In another instance, site users who find *The New Wave in Electronics: eCycling* can directly download a PDF of this free pamphlet without following a link to its originator. Many of the materials listed on this website are brief and consumer-oriented and so may be more useful in earlier grades than some of the more challenging historical texts from the Library of Congress.

NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration) also offers a number of free e-books through its Connect website (<http://www.nasa.gov/connect/ebooks/index.html>). As would be expected, most concern topics related to aviation and space. But it's not all about just technology. For example, there is *Earth as Art*, satellite views of our planet, which is a downloadable PDF. An accompanying iPad app also can be downloaded from the NASA site. Most of the e-books are available in several formats: EPUB, MOBI, PDF, and iBook. All are free of charge.

## 12.5 Commercial Sources

While many digital texts are available without charge, there are additional resource websites where e-books can be purchased. One is the U.S. Government Bookstore (<http://bookstore.gpo.gov/ebooks>), which offers e-books mainly for sale. Users of the website can browse by topic or government department. *2011 The FBI Story*, for example, is published by the Department of Justice and is available as an e-book for less than \$10. This title and other e-books can be obtained through a linked third-party e-book seller, either Apple iBook Store (which requires an iTunes account) or the Google Play eBook Store.

These two third-party sellers for the U.S. Government Bookstore, of course, are excellent starting points in themselves. Apple iBooks are sold through iTunes (preview at <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ibooks/id364709193?mt=8>). Within the iBooks app for the iPad, users can visit the online bookstore to search for titles that can then be downloaded directly to the tablet device.

Google Play (<http://play.google.com>) offers several subcategories: music, books, magazines, movies and TV, Android apps, and devices. The digital books category functions like most online booksellers. e-Books can be downloaded directly to a tablet device. Some are paid downloads, some are free; and soon-to-be-published books can be preordered.

While the iBook Store and Google Play are commercial booksellers, both sites offer many free e-books. Most, as expected, are older, out-of-copyright works.

Amazon.com (<http://www.amazon.com>) provides access to a vast number of e-books through links on its Free eBooks: Collections page (simply search on “amazon.com free ebooks”). The listed collections include Amazon’s own Kindle Store (popular classics), Internet Archive (millions of titles, mainly accessed through historical collections), Open Library (more than a million free titles), Project Gutenberg (mentioned previously), and ManyBooks.net (more than 26,000 free titles). So, even though Amazon.com is the world’s largest commercial online bookseller, interested learning designers can find an array of free digital content that can be tapped to develop lessons on virtually any topic.

## 12.6 Summary

Learning designers can tap a myriad of sources for digital reading matter for students at all levels and abilities and for all of the subjects across the broadest curriculum. The mix of sources is rich and growing richer daily. Many, as would be expected, are commercial websites offering e-books and other materials for a price. In this chapter, however, I have highlighted an array of options for obtaining free texts. They include Internet-based archives and digital libraries—and even a few commercial booksellers.

The challenge for learning designers, from curriculum developers to classroom teachers, is to find, analyze, and organize the materials best suited to their needs and the needs of their students. This is digital curation, and it can seem like an overwhelming challenge. Today’s digital curators must hone their investigative skills, using keywords like scalpels to cut through the mass of available information right to the heart of what they need.

One of the sources mentioned earlier is Internet Archive (<http://archive.org>), with the motto, “universal access to all knowledge.” That sounds like an exaggeration until one notes that the website is a gateway to more than 4.6 million texts. Many of these are freely available for tablet applications, such as Nook, Kindle, iBooks, and PDF. This abundance has changed the equation for learning design. Today it isn’t so much a matter of finding enough reading matter for tablet-mediated learning; it’s a matter of deciding what to include in the learning design.

## Reference

Valenza, J. K. (2012, September-October). Curation. *School Library monthly* 29. Retrieved July 9, 2013, from <http://www.schoollibrarymonthly.com/articles/Valenza2012-v29n1p20.html>