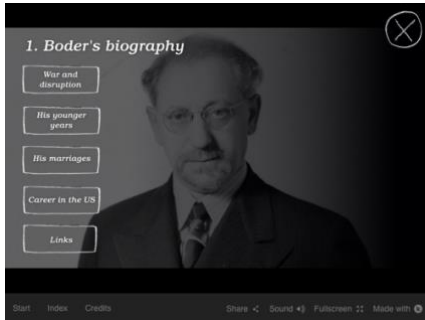


## Struggling with timelines: helping you make the best possible choice



To create this assignment, my student assistants Sidney Wiltgen and Marvin Schieben and I have assessed the advantages and disadvantages of various timeline tools. We would like to share our insights to help teachers and lecturers make the best choice. If we were able to offer an open-source timeline tool that was customised to the needs and skills of teachers and students, these are the items that would be on our wish list:

- A comprehensive tutorial that addresses all possible hiccups
- The option of several people using the tool at the same time
- The option of populating the tool with multimedia content in a responsible way (meaning that copyright law and privacy are taken into consideration)
- An interface that offers a glimpse of what the end result will look like, so that users can take this into consideration when selecting content
- An interface that offers the option of going one step back and editing
- The possibility of creating a timeline in a password-protected area; this way it can be monitored by the lecturer as it is being developed and stored after completion so that new timelines can be produced on the same subject by other students (for example if a timeline assignment is set as an exam question)

Despite the shared belief within digital humanities that educational tools on the web should be free, expecting software developers to develop a tool that would offer all these features free of charge is not entirely fair. Just as in any other profession, software developers have to “bring home the bacon”. This is why nearly all timelines offer a basic free account with limited options, which can be upgraded to a paid account with features that allow collaboration and more flexibility.

The exception is tools developed within an academic environment, but these are not always very user friendly for beginners. Unlike companies, university lecturers and researchers focus primarily on the development of the tool and its performance within a research setting, often within the framework of a project that is limited in time. They cannot support users of their tool throughout the world or create variations with different levels of complexity. This requires a level of customer service that is not viable in a university setting.

So there is tension between the dynamics of the creation of a tool and what is necessary to keep it running, and the context of working with it in the classroom with limited

resources and skills.

To help you make your choice, we have created the following table:

URL	Tutorial	Features of free version	Preparation	Interface	Collaborative possibilities	Multimedia	Password protected for consultation	Password protected for storage	Any particular advantages or disadvantages
<a href="https://estory.iohttps://estory.io">https://estory.iohttps://estory.io</a>	Slides: <a href="https://estory.io/explore">https://estory.io/explore</a> ???	free	Create folder with: - short text in text file - images/audio/video found online, downloaded or links copied	Easy and intuitive	None, because everybody has to work with a personal account to create a timeline.	Files can be uploaded easily or the program helps you to find them on the internet.	Not possible	Not possible	+ Very easy to handle  - eStory does not have a password protected environment, so lecturers have no control over their students' assignments  - Visualisation through bullet points on which you need to click to see the context – a period bar cannot be shown  - The timeline also doesn't extend beyond the width of the screen
<a href="https://timeline.knightlab.com/#make">https://timeline.knightlab.com/#make</a>	PDF:  Clips: <a href="https://vimeo.com/143407878">https://vimeo.com/143407878</a> (October 2015)  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiAn89u0D7M">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiAn89u0D7M</a> (September	free	Users have to complete an Excel file in a very precise way	Users cannot see what the timeline is going to look like; it is difficult to know whether they are on the right track.	????	Files can be included by copying and pasting the online link into the "media" field.	?????	?????	-The program is difficult to use. You need a good tutorial to ensure a successful experience  + By first creating a database in Google sheets, the

	2013)								<p>timeline can be created as a collaborative project and protected with a password</p> <p>+ Knight Lab allows users to view entire periods</p> <p>+ There are navigation buttons to jump to the previous or next event</p> <p>+ Knight Lab can be self-hosted on a university server to manage within a teaching context</p>
<a href="https://www.tiki-toki.com">https://www.tiki-toki.com</a>	<p>Clips: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4e97aGI4zOA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4e97aGI4zOA</a> (June 2014)</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UgiEhJ1xBE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UgiEhJ1xBE</a> (August 2014)</p>	Limited use with free version, only one time	You get a timeline in 2D or 3D with short texts and photographs and you can make timespans visible. Once you have finished your timeline, you can scroll through the years as if you are travelling along a highway.	Easy to use, but you have to change some interfaces. For example if you don't want days and months in your timeline, you have to change the settings beforehand.	Full access costs \$125 per year.	Files can be easily included by uploading them.	???	????	<p>+ Easy to use after watching a tutorial clip</p> <p>- Only one timeline in the free version</p> <p>- Visualisation through bullet points rather than bars</p>

<a href="https://www.time-toast.com/timelines/1471445">https://www.time-toast.com/timelines/1471445</a>	<p>Clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rk9fcBDVMd4 (January 2014)</p> <p>Slides: https://www.slideshare.net/educ215langosch/time-toast-tutorial (April 2014)</p>	<p>Comes with adverts</p> <p>Users are entitled to just one draft private version; their other timelines are automatically made public.</p> <p>Only one user per account</p> <p>Limit of 10 timelines</p>	<p>Create folder with material:</p> <p>Write short text in text file</p> <p>Search for images/audio/video and download copies or copy links</p>	<p>Timeline does not show automatically; you have to press MORE and VIEW THIS TIMELINE to see what you are doing.</p> <p>Going back to re-edit is fairly easy</p>	<p>Only possible with basic: \$72 a year, no adverts, timelines stay private, unlimited timelines</p>	<p>Images can be uploaded, audio and video through links</p>	<p>Upgrade needed for more basic functionalities</p>	<p>Upgrade needed</p>	<p>+ Very easy to handle</p> <p>- Visualisation through bullet points instead of shapes</p>
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We would suggest the following:

**The easiest way** - If this is the very first time you are dealing with a digital timeline and you have no plans to integrate it into your teaching on a long-term basis, you might want to limit yourself to assignment 1a and make use of the existing assignment account with Tiki-Toki. You will just need to add two new entries. Be aware that you have to take turns to complete the entries, as several people cannot work at the same time within one account. The problem with the life of Boder is that there are not very many images available free of charge. So creating a new timeline every time this assignment is given would cause problems. This is why we want to keep this assignment behind a wall instead of publishing it online.

**An investment in a teaching resource** - If you are interested in integrating this tool into your lessons and you have the time to have your students create alternative timelines, there are many more possibilities to find copyright-free material. In that case you might want to try the very easy tool eStory or create a paid teacher account in Tiki-Toki, which gives you a wide range of possibilities.

**Understanding the backend of a timeline** - If this exploration is the start of engaging more deeply with digital history, you have to cover the subject of how the backend of a timeline is created. This means learning to work with tables, structured data and URLs (the addresses of where data is stored). The tables have to be completed in a very precise way so that they can be turned into timeline entries. This is a visually complex task – you need to work vertically on something that is going to be presented horizontally. It requires time to develop the skills needed, but it is very useful to get acquainted with handling digital data. In this case Knight Lab would be a good choice.