



Digital Anthropology for IB Social Anthropology utilising the Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Anthropology

The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Anthropology (CEA) is a growing open-access teaching and learning resource. Its goal is to facilitate access to scholarship in Social Anthropology for experts and non-experts worldwide. All entries are written and peer-reviewed by leading academics. This document has been created to provide sign posting to how this resource might be used by those studying IB Social Anthropology.

Purpose of this document

This document provides five learning activities that support learning towards exam paper 2. It also offers some suggestions for applying this topic to an extended essay. The activities can be utilised individually, or as part of a program. Each activity requires 1-2 hours, two are individual study activities, one is an activity for small groups, and one is a film viewing followed by group discussion.

A contents table on page 2 will outline the activities that have been produced.

Preparation

Students would benefit from reading Daniel Miller's online encyclopaedia entry which offers a comprehensive overview of Digital Anthropology. These activities will also be best approached by students who have already read (or at least, are a substantial way into) an ethnography that covers digital media. Miller's entry provides a good overview for selecting possibilities.

Example ethnography options

Boellstorff, Tom. *Coming of age in Second Life: An anthropologist explores the virtually human*. Princeton University Press, 2015. (An ethnography of the avatar-filled world, *Second Life* – particularly good for *The Body*)

Coleman, Gabriella. *Hacker, hoaxer, whistleblower, spy: The many faces of Anonymous*. Verso books, 2014. (An ethnography of the political/digital 'Anonymous' – particularly good for *Conflict*)

Miller, Daniel, and Don Slater. *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*. Berg Publishers, 2000. (An ethnography of Internet use in Trinidad –

Particularly good for *Belonging*)

International Baccalaureate Curriculum Links

Part 2: Engaging with ethnography.

Digital anthropology provides possibilities for making connections across several of the key concepts and areas of inquiry.

Relevant areas of inquiry:

Group 1 *The Body*

Group 2, *Communication, expression and technology, Movement time and space, Belonging*

Group 3: *Conflict*

Link to Key concepts

Primarily *Materiality*, but also *Change, Culture, Identity, Power, Social relations*.



Figure 1: Credit Daniel Miller



Page	Activity	Objective	Time
3	Comprehension of the Encyclopaedia Entry.	Read the encyclopaedia entry and begin to understand and engage with the key concepts.	The entry will take around 1 hour to read. The exercise will take 45 minutes to complete
4	Conceptual understanding of Materiality	Students will be able to connect concepts of Digital Anthropology to ethnography that they have read.	1-2 hours.
5-7	Does YouTube make people?	Students will critically engage with Michael Welsh's approach to YouTube.	Video, 1 hour. Discussion 20 mins.
8	An Anthropological Approach to Digital Technologies.	Students will work in small groups to develop a better understanding of anthropology as a discipline and ethnography as a practice through exploring they key attributes of an anthropological approach to digital technology.	1 hour 20 minutes
9-10	Exam and Extended Essay Preparation	Students will be able to apply their learning to general anthropological discussions and broad exam-type questions.	Exam practice: 1 hour. Extended Essay Prompts: 10 mins reading, to prompt future work.



Comprehension of the Encyclopaedia Entry.

Type of Work: Individual

Activity Objective: Reading the encyclopaedia entry and begin to engage and understand key concepts.

Time Allocated: The entry will take around 1 hour to read. The exercise will take 45 minutes to complete.

Read [the Encyclopaedia entry on Digital Anthropology by Daniel Miller](#) and answer the following questions:



DANIEL MILLER

Daniel Miller is an anthropologist who is closely associated with studies of human relationships to things and the consequences of consumption. Until 2022 he will be leading on an ERC funded project called 'The Anthropology of Smart Phones and Smart Ageing'.

@DannyAnth

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/why-we-post/>

1. How does Miller define 'digital'?
2. List 5 sorts of technology or interaction that might come under this definition:
3. Miller distinguishes between 'newish digital worlds' and 'everyday use of digital technologies'. Provide one example of each of these, and explain the distinction between them.
4. Choose two references from Miller's encyclopaedia entry that interest you, and briefly note what you can gauge from Miller about the relevance of that work to the broader field of digital anthropology.
5. Why might digital anthropology help us to understand key anthropological concepts? Choose one of the following and explain (in 2/3 sentences) what relevance digital anthropology may have to that concept, give at least one specific example from Miller's piece, or from any additional reading you have completed.
 - a) Materiality
 - b) Social Relationships
 - c) Identity
 - d) Change
 - e) Society
 - f) Power



Conceptual understanding of Materiality

Type of work: Individual study

Activity Objectives: Students will be able to connect concepts of Digital Anthropology to ethnography that they have read.

Time allocation 1-2 hours.

Using an ethnography you have previously read or reflections from your own experience answer the following questions:

In his [encyclopaedia entry on Digital Anthropology](#), Daniel Miller says that “People make things and things make people”

1. ‘People make things’: find **one** example in the ethnography that you have read that demonstrates human creativity through interaction with technology.
2. What might it mean to suggest that the internet makes people? Find **two** examples from the ethnography that you have read that demonstrate the impact that the internet has on the sorts of personhood or identity available to its users.
3. Why might it be concerning to some people, to suggest that ‘things make people?’ Find one ethnographic example that demonstrates technology use is a *moral concern* in people’s lives.

Additional group discussion or extension question to help connect the concept of materiality to other ethnographic examples.

How does the internet compare with other ‘things’ that might be said to ‘make people’?

Consider transport, money, food, bodies, consumables, or landscapes, or choose your own material thing to think about. Use examples from ethnographies you have read if possible, and your own experience otherwise.

Create a list of similarities and differences. This could be done in small groups and then fed back so the class can look at common differences.



Figure 2: Credit Sam Williams



Does YouTube make people?

Type of work: Video viewing, group discussion.

Activity Objective: Students will critically engage with Michael Welsh's approach to YouTube.

This activity uses similar framing as the individual study topic above, enabling students to consolidate their conceptual thinking through applying the same ideas to different material, in a different medium.

Time Allocation: Video, 1 hour. Discussion 20 mins.

Watch [Michael Welsh "An Anthropological Introduction to YouTube", 2008.](#)

Part 1: Reflect and respond

Ask students to reflect in silence to the following question for two minutes and then give initial responses to the group:

Do people make YouTube or does YouTube make people?

Part 2: Explore and expand

The following questions can then be asked to expand the discussion:

1. Would the same answer apply in the same way to other forms of social media (Tiktok, Instagram, Twitter?)
2. Does it apply equally well to all people, at all times?
3. If YouTube makes people, would that be a bad thing? Why/to who?

Alternative distancing measure

Students can engage with the question in a written format or with an online vote and commentary on the initial question followed by collective contribution of other possible ways to depict this relationship.

Part 3: Is this the only way?

In smaller groups students can then engage with the following critical question:

Evaluate Michael Welsh's approach to the subject: Do you agree with his interpretation and depiction of YouTube? Are there other ways to depict the relationship between people and YouTube?

Daniel Millar's Website <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/why-we-post/>, [his encyclopaedia entry](#) and the infographic on the following page will provide useful additional resources to help with this discussion.



The Massive YouTube Ecosystem



Figure 3: Credit Visually



An Anthropological Approach to Digital Technologies.

Type of work: Small group work

Activity Objective: Students will work in small groups to develop a better understanding of anthropology as a discipline and ethnography as a practice through exploring they key attributes of an anthropological approach to digital technology.

Time Allocation: 1 hour 20 mins

Group work (45 mins)

Work together in groups of 2-4. Each group should be assigned one of the quotes below. These are all taken from Miller's encyclopaedia entry on Digital Anthropology.

In groups, prepare the following:

1. An explanation of what Miller meant with the phrase.
2. An ethnographic example (or, example from your own life, if ethnographic reading not yet complete) that illustrates the point.
3. What might the phrase tell us about the key principles of an *ethnographic and/or anthropological* approach to studying digital technology?

Feedback to class (35 mins)

Share group findings with the whole class.

Quotes from Daniel Miller's CEA entry on Digital Anthropology

"While the digital world may often be online, it is not immaterial."

What might Miller mean when he describes digital worlds as 'newish'?

"Online activities can only be understood in relation to changes that have taken place offline"

"Anthropology should be a discipline that encompasses contradiction" What might this mean in relation to the internet?

Alternative distancing measure

Smaller groups can then meet online to discuss and create one page per group for digital sharing. At a later date, small groups can meet online to discuss one other group's findings. Teachers can assess the original page per group, plus one page of comments from the work-exchange.



Essay and Exam preparation

Type of work: Individual Study

Activity Objective: Students will be able to apply their learning to general anthropological discussions and broad exam-type questions.

Time Allocation: 1 hour

Write an essay in response to one of the following questions. Use ethnographic evidence of contemporary, real world examples, in the answer.

TIPS: These questions are broad and general and can be quite intimidating. But you do not need to come up the final, complete, and correct answer to these questions. You need to use them as ways to think about the specific things that you have read about in ethnography. As a starting point, come up with two ethnographic examples that demonstrate something relevant to the question, and then compare them with one another.

TOP TIP: For an excellent answer, can you think about how anthropologists *ought to* think about the key concepts (eg materiality, identity, power, change) in order to best understand human lives? What is good or not so good about the approach of the anthropologist's you have read?

1. What can digital anthropology teach us about the relationship between identity and materiality?
2. When we study change, what can we learn about power?
3. When societies change, does something always remain the same?
4. How can we use the concept of materiality to better understand social relationships?



Figure 4: Credit Monarch Studios



Extended essay and ethnographic research topics

Some students may wish to pursue Digital Anthropology as a topic for their extended essay or ethnographic research. Some possible titles/prompts are below. [Miller's encyclopaedia entry](#) can be used to help you to select appropriate reading and organise your approach.

1. How does it matter, and when does it matter, if relationships are online or offline?
2. The internet is a cultural space
3. The internet is empowering
4. What can digital anthropology tell us about human relationships with our bodies?

Or, to come up with your own topic of enquiry you may like to consider:

What did you find surprising about the ethnographies you read?

Is it important that we understand digital relationships well, and why?