

# Workflow, Responsibility and Quality Control for Digital Editions: A Case Study

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## **Abstract**

The modern digital edition of a literary work is most often a collaborative product, with many contributors participating in the process of production, from the planning and image capture phases through to the electronic presentation of the edition. Managing the production process, and marshalling all these forces into an efficient workflow presents a major challenge, which is often well understood for large scale projects, but is perhaps less well defined for individual Edition projects.

In this paper I will present some suggestions for tools to ease this workflow, and some analysis of their effectiveness in use, notably within the AHRC-funded project, “Citation and Allusion in the Ars Nova French Chanson and Motet”, towards the production of “Je chante ung chant”, an archive of late-medieval lyrical poetry. Now in a pre-production phase, this project has leant heavily on a number of tools to ensure consistency in a highly complex markup schema.

Many of the tools examined are standard, open-source products, and are commonly used in other areas of digital production, such as software development; I will address both their applicability to the domain of literary text production, and their suitability to a less technical audience such literary editors and reviewers and look at notable features to assist developers, designers, editors and project managers.

## **Background**

Much of the foundation of the scholarly editing process was laid down by Peter Robinson’s “Canterbury Tales” Project (Robinson 1993; Robinson 1994) and subsequent SGML-based projects built upon this framework to encompass many styles of digital edition. The ongoing development of the TEI framework (Burnard, O’Keefe, and Unsworth 2006) for text encoding gives editors a robust and flexible structure to produce their editions, using a sustainable and transferrable format. The role of the editor, and the design of the digital critical edition itself, is well documented if perhaps not yet well understood (e.g. Shillingsburg 2006; Siemens and Schreibman 2007; Irvine 2006).

However, when developing an edition, particularly for a corpus of discrete texts, there is a need for management of the editorial process, in terms of efficient working practices and in quality control. Where multiple editorship is involved, it is necessary to develop a model of responsibility for text production and to formalise the steps taken in assuring quality and accuracy. The need to restrict editors to certain practices and encodings, and to encourage consistency in the metadata describing the editing process, will also arise.

Even in modest scale projects, it can be difficult to keep track of the ongoing progress, where problems are found and are not immediately addressed there is a danger that they will be missed; it

is also essential to have an idea of the overall progress of the edition. Finally, there will be a significant exercise in documenting encoding decisions and editorial practice unless this is recorded throughout the project.

## Tools and software examined

- XML-aware text-editors, using schema constraints and visual editing
- Edit tracking and reversion (version control)
- Responsibility (and blame) with multiple editors
- Transformations to ensure consistency and reliability
- Display and publication technologies
- Simple web-based project management and bug-tracking
- Quality assurance, unit testing and feature-highlighting displays
- Wiki-based documentation

## Preliminary conclusions

The adoption of such technologies has enabled this particular project to expedite the editorial process in many ways, through repurposing word-processed transcriptions as first-draft TEI texts, to ensuring that the displayed texts are accurate and reliable. The focus of the workflow, as designed for this project, is towards transparency, which is intended to produce an edition in which all aspects of production are explained, and all editorial decisions are clearly defined. In practice, of course, time is limited and editors are human, so errors and omissions creep in. The test of any workflow is whether these are kept to a minimum, or allowed to run out of control; the measure of a toolkit is the quality of the end product. This paper will conclude with comments on the success of the workflow, and possible improvements for future projects.

## References

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