Sample Guide for Advanced ePortfolio Skills

Note:
These sample materials were developed at KCL are included in the CREATES Toolkit Co-creative Learning as an example of specific guidance on eportfolios developed at the CREATES partners. For more information and additional educational tools, visit: http://europe-creates.eu

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Advanced Mahara Skills

A Guide to Creating Advanced Pages on Mahara

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Section 1

Text

TOP TIPS

1. You have a choice of 17 typefaces for a text block. For large blocks of text, choose one that is easy to read (e.g. Times New Roman or Helvetica) and leave more intricate fonts for headings (e.g. Chancery).

Andale Mono
Arial ★
Arial Black
Book Antiqua ★
Comic Sans MS
Courier New ★
Georgia ★
Helvetica ★
Impact
Symbol
Tahoma ★
Terminal
Times New Roman ★
Trebuchet MS ★
Verdana ★
Webdings
Wingdings

2. Note that some typefaces are smaller than others even when set to the same point size All of the typefaces in the image to the left are 14-point size, yet Palatino appears smaller than Century Gothic.

3. As a rule of thumb, it's best to keep your text right-aligned. However, in the Layout example above, a left-justified block of text is used to give a symmetrical look.

4. Make sure your column size is right for the amount of text that you are putting in the block. For more on column sizes, see the Layout section below.

★: can be used for a Skin

Section 2

Images

TOP TIPS

1. Make sure you source your images lawfully. Do not simply take any image you find online as you may likely be breeching copyright law unwittingly. There are many royalty-free image databases such as the Creative Commons and pexels.com from which you can download and use a wide range of images for free.

2. Unlike with Skins, you can upload an image straight from the block configuration rather than having to have it already in your files.

3. Make sure your place your image block in a column that is wide enough. If you have a large image but put it in a small column, Mahara will automatically scale it down to fit into the column.

Section 3

Skins

You can create customised design settings for your Mahara pages using Skins. By creating a Skin, you can customise:

a) Background
b) Font
c) Text colour

'Manage skins' is a section available in your Portfolio. From this section you can create a you own Skin that you can then apply to any of your Pages.

Background

1. If you are uploading an image for your background, it must already be uploaded to your files in the Content section.
2. Depending on the size of the file you upload, Mahara will try to repeat your image so that it covers the entire background of your page. Using the 'Background image repeat' drop-down menu, you can make sure that your image repeats nicely.
3. The best background images are usually very simple and will not distract from your work. They are not the main feature of your page—they are there only to make your page look more attractive to your audience.
4. If you would like to use a very intricate image, only try to do so if it large enough to see the details. Otherwise, your page can look very cluttered.

Font

5. You can choose from 13 fonts when creating a Skin. You cannot preview the fonts while you are creating a skin, but you can see how each one looks in the Text section above.

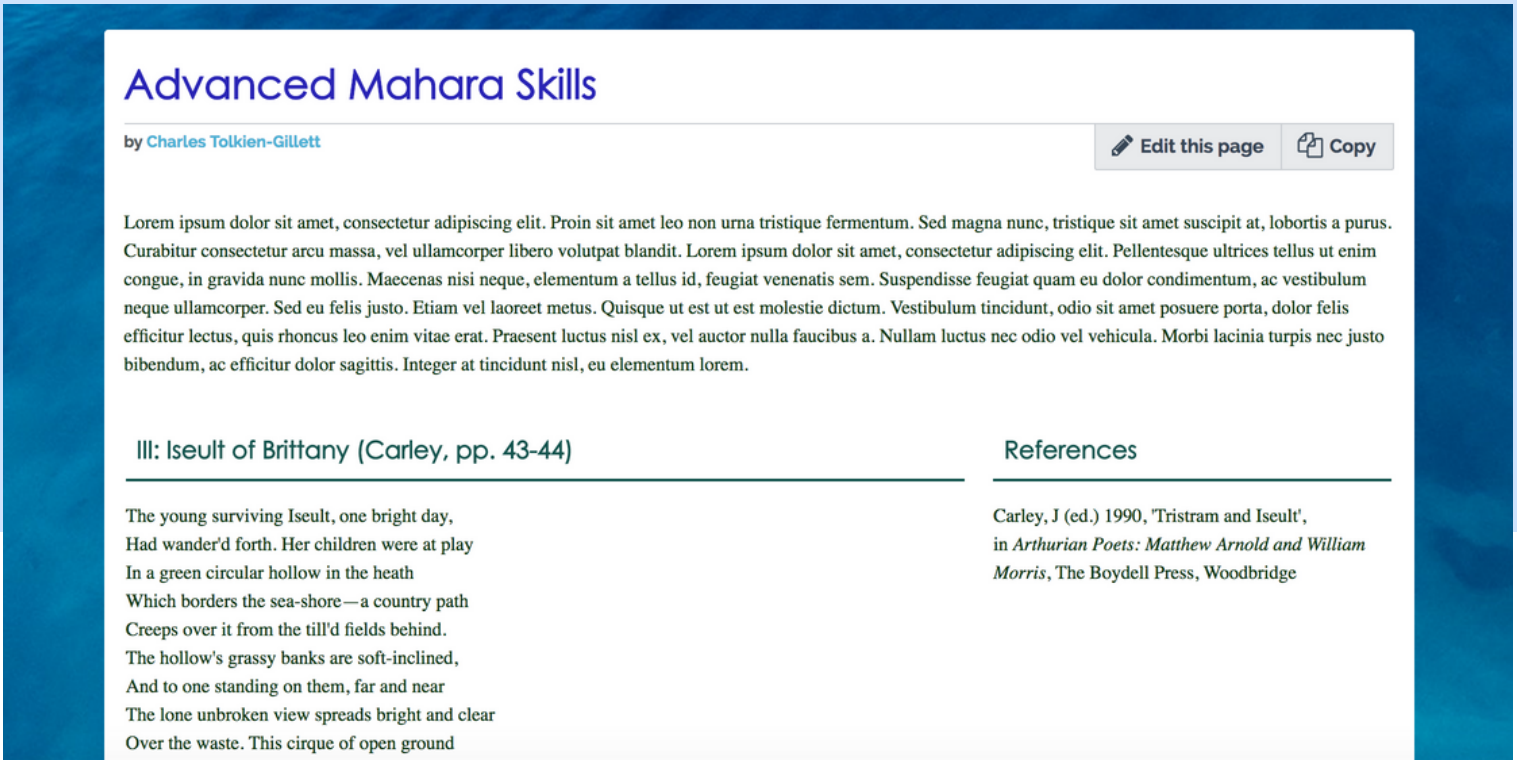
6. Like with a colour scheme, you should come up with a group of fonts that work well together. This might include one statement font and then a simpler one, or one serif and sans serif. Try to avoid using to multiple bold fonts—you want your page to be easy to read above all else.

Text colour

7. Be cautious of using too many stark colours on one page. Come up with a simple colour scheme that compliments your background.

TOP TIPS

Good Example



Background

This page uses a large image (1920 × 1280) so that it does not repeat frequently. The image reads very simply and adds just enough detail to make the page interesting but not distract from the text.

Font

Heading font: Century Gothic; Text font: Bookman—combing a sans-serif typeface (Century Gothic) with a traditional one (Bookman) compliments their differences.

Text colour

Text colour: #0B3712 (deep green); Heading text colour: #2925B6 (blue); Emphasised text colour: #13554E (sea-green)—the colour palate is chosen to reflect the ocean theme, and while usually its advisable to avoid using a colour for the Text colour itself (as opposed to just black), here it is dark enough to work.

Bad Example

Background

The image here, while a nice painting, is far too small (320 x 135) to be appreciated. Additionally, because it is so small, it repeats frequently which creates an awkward pattern. Using a detailed image like a painting may not read well in the first place.

Font

Heading font: Verdana; Text font: Chancery—the use of such standout Text font can make large blocks of text more difficult to read. It also makes the Heading font look boring.

Text colour

Text colour: #FFFA41 (yellow); Heading text colour: #FF2616 (red); Emphasised text colour: #44FF6A (green)—there is no coherence between the colours used, both in relation to each other and in relation to the background. The bright and vibrant colours can also be difficult to read.

Section 2

Layout

You can also customise exactly how many columns (vertical divisions) and rows (horizontal divisions) of content you have on your Mahara page. This is a great way to make the viewing experience more interesting.

'Edit layout' is a section tab on the top right of your page in between 'Edit content' and 'Choose skin'.

TOP TIPS

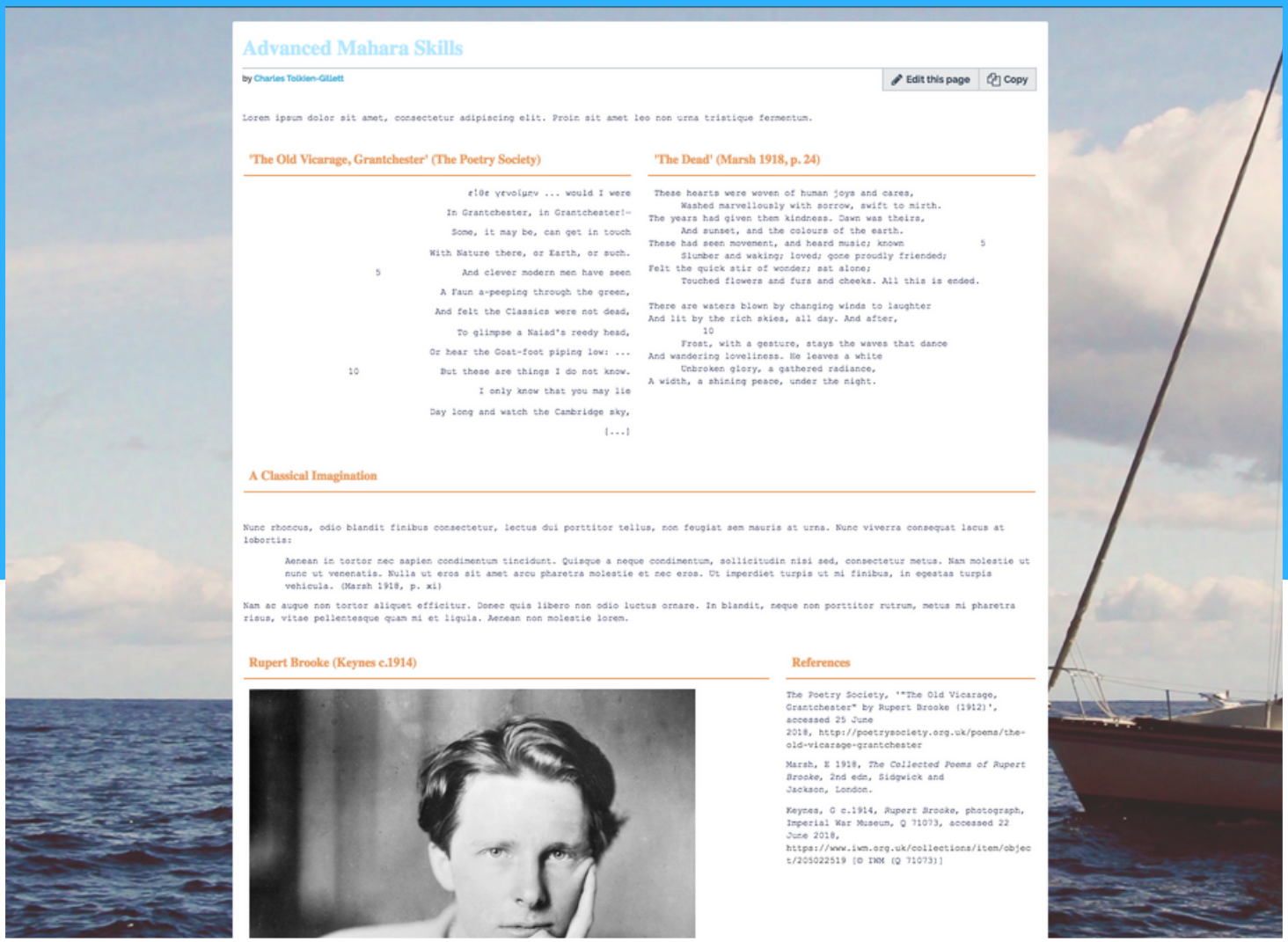
1. Make sure your column is the right width for the content you're adding. If you're putting in an image, its column should be wide enough so that you can see it clearly. Equally, if you're adding a text block don't make the column too big when using a small text otherwise there will be a lot of blank space. Conversely, a large text in a narrow column will be difficult to read.

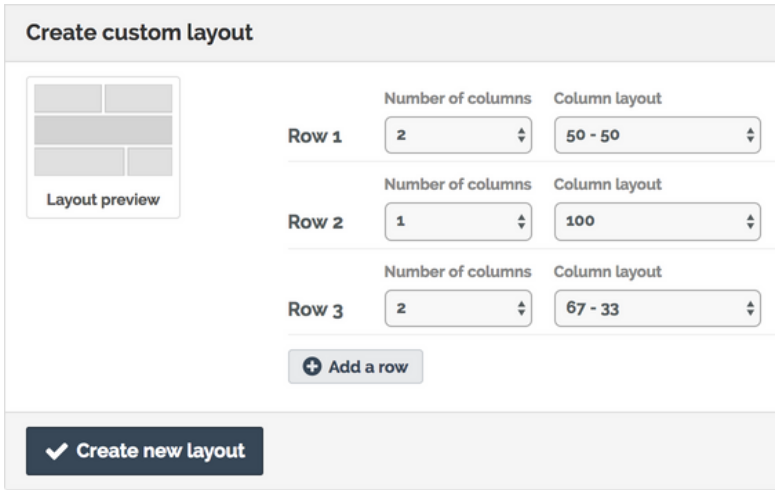
2. Using multiple rows with varying numbers of columns can be a good way to make your audience's experience more engaging. Think about the trail of your audience's eye as it travels down the page. Straight lines are boring and monotonous, but Layouts that are too complex can be confusing.

3. Avoid creating dead-zones. Make sure you are making the best use of all of the space on your page. But, don't over-crowd your content.

3. Often, customising your Layout is the last step. Don't try to force your content into a layout that you think will look good. You want a layout that works well with your content. Once you have all of the content you want to display, then you can test out more complex layouts or create your own custom layout.

Good Example





Row 1

Side-by-side comparison of texts with columns split evenly

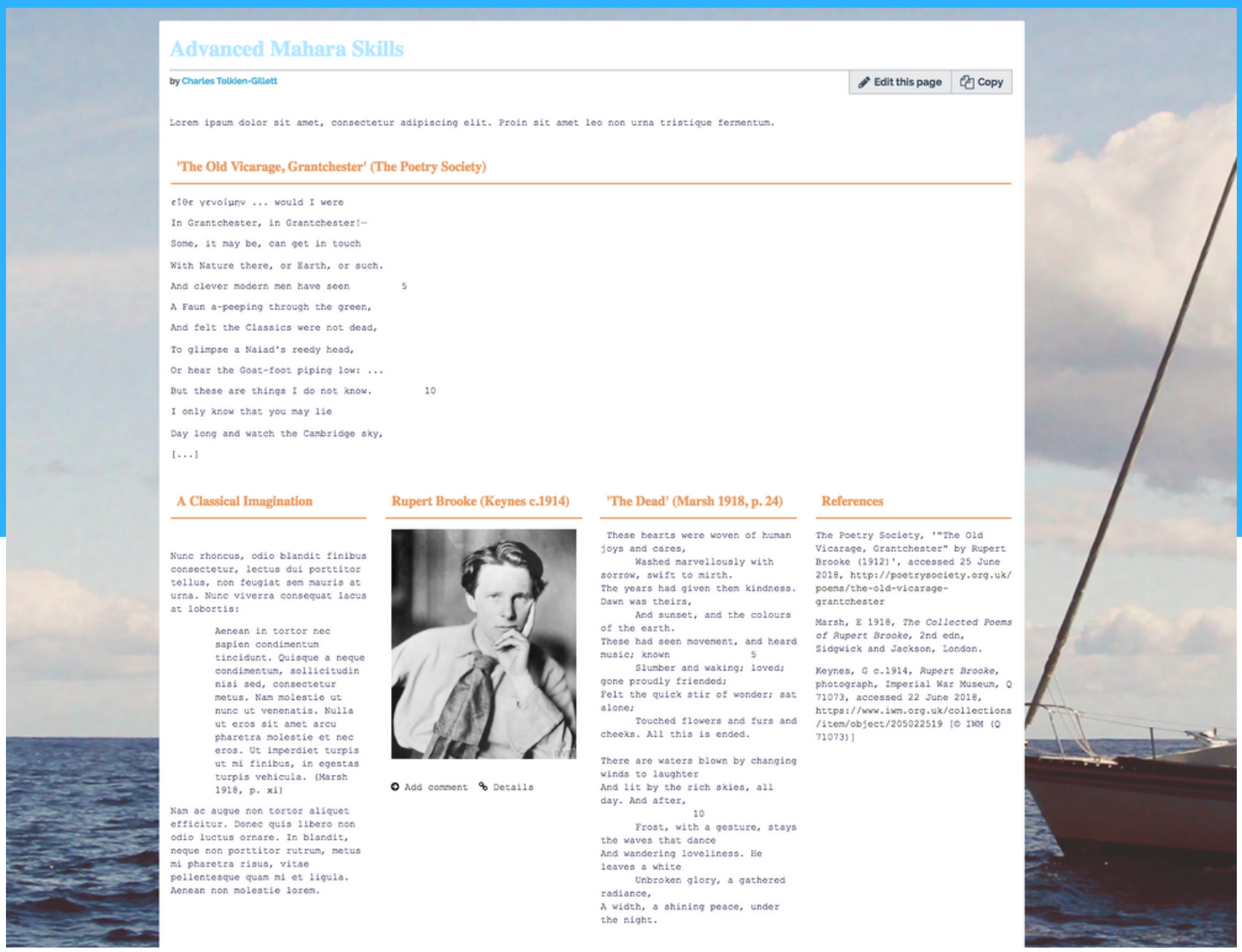
Row 2

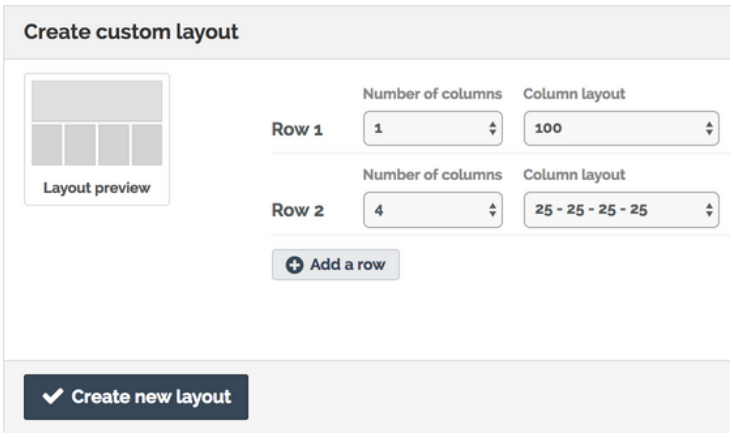
Analysis of the two texts – this is the most important text on your Page so it deserves a full row to itself. It also breaks up the preceding and succeeding multiple-column rows

Row 3

Portrait has a large enough column and References do not overuse space

Bad Example





Row 1

The text wastes a lot of space and creates a big blank space

Row 2

Too mich is squeezed in. Because this row is over-crowded, the texts are more difficult to read and the image size is constrained.

TOP TIPS

Section 5

Banners

Background

1. A banner can provide an eye-catching beginning to your viewer's journey through the exhibition. Canva.com is one of the best free graphic design tools. It is very user friendly and makes it easy to create high quality designs.
2. Once you have signed up, select 'Create a Design' and then 'Use custom dimensions' in the top right-hand corner. The width of a Mahara page is 1140 pixels so set this as the width for the design

Colour

3. It is important to keep the colour scheme simple as it is easy for the banner to become cluttered and difficult to read. An easy way to do this is to select a light or neutral background colour and a darker colour for the text.
4. To make the banner a little more exciting, a background image could be used. However, make sure it is simple and fairly abstract, so it is possible to read text over it. If you are already using a skin for the background of your Mahara page this may not be a good idea.
5. A border can ensure that the banner does not blend into or get lost within the page. To add one enter the elements section and select shapes. Use the square outline and drag it to the edges of the banner - it should snap into place. It is a good idea to make this outline the same colour as the text for simplicity.

Text

6. Now is the time to use a more exciting font if you like. However, make sure that the banner does not have more than two fonts as this will make it difficult to read. If you do go with a more interesting font, counterbalance it with something simple (if you have a subtitle) and ensure it is large enough to read

Importing

7. Download your banner as a JPG. In Mahara, select 'Add Image' to the top cell and set the width to 1140. Select your banner and ensure that it is set as non-retractable and with a hidden description.

Examples

Background

Both of these banners use block colour backgrounds for clarity. It is essential to make sure there is a strong contrast between the text and background. Both also use a border to clearly define the banners and prevent the them from getting lost in the page.

Colour

Try to use colours that compliment the rest of your page. A good rule of thumb is to use no more than three colours for a page.

Text

The fonts are easily legible. The first banner uses Fredoka One. The second banner uses Hussar Ecologiczy and Raleway Heavy. Using a combination of serif and sans serif for heading and subheading can also look good, but be sure to keep the rest of the banner simple.

Examples (cont'd)

Background

Both of these banners use images for backgrounds, but with different levels of success. The first banner's image is simple and text can easily be overlaid. In the second example the image is too busy and distracts from the text.

Colour

Black or white are usually the best colours using text over an image background. As you can see in the second example, the blue text becomes lost in the blue section of background making the banner difficult to read.

Text

The font in the first example is Julius Sans One. This is a good example of a more unusual font. It would not be appropriate for a large body of text, but works well in a banner. The font in the second banner in Carter One. It is also an unusual font, but is perhaps too informal for an academic piece.

Section 6

Media

TOP TIPS

Types of Media

Mahara has the ability to host images, video and audio. These all add new possibilities for engaging visitors, but must be set up correctly in order to be effective. For information on how to upload each kind of media, have a look at the standard Mahara guide. The aim of this is guide to suggest some exciting new ways in which to use media on the platform.

Images

Mahara allows users to create photo albums, which a view can flick through. These albums only take up the same amount of space as one image on a page. Be sure to check out Pexels for a huge collection of royalty free images.

Video

Using a video as the heading or introduction to your page or exhibition can be an engaging way to draw in the viewer. To make a video the heading simply 'Insert Media' and select the top cell. For a clean look, do not give a description and make sure the the cell is non-retractable. A description should not be necessary if the video is providing an introduction.

If you are using Mahara to create an exhibition, it could be an exciting idea to use video to provide a virtual tour guide. This could be done by adding a retractable cell titled 'Virtual Guide' in a discreet place on each page. Within this cell, insert a video with a brief analysis of each page or artefact.

Audio

Audio could also be used in this way, however, it may be better to make the cell non-retraactable in this case, as the audio player is much smaller than the video player.

Section 7

External

TOP TIPS

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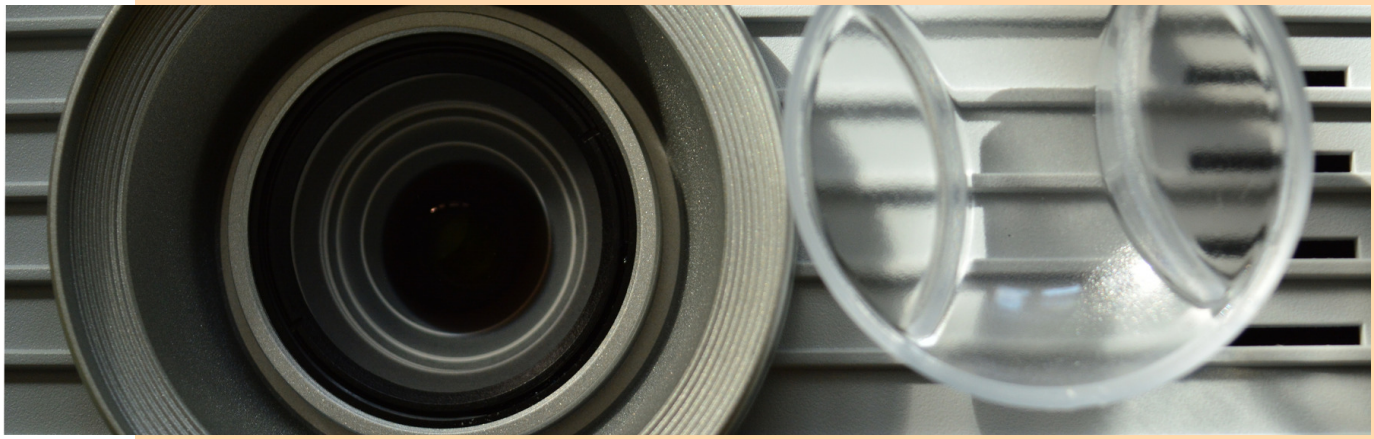
Section 8

Sharing



TOP TIPS

1. You can create a 'secret URL' for your Mahara collection or page which will link to the Mahara website:

a) When editing your Page, there is an option at the top called 'Shared page' next to next to an image of a lock. From here you can allow your page to be shared with the public or with specific Mahara users or groups.

b) Under the Portfolio tab, there is section titled 'Share by Me'. You can now click on the globe icon next to your collection or page to create a URL.

2. You can also export any of your collections or pages as HTML files. This is only useful if you know how to use HTML to create a webpage:

a) Under the Portfolio tab, there is a section titled 'Export'. Select the 'Stand alond HTML website' option and then you can select which pages and/or collection you wish to export. After you click 'Generate export', a zip file will download with the HTML content for those pages.