

Archival Research and Editing in the Early American Classroom

Theresa Strouth Gaul

TCU

ALA 2009

Schedule field trips to local archives

Discuss:

Rules and procedures of archives

Etiquette of approaching archivists

2. Design assignments that will enhance students' familiarity with digital and material/physical/"actual" archives.

Assignment:

Search for usages of a key term, concept, or item that you come across repeatedly in a particular novel. How does what you learn about contemporary usage of this term or concept affect your interpretation of the novel?

(examples: friendship, brother-sister relationship, coquette, hermit, spontaneous combustion, etc.)

Assignment:

Search a newspaper database to find articles on a historical event or individual referred to in a novel. How does reading those articles affect your interpretation of the novel?

(examples: Haitian revolution, the American-Algerian war, Pocahontas, etc.)

If you don't have access to databases through your institution, the Research Society for American Periodicals lists periodicals available on the web for free:

[http://home.earthlink.net/
~ellengarvey/rsapresource1.html](http://home.earthlink.net/~ellengarvey/rsapresource1.html)

3. Series of three
sequenced
assignments in
documentary editing:

Assignment 1:

Read the content of the University of Virginia ADE website on editing.

http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/ade/about_editing/

Transcribe and annotate a manuscript letter related to a collection of correspondence but not included in it. (I provide a copy of the manuscript letter; we have already read the collection in class).

Discuss:

- the differences among students' transcriptions
- the choices students made as editors
- the challenges they encountered
- whether that particular letter should have been included in the volume under consideration and why
- how its inclusion/exclusion affects the volume as a whole

Assignment 2:

Transcribe and annotate two letters from a microfilm of a manuscript collection.

Use digital databases to find published letters by the same individual to compare the editing conventions of early American periodicals versus today.

[discuss in class]

Assignment 3:

Transcribe and annotate a letter of the student's choice from the microfilms of a massive manuscript collection.

Write a headnote explaining the letter's significance.

4. Seminar projects

Seminar Project 1:

Prepare an edition of correspondence, including

- introduction
- statement of editorial method
- headnotes (if appropriate)
- transcriptions
- annotations
- bibliography

[I tell them about options at local archives, but many of them choose to pursue materials at other archives.]

The introduction for the edition must:

- Provide necessary background information and historical contexts
- Situate the letters in relation to contemporary scholarship on letter writing
- Present a reading of the letters.

The introduction should be at least 10 pages, and total length may range from 30-40 pp.

Seminar project 2:

Using electronic databases, locate and read a pre-1835 novel which was either serialized in a newspaper or published in book form. The novel must currently be out-of-print.

Write a critical introduction for the novel.

The introduction (approximately 20 pp. in length) must

- provide necessary background information on the novel's initial publication and its author
- argue for the novel's significance in relation to current critical concerns
- establish necessary historical contexts
- present a critical analysis of the novel