

CASE #2

Teaching Citations as a Multi-Functional Approach to Archives Instruction

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES ENGAGED BY THIS CASE STUDY

5C. Cite sources in accordance with appropriate citation style guidelines or according to repository practice and preferences (if possible).

LOCATION OF CASE STUDY

Special Collections Research Center, Gelman Library
George Washington University
Washington, DC
<https://library.gwu.edu/scrc>

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Introduction and Institutional Context

This case study presents a lesson plan in which students learn how to cite archival materials. The exercise of citing archival materials not only ensures that students make proper attributions, it also requires students to apply their understanding of archival description and organization. This case study treats teaching proper archival citation as an opportunity to (a) reinforce core archival literacy skills and (b) cultivate best practices in note-taking and academic integrity.

Both authors are librarians, one a special collections librarian and the other a reference librarian who was also the instructor for the course. The discussion below draws on the authors' collaboration in a ten-week archival research practicum at The George Washington University (GWU) in fall 2016. In that practicum, students conducted preliminary research at GWU's Special Collections Research Center (SCRC) in order to develop research proposals. The learning activities discussed here fell in week two of the practicum.

The course in question was an Arts and Humanities Seminar offered within the University Honors Program. The Honors Program requires students to take two such seminars, and students have several options available each semester. The sixteen students enrolled ranged from second- to fourth-year undergraduates. Only one had previous experience in Special Collections.


Narrative

Prior to this learning exercise, the students had a hands-on introduction to reading finding aids and requesting boxes. Each student then requested one or two boxes from a collection of interest. This lesson was the students' first opportunity to see the boxes they had requested. As the students explored their boxes, we introduced best practices for note-taking and citation management in archival research.

The learning exercise used three tools. The first was the physical citation slip, shown in Figure 1 below. SCRC provides citation slips in its reading room, but students could easily create their own on scrap paper. The second was a handout on the elements of an archival citation and their arrangement in MLA, APA, and Chicago style guides (see Appendix 1). The third was an online note-taking application. Most of the students used Evernote, but some preferred Google Drive. This exercise could also be adapted to provide an introduction to Tropy, an open-source

tool released in 2017 that helps researchers organize and describe photographs of research material.¹

Special Collections Research Center | George Washington University Libraries



Collection: _____ Box: _____

Folder: _____

Notes: _____

Figure 1. Citation slip used at GWU's SCRC.

We guided the students through the following two-part workflow:

1. Record your research notes on an item of interest.
 - a. When you locate an item of interest, fill out a citation slip. Be sure to fill out all fields, including the series. Use the box label and the folder label to help you. Refer to the finding aid if you are unsure of any information.
 - b. Place the citation slip next to the item of interest and take a photograph of the slip and item together. Now you have a record of the item and its location in the collections.
 - c. Upload your photograph to Evernote or the online tool of your choice. Add annotations so that you remember why you found this item interesting.

2. Create a formal citation.
 - a. Check your finding aid for the preferred citation for this collection. Copy this and save it in your research notes.
 - b. Using our handout, add the item details, box, series, and folder number to the preferred citation information. Note that each style guide (MLA, APA, Chicago) formats archival citations uniquely.
 - c. Show the citation to the instructor or librarian for approval.

In part one of this workflow, photographs with citation slips ensured that students' research notes included all relevant information for revisiting any given item and for generating citations later. We encouraged students to take photographs of any item they found interesting, even if

¹ For more information on Trophy, a freely available application developed by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University with funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, see <https://trophy.org/>.

the photograph could not serve as an informal digitization of the item's content. We designed this exercise to encourage students to practice organized and reflective note taking. Placing citations, notes, and photographs together in one exercise provided a way for students to anchor analysis to a specific object. Through this exercise students began to understand the recursive nature of archival research; one may have to return to the original source multiple times and this practice of note taking supports iterative research practice.

Part two of the workflow required students to write a complete citation for one item. The students presented the citation to the instructor and librarian as an "exit ticket" before the end of class. Each student received direct feedback on any incorrect elements and learned how to locate the information to correct the citation.

Introducing the elements of an archival citation reinforced the earlier training on finding aids, as students had to refer to finding aids for preferred citations, and understand the relationship between series, boxes, folders, and items.

The exercise described here also contributed directly to a later deliverable. After several weeks of research, students had to submit an annotated primary source gallery featuring at least ten documents for use in their later deliverables. Each item in the annotated gallery included a complete citation for the featured document, a photograph of the document with citation slip present, and notes on the item's relevance to the student's research. We explained that the learning exercise could serve as the first entry in the annotated gallery, therefore students had a clear reason to pay attention and participate.

Results

From the students' perspective, the required citation was an exit ticket. From our perspective, it was an initial, authentic assessment of student learning, because in order to complete the workflow in our exercise students had to (a) refer to finding aids for preferred citations and (b) understand the relationship between series, boxes, folders, and items. All students completed their citations successfully, some with help and others independently.

Our assessment did not end with the exit ticket, however. Instead, the annotated primary source gallery offered a second, more comprehensive verification of student learning. In the annotated gallery, students demonstrated their ability to cite multiple document types, with or without author, title, and date information. In compiling the gallery from several weeks' worth of notes, students also checked their own note-taking skills since each student was individually

responsible for ensuring that they could return to any given document using their own notes and photographs. The prospect of having to submit the annotated gallery itself served as an incentive to keep good research records.

This lesson could also be extended to include copyright and fair use research (Learning Objective 5.D). Students could take a single item and investigate its copyright status as if they were preparing for publication.

Lessons Learned

The task of citing an item of interest worked well for students who found promising materials in their first boxes. For other students, whose boxes were less promising, the “item of interest” selection was forced. Those students started their practice citation quite late in the class period and felt rushed when seeking help. In future iterations of this learning module, we could simply drop the “item of interest” language, and suggest that students select one item for their practice citation.

Students needed additional guidance when (a) citing items for which they had to devise a title or other information and (b) faced with a published item present in the archives. We revised our handout to reflect these questions.

The best practices taught in this learning module lend themselves to further reflection upon the fact that the students are generating new records in their research projects. Students would likely benefit from considering the quality and condition of the records they create, as they work with the already-archived records of others.

Appendix 1. Handout: How to Cite Materials from Archival Collections

Your main goal when citing archival materials is to enable a reader to locate the item you're citing. For this class, we will use *The Chicago Manual of Style's* notes and bibliography, a standard citation style for historical research.

In practice, the structure of an archival citation can be ambiguous. The *APA Publication Manual* does not offer examples for unpublished sources. *The Chicago Manual of Style* does not include series, box, and folder numbers in its examples of notes citing archival materials, but it is best practice to include that information anyway—and to do so consistently across all citations.

Gather the Elements of a Citation

1. In the finding aid, look for the “preferred citation” information under “Information for Users.” Record the preferred citation in your notes for that collection.

For example, SCRC Collection MS2093, “Student Protest Collection, 1965-1980,” has the following preferred citation: Student Protest Collection, Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University.

2. For any citation, you will also need the following information:
 - a. Author/creator
 - b. Document title/description where no title is given
 - c. Document date or [n.d.], if no date is available
 - d. Series #, box #, folder #

Use your citation slip to record anything not visible on the document itself, then take a photo of the item and citation slip together.

Assemble the Above Elements as Prescribed for *Chicago Manual of Style* Notes and Bibliography

Note:

Author Firstname Lastname, Document Title/Description, Date, series #, box #, folder #,
Collection citation as given in finding aid.

Bibliography entry:

Collection name. Repository name, university/institution, city, state.

Some Typical Item Descriptions

Letter: Joe Letterwriter to Joseph Recipient

Memorandum: Memorandum from Joe Letterwriter to Joseph Recipient

Photograph: Photograph of Joe Letterwriter and Joseph Recipient