

8 AT WORK IN THE ARCHIVES: PLACE-BASED RESEARCH AND WRITING

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OVERVIEW

This chapter outlines a plan for incorporating primary and archival research into first year writing course designs.* Correlating directly with recent college initiatives and composition best practices, archival research asks students to see themselves as experts, engage in rhetorical activism, and take on college-to-career projects. At its core, writing with archives not only encourages, but insists upon, interdisciplinary topic selection and research. Because all projects focus upon local communities, archive building and assessment, and stakeholders' interests in the collected materials, this pedagogical method organically guides students through traditional rhetorical elements: audience consideration, articulation of the writer's relationship with the subject matter, and blending primary and secondary evidence to craft a convincing (and in many cases, quite passionate) message. This chapter offers students a fundamental understanding of archiving practices and research methods, providing tools that prepare them for interdisciplinary research and writing practices that characterize academic, community, and workplace communication.

What do you imagine when you hear the term “archives”? Do you think of obscure documents or fragile artifacts, dusty attics or damp basements filled with shelves of paper? Although sometimes true, these stereotypes present an incomplete picture of archival work. *Archives* house physical evidence of the past and offer direct links to

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community histories. We define archives as both (1) collections of materials related to a person, family, or organization that have continuous social and cultural value, and (2) the places in which these collections are preserved and stored for future use. Many of the materials housed in archives are considered *primary sources*—direct materials created by or around the research topic and uninterpreted by others. Typical primary archival materials include official documents, letters, photographs, and memorabilia. Strong archival research projects blend primary archival research with *secondary research*—the published findings of experts—to produce a comprehensive exploration of a research question.

Archives and archival research have recently enjoyed a renaissance and are recognized as important sources supporting a range of exciting commercial, public, and scholarly projects. Historical novels and genealogy projects, biopic movies and public memorials, human rights marches and copyright law all rely upon archival investigation. Archival research can be highly personal, and projects often stem from the writer/researcher's interests. For example, you might want to learn more about your family's history, a possible career or a hobby, a social movement issue, or a local legend or public figure. You may want to correct a common misconception, bring to light a neglected person or issue, or illustrate how a local event connects to a larger initiative. In these instances where secondary research may be limited, over-interpreted, or missing, archival research can bridge connections and encourage new scholarship. In this chapter, we introduce concepts of archival investigation and provide ideas and suggestions for researching diverse and fascinating archival materials such as monuments, clothing, letters, photographs, and maps.

You will find numerous advantages when writing with archives. Perhaps most importantly, in this research method you choose topics that you really want to investigate. Rarely do two students in a class write about the same issue or collection. Your project is unique, and you immediately become the subject matter expert, given your familiarity with the topic and experiences. As with all projects, archival researchers must double (and sometimes triple) check findings by consulting published sources to corroborate information. However, the artifacts and primary materials you explore, the research questions you formulate, and the experiences and knowledge you bring to a topic ensure that your project is original. In this approach, you are not asked to capture just a snapshot of scholarly ideas addressing a subject, but instead, are encouraged to make new meaning by interpreting a collection of materials or data through your unique perspec-

tive, original interpretation of the material, and personal understanding of people involved.

Within this chapter, we provide guidance for initiating archival research, offer ideas for finding a topic, and discuss issues associated with digital and in-person archival investigation. Because archives are tied to memory, culture, and power, class assignments might introduce study that happens beyond the desktop and library stacks, in places where the research process is determined by the space in which it occurs. We also share anecdotes about writing with archives that demonstrate how you can build an exciting research plan that is at once personal and outward facing.

WHAT COUNTS AS AN ARCHIVE?

In our current technological moment, where posts, tweets, and even our Internet searches are “archived,” understanding exactly what the term *archive* means for academic research is critical. Here, we refer to archives as formal acts of gathering and organizing materials, the collections themselves, and the spaces where preservation occurs. Archival research can take place at a variety of locations, including:

- college and university archives
- corporate archives
- government archives
- historical societies
- museums
- religious archives
- special collections
- community archives
- digital archives

Specific goals govern each of the archives listed above, which determines what materials reside in their repositories as well as collection practices. Understanding how collections are collated (or assembled) can sometimes, although not always, help direct your research process. For instance, examining a government archive for what is missing—what is not present in the archive but seems logical to be included—could be as important as discovering what is available. In defining your research goals, knowledge of these differences will help you decide where materials might live and which repositories to consult.

Through archival research, you become an academic detective. You reconsider what counts as evidence, rethink who can be identified as an expert, and discover how and where historical accounts are generated. Working with primary and archival sources prepares you for community writing and workplace research, where you will likely be asked both to locate information and seek solutions to existing problems. Consider the workplace projects of some of our students who have conducted original investigations in our archival research classes: one student gathered months of data and conducted employee interviews to solve a scheduling problem at the food delivery franchise where he worked. Another student researched blueprints, government documents, and newspaper articles to help determine how best to launch a new business within an existing community. One of our employed students investigated the branding and icon history of the local bank where he worked. Others chose topics closer to home, like the student who researched shifting legislation and tax law to advise her parents about looming changes that would affect their family business. Keep in mind that archival materials can be accessed by visiting physical collections, consulting online websites, or in some cases requesting that digitized holdings to be delivered to you via email or through interlibrary loan.

Archival projects may also be deeply personal and familial. Such projects might include researching an often-told family story, maybe one about immigration, travel, or a birth narrative. These projects often rely upon consulting archival materials such as interviews, family letters and documents, baby books and birth certificates, as well as government records. You might choose to write about personal communities to which you belong—religious, educational, heritage, place, or food. Maybe you want to dig deeper into a personal hobby, which provides a great opportunity to share your passions and expertise with new audiences. Our students have written about a diverse range of topics, including international stamps, NASCAR, vintage wedding dresses, cooking and crafting, conspiracy theories, immigration communities, protest posters, New York's 1970s disco scene, the natural hair movement, and the history of the Appalachian dulcimer. Topic possibilities are limited only by your interests.

PLANNING ARCHIVES-BASED PROJECTS

Archival research requires you to arrive at interpretations of events and ideas independently, rather than solely relying on the interpretations of others or published scholarship. In doing this work, you become the expert

on the topics you investigate. However, archival research can initially be confusing for those who are unfamiliar with the process. As you gain experience developing projects that include or prioritize archives, however, the process becomes easier. Archives-based research can be hugely rewarding but requires flexibility and some working knowledge of archival tools. In this section, we introduce those tools and describe ways in which you can prepare for this kind of research.

TOPICS

Students beginning archival research for the first time often ask, “Where do I begin?” Likely, up to now, your research projects have been assigned and relied heavily upon secondary sources; the published research and claims of experts may have guided both your research process and conclusions. Archival research, however, gives you the chance to choose your own topic, state your own claims, and even make new knowledge based on your research trajectory.

When selecting a topic, begin with subjects that interest you most. Topic ideas can come from a variety of places. In our archival projects, we have investigated historical issues (the history of music copyright and 19th-century women’s monuments), current social movements and events (women’s marches and health-related artifacts), and labor practices (domestic workers and educators). Your research may be just as varied. Take a moment and think about what interests you personally and academically. Do you have a hobby that you want to explore further; do you want to know more about a community issue; or are you interested in the backstory of a film or book? List three possible research topics, then ask yourself the following questions about each option in order to narrow your focus:

Table 1: Topic Idea Chart

	Is your topic an idea, thing, or place?	What draws you to it?	What is the exigence?	What claims can you make?	Where can you find more information?
Topic Idea 1					
Topic Idea 2					
Topic Idea 3					

As you brainstorm, you will find that research paths begin to appear. To demonstrate, let's consider an example: you want to explore the origins of an old family recipe, a source of family pride. Let's say you are interested in learning more about the original version of the recipe, which includes an unfamiliar ingredient, Carolina gold rice. After quickly researching Carolina gold rice, you discover it is an heirloom rice tied to historic Southern coastal culture, which leads you to hypothesize how the recipe and your family might connect. With additional secondary research, you discover that the rice was brought to the Carolinas from West Africa and was important to the history of antebellum commerce and low-country Creole life. With this information, you can now begin searching for archival collections that feature that specific strain of rice or similar recipes to draw further connections. You might also decide to do some genealogical research to locate where recipe originators likely lived, and you will probably develop additional research questions that arise from findings. Regardless of what you discover, you may gain both a better understanding of your family recipe and expertise in the cultural, commercial, and political facets of Lowcountry foodways—all from a family recipe.

ARCHIVAL EVIDENCE

Archival research always blends traditional secondary research with primary investigation. Archival holdings frequently include documents, artifacts, and ephemera (described below). Documents refer to organized papers that relate to a person or institution and may include office memos, patient records, press releases, accounting ledgers, journals and calendars, and legal papers. Artifacts—physical items—may be related to a donor's life or work and could include items as rare as a lost sketch or as mundane as a collection of protest buttons. Ephemera—an item that is temporary or has a short shelf life—may include documents or artifacts, but what makes them so exciting is that they are accidental. These objects were not necessarily meant to be saved and were important only in the moment; examples include receipts, tickets, and advertisements. Ephemera are often collected as reminders and souvenirs of an event. Given these diverse examples of archival evidence and the information they can provide, we encourage you to rethink what counts as evidence. Consider items you have collected or saved: birthday cards, concert tickets, a diary, a favorite doll. If future researchers encounter your collection of ephemera, what might they deduce about you and the time in which you lived? How might they count your materials as evidence?

In addition to documents, artifacts, and ephemera, many archives also collect oral histories. *Oral histories* include sound recordings and transcriptions of conversations between an archivist or researcher and historical participants and experts. You are probably familiar with the concept of interviewing, a hallmark of journalistic research, in which a reporter asks someone prepared questions on a topic. The oral history format is similarly characterized by question-and-answer conversations though, unlike interviews where information is analyzed and interpreted, oral histories only collect information for posterity. While oral history prompts are designed to gather specific details and information tied to a specific topic, they are much broader in scope, asking the interviewee to recount facts and expound upon memories and experiences. For this reason, oral histories are not merely tools for research but, more importantly, serve to gather and preserve voices of community members, experiences of participants in community events, and memories of witnesses to history.

Oral history interviews take many forms. Interviewers may submit written questions ahead of time to interviewees, who then answer either in writing, in person, or via phone conversations. Depending on the purpose and occasion, accounts also may be gathered on location from witnesses to an event or through legal depositions, for example. Think about ways in which Ken Burns' documentaries ("The Films") and NBC/Ancestry's "Roots Less Traveled" series incorporate oral histories and archival materials, which bring their topics to life for contemporary audiences. However, oral histories are part of a longer oral tradition, recounted in the past by troubadours and travelling storytellers who repeated historical accounts far and wide to ensure they were kept in the public memory. Currently, through the recordings and transcriptions of the interviews, oral histories remain as living artifacts long after the participants pass away or memories of the events discussed begin to fade. If you are researching familial subjects, consider conducting an oral history interview with a family member. Our students have interviewed relatives to learn more about immigration narratives, experiences living in occupied territories during wartimes, and gentrification of neighborhoods. In our research, we have consulted oral histories to learn first-hand about domestic labor unions and women who worked in traditional male occupations. Thorough information about preparing for, conducting, and storing oral histories can be found on the "Best Practices" page of the Oral History Association website.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

As you prepare to work with archives, keep in mind that collected materials are the natural result of human activity and exist within specific cultural circumstances. How we describe, support, and cite archives responds to those contexts.

ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION

The process of archival description is important for both archivists and researchers. Because archives have a significant, physical component, the information those materials share is partly physical as well. For archivists, description is “the creation of an accurate representation of the archival material” and is tied to a collection’s provenance (the record of ownership) and finding aid (*Describing Archives* xvi). Archivist’s in-depth rules of description are uniform across collections, regardless of material or donor. Layered descriptions reveal relationships between the materials and their sources, as well as among other items found in the same collection.

As a researcher, your accurate description of an artifact also reveals the layers and relationships among archival materials and other sources you include in research projects. Beginning your research by creating a description of your source will help you understand what you are examining and help capture small, easy-to-miss details. While an archivist’s descriptions are often succinct and summative, research descriptions should be *thick*. The practice of *thick description* is rooted in ethnographic observation and begins with pure description—what can only be observed—and then folds in additional context or interpretation. Let’s look at the excerpt below of a thick description from William, a college first-year. This excerpt is the first paragraph of an AIDS Quilt panel he used in his research:

The quilt block is in total twelve-foot by twelve-foot. There are eight panels in this specific block. The specific panel stands vertically three feet wide by six feet tall. It is in the bottom right corner of the entire block. The block is number 4642 out of the 5956 made, so this block was a later addition to the NAMES Project collection. The panel has a solid black background that feels like a rough cotton fabric. At the top of the panel the name Pedro Zamora is spelled out with gold colored felt in all caps. Just below the name in the same gold felt are the years 1972 on the far-left side and 1994 on the far-right side. Below the year 1972 is a Cuban flag, under the year 1994 is an American flag. Both flags seem to be made out of a vinyl fabric. Pedro Zamora was born in Havana,

Cuba February 29, 1972 and died November 11, 1994 in Miami, Florida, explaining the Cuban flag under his birth year and American flag under his death year. Below the flags on either side are acting masks and LGBTQ+ pride flags.

William first frames the object he is observing before describing the object's smaller elements. He refrains from adding opinion and context, and keeps his description focused only on what he can see and feel. Several paragraphs later, once William is certain he has captured all the details, he then begins to contextualize his findings:

Zamora was presented as a very healthy and 'normal' individual that just happened to be living with HIV/AIDS. It was this health and youthfulness that allowed Zamora to reach the younger generation. . . . The panel signifies Zamora's relationship with the public, his family, and his friends. It shows his lasting legacies to the public and how HIV/AIDS impacted him. The panel also shows where he was from and his career occupation with MTV. This panel was created by his close friends and family with help from the people at MTV studios in the wake of his death to HIV/AIDS.

Practice crafting an artifact description. Select a single object and write a detailed objective description--leaving out your assessment or opinions. Then, thicken your description by adding personal, historical or cultural details. Challenge yourself and see how detailed you can be. In writing archival descriptions, try using your senses to flesh out your analysis: How does your object feel? What is its temperature? Does it have a smell? What are its dimensions? What is the condition of the piece? How is it constructed? Once you feel you have exhausted your pure description, contextualize the object: What do you think the object represents? For whom might it have significance (originally and now)? Do some quick research to discover historical and cultural backstories of the artifact.

TRIANGULATING EVIDENCE

"Triangulating evidence," a common research term, means testing or corroborating a study. To ensure the reliability of findings, you need to seek additional sources that verify your claims. For example, a classroom teacher might design a new teaching strategy to help students get better results on timed exams. In addition to creating a control group for testing findings, the instructor may also conduct interviews with student partic-

ipants and ask another teacher to observe the classes and students, as well as comparing the final test scores after the two groups receive results. This validation process is less formulaic in archival research since primary projects can vary widely.

In archival research methods, triangulation seeks to establish validity of findings by consulting multiple accounts of an event obtained from sources, such as individual accounts, public records, community artifacts, corporate records, or private holdings. Think about sources you might use to corroborate, or double- and triple-check findings, for your projects. For example, in archival educational research, you might examine the literary influences of a famous author by starting with the writer's letters or journal entries in which they allude to a reading history or favorite writings. Next steps in determining works from which the author drew inspiration could include consulting printed catalogs, university calendars, or published professor testimonies that discuss the school curriculum where the author studied. To further verify a list of possible early influences, you might find an inventory of the contents of the author's personal library. Collectively, these sources provide an overview of possible works the young artist may have encountered. Citing multiple sources serves to authenticate your claims, particularly when readers don't have direct access to the original artifacts and ephemera that you found and consulted.

CITING ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Academic research always requires acknowledging the materials you consult and investigate. The specific guidelines for citing and formatting bibliographical information depends upon your teacher's preference or the adopted guidelines of your discipline (e.g., Modern Language Association, American Psychological Association, or Chicago Manual of Style). While you likely are quite familiar with requirements for citing printed materials, such as books, journal articles, and newspapers, documenting archival materials may be new to you. For example, when faced with quoting and citing information found in a file folder contained in a larger box that also houses photographs, letters, and perhaps artifacts such as diaries or military ribbons, how do you begin to cite? Oft-visited reference sources, such as the Purdue OWL and library resources, include information for getting started (see for example "Primary Sources in Archives & Special Collections: Citing Archival Sources"), but in archival documentation, one size doesn't fit all. In recent years, as archival research has become more prevalent, the major style guidelines have revised and improved the citation information for primary sources. Begin with the available information

found in your teacher's recommended style guide, but be aware that citing archival materials may require a bit more attention to detail—both in adequately citing references but also in pointing to the actual content of your sources.

Archival researchers must adopt an extra layer of ethical responsibility, particularly when working with materials that are not published, catalogued, or even available to the public. Adequately citing and documenting a photo album, life events recorded in a family religious volume, or unpublished letters, for example, relies wholly upon the ethical responsibility of the researcher. You must comprehensively describe and catalogue findings, representing not only materials that answer your main research questions, but also information that may contradict your original hypothesis or suppositions. Readers will not have access to these materials and, therefore, cannot double check your findings. Properly citing archival materials not only ensures you represent your research properly, but also responds to the same plagiarism concerns connected with properly citing secondary sources.

One of our students examined a set of letters sent home from a soldier serving in Vietnam. The student wanted to capture the isolation young soldiers experienced during this controversial conflict. Yes, in this private family collection of ephemera, she certainly found evidence to support this initial research question, but our student also discovered within the correspondence that her relative developed a sense of personal responsibility, strong camaraderie with fellow military personnel, and clear ideas of what path he wanted to take upon his return to civilian life. In the final analysis, she had to include all the findings, even the information that refuted/expanded her initial assumption. When conducting archival research, you may find that once you have examined materials, you must adjust research questions and ethically account for the full range of collated materials. This practice serves to strengthen your stance as a reliable researcher and has the added advantage of suggesting new avenues of research and possible topics that your readers might want to pursue—hallmarks of effective scholarly research.

CONCLUSION

Incorporating archival investigation early in your academic career sets you upon a research and writing path that you will likely follow throughout college, at work, and in your personal life. We find community study and problem solving to be much more engaging than restating what someone

else thinks about an assigned topic, and we hope that archival research serves to increase your awareness of local issues and understandings of people who may be different from yourself.

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TEACHER RESOURCES FOR AT WORK IN THE ARCHIVES: PLACE-BASED RESEARCH AND WRITING

OVERVIEW AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

Teaching undergraduates to write with archives is rewarding and pedagogically sound. Benefits for students include strengthening critical thinking skills and developing greater awareness of how scholars use sources to make meaning. Archival research has benefits for teachers as well, providing unique opportunities to learn from and alongside your students. While this shift in pedagogical roles may seem a bit alienating initially, we've found engaging in archival research and writing to be quite liberating. Teachers and students worry less about plagiarism and disinterest in assigned topics. Additionally, teachers don't face burnout because each term brings a new set of students with widely divergent interests. Pretty quickly, students take on roles as subject matter experts and begin to see vital connections between their personal lives and academic work. As archival researchers ourselves, we share our experiences working in the archives with our students—stories of serendipity and curiosity, moments of blending our personal interests with rhetorical activism—in ways that invite and encourage students to join ongoing scholarly conversations.

The recent surge in scholar-teacher works dedicated to writing with archives provides good starting places for considering how you might add archival research to existing courses or redesign curriculum to focus on primary research. See, for example, *The Archive as Classroom: Pedagogical Approaches to Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives* (edited by Katie Comer, et al), an open access collection of scholarly essays, assignments and exercises associated with the *Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives* (DALN)—a collection of over 7000 distinct oral history narratives. The teacher-authored chapters in this unique digital-born collection address storytelling, globalization, digital composition, building a vertical writing curriculum, allowing research subjects their own voices, literacy sponsorship, research methods, performance, serendipity, and researcher positionality. Jane Greer and Laurie Grohman's *Teaching Writing and Rhetoric at Museums, Memorials, and Archives* likewise offers a collection of articles penned by teachers experienced in designing archival assignments; the contributors address pedagogy affiliated with local, public collections and artifacts. And Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Michelle Eble's *Primary Research and Writ-*

ing: People, Places, and Spaces is a first-year writing textbook completely grounded in archival and primary praxis. (See also works by Bahde, et al; Enoch and VanHaitisma; Graban and Hayden; Hayden; and Daniel-Wariya and Lewis).

Specifically, first year writing classes grounded in archival research:

- ask students to see themselves as experts and share their passion and knowledge;
- avoid plagiarism and patchwork writing;
- blend community writing and service learning with original research effortlessly;
- invite students to research local artifacts, business and government records, and workplace collections;
- introduce students to library investigation in engaging ways—through special collections and with digital materials;
- encourage students to research writing in the disciplines through exploration of oral histories, conducting interviews and surveys, and in analyzing commercial holdings;
- correlate primary research with digital research and writing;
- provide opportunities for students to engage in local rhetorical activism;
- introduce undergraduate students early in their college careers informally to a variety of research methodologies/lenses;
- poise students to examine the ethics of preservation and research;
- explore the implications of researcher credibility and potential claims to speak in community spaces;
- exercise critical thinking skills and bridges the gap between synthesis of knowledge and development of new ideas; and
- stretch students' acumen of the terms "evidence" and "expertise."

Primary and archival research does not dilute traditional research and writing goals. For us, the class goals and outcomes remain the same as in traditional first year writing courses. Students learn to form research questions, evaluate secondary sources, develop rhetorical strategies designed to inform and persuade target audiences, test hypotheses and data, and construct arguments written in convincing prose. Yet, in this approach, they move beyond canned assignments that ask them to engage in patchwork research and writing on topics that may not interest them. Instead, students begin every project by considering their own interests and knowledge—writing as insiders and community members. We have found that

the panicky feeling to get up to speed and say something original about a topic dissipates, drastically reducing plagiarism incidents.

Archivist-teachers reiterate this overview in their disciplinary conversations about the merits of introducing students to working with primary materials, noting that “users who encounter primary sources gain a unique perspective on the subject they are studying,” and identifying several “core concepts” students encounter, including:

- analytical concepts, including hypothesis, analysis and critical thinking;
- theoretical concepts surrounding evidence, power, authenticity, materiality, context, and authority;
- ethical concepts around privacy, intellectual property, culture, and copyright; and
- practical skills that reinforce other forms of research and include “finding, accessing, gathering, and handling of materials” in various contexts. (SAA-ACRL/RBMS)

At its heart, writing with archives not only encourages but insists upon interdisciplinary topic selection and research (given the range of student experiences). Because all projects focus upon local communities, questions of archive building and assessment, as well as stakeholders’ interests in the collected materials, this pedagogical method inherently and organically guides students through the rhetorical processes of audience consideration, articulation of the writer’s relationship with the subject matter, and evidence for crafting a convincing (and in many cases, quite passionate) message. Below, you will find first a list of questions and heuristics that are designed to help students understand the unique nature of archival sources and research methods, to take on the role of expert investigator, and to get started selecting topics to investigate. Next, we offer several sample assignments that you can easily adapt for different locales, to accommodate available physical and digital collections, to adjust for students’ level of expertise, and to encourage integration of primary and secondary research. These assignments may be scaffolded in courses completely grounded in archival investigation or adopted within traditional first year writing standard curriculum as stand-alone projects.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Archival research asks us to look at a wide variety of resources both to glean topic ideas and to shed light on local topics. In what ways might we appropriate everyday spaces, places, and artifacts as sites for archival and communal investigation? Make a list of communities to which you belong (or perhaps, groups you wish to join). What materials, places, and knowledge could you analyze and discuss to make others better aware of that local community? Keep in mind that archivists expand notions of “text” to include a wide list of materials such as letters, pictures, clothing, monuments, government documents, meeting records, and physical artifacts.
2. While most people conjure up physical spaces when imagining the possibilities for conducting archival research, digital archives offer an accessible and reliable way to investigate community topics as well—and provide an excellent and inexpensive way to begin archival exploration given the nature of finding aids and the increased number of digitized collections. What are the advantages and limitations of examining archival materials online for your specific topic? How might you blend traditional research methods and digital archival investigation to expand the efficacy of your investigation and to corroborate findings?
3. How does your “positionality” or relationship with materials and communities you choose to research influence the ways you interpret and report findings? Before taking on a project, think carefully about why you want to research this event, community or set of artifacts. What is your goal, and who is your audience? How will you respond to found materials that don’t fit your hypothesis or perceived ideas about a community?
4. How does “presentism” —your own cultural practices and twenty-first century perspective —influence your readings of historical events? Relatedly, in crossing cultural, racial, political, and gendered borders, in what ways do we need to take care—particularly in terms of representation of groups to which we don’t belong?
5. Archival and primary research never works in isolation from traditional secondary investigation. Whether engaged in historical, community event, or workplace inquiry, researchers must rely

upon secondary research to contextualize research topics, corroborate findings, and test solutions and claims. After you have initially examined physical or digital collections, make a list of secondary sources and agencies whose findings will help locate the materials you've found and provide a backstory of the communities you are studying.

6. Findings in archival research can easily be adapted for multiple audiences. In your past writing course(s), you have likely been asked to tell the story of your research findings and experiences from a traditional perspective or in an academic genre. Begin now to think about ways you can adapt your findings for members of the community you are studying, for community outsiders or readers who may know nothing about the subject matter. To community stakeholders or to those with the power or abilities to answer a call to action? For public, civic, or corporate audiences? Does shifting the lens make writing easier for you, attract listeners outside your (perhaps) shallow initial target audience pool, or suggest additional venues for delivering your findings? In archival research, the audience is never just your teacher.

GETTING STARTED WRITING PROMPTS

1. Make a list of research projects you have produced in the past. Identify differences and similarities among each type of research method found in those papers. What steps did you need to take to prepare? Could any of those topics be revisited through the lens of archival investigation? If so, draft a revision plan that incorporates archival research methods.
2. As a thought experiment, how might you build an archival collection? (You can take pieces from existing collections.) What would you include in your archive and why? What is the significance of the materials? How are the items related? Justify where your collection should be housed.
3. In the "Archival Description" section, we ask you to describe a personal object. What did you count as "evidence" and "information?" Cite at least two examples of how you might triangulate claims about the object.

4. Look at the JFK Oral Histories collections and select an oral history to investigate (“Oral Histories”). Listen to the first 25 minutes of the oral history and make notes about the covered topics. List names of people the interviewee mentions, biographical data, and other items of interest. Write a paragraph that summarizes your observations and concludes with one research question.

ACTIVITIES

The following activities introduce concepts, skills, and frameworks associated with archival investigation. These scaffolded assignments are designed to support skills-building, culminating in a final project. Assignments echo and reinforce primary research skills across the course curriculum. However, teachers who wish to incorporate archival investigation as one tenet of a writing course may find these exercises useful for introducing primary research into the curriculum and broadening students’ understanding of what counts as a text, the relationship between sources and communities, and the role of the researcher.

SITE VISIT

One way to introduce students to archival research is to schedule a class visit to a local collection. Many institutional libraries will provide a guided tour of special collection holdings. Following this group visit, then ask students to begin thinking about a specific collection they might like to visit individually. They can research the target site online to gain an initial understanding of what resources might be available locally or call a reference librarian or curator to learn more about research opportunities. Then ask students to turn in a preliminary memo stating the proposed location they plan to visit, strategies for gaining admission, plan of study, and research questions. You will likely need to make time early in the term to consult individually with students about their project interests and possible local sources. The time spent early in the term in 1:1 consultation pays big dividends later in the semester; students leave these early meetings focused and excited. Following the site visit, students turn in a follow-up report, describing and detailing what they found in the archive and exhibiting more fully developed research questions based on available materials.

ETHNOGRAPHIC ASSIGNMENT

This assignment asks students to describe research sites, noting details such as colors, weather, physical space layout, artifacts, as well as partici-

pants' appearances and body language, and actions, etc. Field notes are the essence of any observational project, and for this assignment, you can ask students to conduct two (2) site observations, turning in both observational field notes and their narrative/analytical reflections on their observations. After they demonstrate observation and transcription skills, students can next explore interpretative techniques, such as coding and analysis, and then draw conclusions from the patterns they find. The students' field notes become a primary source for determining research questions. For a robust discussion of observation techniques, we recommend consulting Dana Driscoll's "Introduction to Primary Research: Observations, Surveys, and Interviews," featured in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, Volume 2.

INTERVIEW

Oral histories lie at the heart of many archival projects. You can ask your students to listen to digitized oral histories to become familiar with this format, instructing them how to read transcripts and listen to recordings with their research questions in mind. Depending on their research interests, we next ask students to conduct a short interview with a "person of interest" —archivist, researcher, community member, event organizer, or expert. This exercise can serve multiple functions, such as: introduce students to new communities, provide a first-hand account of a local event, corroborate archival findings, or contextualize information. Students often include information gleaned from the interviews in their final papers—and sometimes they invite the interviewee to attend the final project presentation event (described below).

DIGITAL ARCHIVES ANALYSIS

Increasingly, historical and current materials are digitized, granting wider access to a wealth of materials. Additionally, many student projects may rely on government documents, community archives, and workplace information that is now readily available online. Ask students to first provide a thick description of the digital archive and then to outline their plan or methods for incorporating this material into their project, stipulating the limitations of this online collection and identifying needed supplementary secondary sources to contextualize what they find within cultural, educational, historical, or political contexts. Finally, students can list emerging research questions prompted by the collection, answering how they will

use the discovered information to support a claim, illustrate a point, or shed light on an existing problem.

FINAL PROJECT

Discuss possible project formats with students during the first two weeks of the class. As in prior assignments, students submit memos for end-of-semester work, which may include a culmination/synthesis of the term's research. In classes grounded in archival research, final projects may take many different forms, including finding aids (for uncatalogued materials), commonplace books (for collecting and connecting related materials addressing a narrow subject), mapping projects (associated with ethnographic observation and community investigation), and artifact analysis—in addition to traditional research papers. These final assignments all include written project justifications, research narratives, and reflections about their experiences working in the archives. Students “write up” findings in the format appropriate for interested communities

PRESENTATION OF FINAL PROJECTS

At the end of the term, consider planning a symposium where students present their final projects in a poster board session, discussion panel, conference talk, paper, or other genre as appropriate to the project. We've had great success inviting other teachers and students from the department to the event, as well as community participants who contributed to the projects.