

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS RESEARCH GUIDE

FOR CLUSTER M71CW
SPACES OF
BIOTECHNOLOGY

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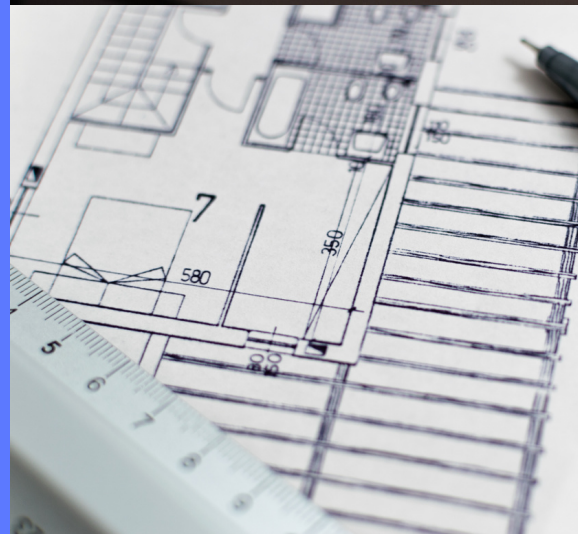
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INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Welcome to Special Collections!

Special collections in academic institutions arose out of a history of private collectors in Europe and America, the subsequent donation of these collections, and the collection building of encyclopedic museums in the late 19th century and early 20th century. As universities invested in rare book holdings, these special collections rapidly grew, expanding to primary sources of various formats, increasing in importance and recognition as integral parts of research institutions. This long and complicated history, while only briefly summarized here, reflects the wealthy white men who dominated the market where value and purpose was determined. Today, special collections are reckoning with that past, and most are embracing a future of transparency and open accessibility. (1)

Identifying Primary Sources

Special collections are repositories for fragile, scarce, rare, unique, miscellaneous, outdated, and in some cases totally bizarre materials representing parts of the past. These materials are primary sources: sources created within the time period they represent. They are first hand accounts, evidence of events in time, and reflect direct knowledge of experiences. Anything can be a primary source if it contains original information contemporary to the period in which it was produced.

Examples of primary sources are:

- Letters
- Diaries
- Manuscripts
- Court cases
- Interviews
- Original research
- Maps
- Architecture
- Field notes
- Lab notes
- Patents
- Technical reports
- Clinical trials
- Sketches
- Blueprints

Analyzing primary sources compiles information surrounding those sources, providing a foundation of knowledge to make claims about the effects sources and their contexts have had on individuals, groups, culture, and society.

1. "A Brief History of Rare Book Libraries." In *Rare Book Librarianship: An Introduction and Guide*, edited by Galbraith, Steven K., and Geoffrey D. Smith. Santa Barbara, California: Libraries Unlimited, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012.



NEUTRALITY, SILENCES, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL PRESENCE

Neutrality and Silences

Special collections and the materials they hold are not neutral or objective. Records, objects, and architecture all carry with them the bias and partiality of the people, cultures, and social necessity that created them. Additionally, every institution, system, and physical infrastructure has a legacy or a history that determines and affects its collecting practices, organizational structure, its policies, design, use, employment, and outreach. This means that absence and silence in archives is valuable information, often exposing active harm against individuals and communities. As you do research in any discipline, with any type of material, pay attention to what you do not find and what is not there, what this means, and what power dynamics are present as a result of this.

The Importance of Viewing Primary Sources In Person

Primary source analysis requires detailed observation. This means looking at particular features that are often dependent on being physically present with the object, like touch, smell, affect, scale, and replications of the original environment. While digitization is an ongoing effort, it is a slow process, and still cannot replace how important it is to see materials in person. The two can co-exist together, each providing their own value as methods of extracting information from sources.

As Chris Bourg notes, “libraries are not now nor have they ever been merely neutral repositories of information....But what I mean when I say libraries are not neutral is not just that libraries absorb and reflect the inequalities, biases, ethnocentrism, and power imbalances that exist throughout our host societies and (for those of us who work in academic libraries) within higher education...we live in a society that still suffers from racism, sexism, ableism, transphobia and other forms of bias and inequity; but libraries also fail to achieve any mythical state of neutrality because we contribute to bias and inequality in scholarship, and publishing, and information access.” (2)

More resources on neutrality and historical silences

- Ketelaar, E. “Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection.” *Archival Science* 2, (2002): 221–238. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435623>
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- Solis, Gabriel. “Documenting State Violence: (Symbolic) Annihilation & Archives of Survival.” Texas After Violence Project. Accessed June 7, 2022. <https://texasafterviolence.org/documenting-state-violence-symbolic-annihilation-archives-of-survival/>
- Duff, Wendy M., and Verne Harris. “Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings.” *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 263–85.

2. Bourg, Chris. “The Library is Never Neutral.” In *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, edited by Jessie Stommell and Dorothy Kim, 456-57. Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2018.



STARTING YOUR RESEARCH IN SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



Where do I Start?

Start with your own school's library research guides. Your school will have a research guide related to your field of study. Special collections will be listed there as a resource, as well as specific collections, and other guides, catalogs, and databases to help you search. This link will take you to [UCLA's research guide for the Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library History and Special Collections for the Sciences](#). This link will take you to [UCLA's research guide for Architecture and Landscape Architecture in Special Collections](#).

If you are in California, a great place to start looking for materials is [the Online Archive of California \(OAC\)](#). This site allows you to search the collection guides of over 300 institutions in California.

If you have a specific institution in mind, and they are not listed in the OAC, try going to their website and seeing if there is a page for their archive, library, or special collection. They will either connect you to their own collection guides, finding aids, and digital collections, or a consortium where their holdings are listed.

Primary sources like institutional Press Kits and Fact Sheets are resources with which you can familiarize yourself with contextual information about buildings, as well as terms, subjects, and time periods to help you further search special collection databases. These are especially helpful when doing research on modern buildings and newer spaces or exhibitions.



Other starting points for primary source research are listed below:

- MIT Library Research Guide for Architecture
<https://libguides.mit.edu/architect/special>
- MIT Library Research Guide for Biotechnology
<https://libguides.mit.edu/bioleng>
- Science History Institute Special Collections
<https://www.sciencehistory.org/collections>
- California Revealed
<https://californiarevealed.org>
- Calisphere <https://calisphere.org>



HOW TO SEARCH

Often when you reach a collection guide or database that seems applicable to your research, you are confronted with an empty search bar. How do you search when you don't know what you are looking for?

Before aimlessly browsing, ask what questions do you want to answer with your research? What topics do you want to investigate? Are there periods of time that are of special interest? You can start broadly and as you search, become more specific. Return to your class readings to help spark inspiration.

After establishing answers to any of these questions, think of keywords. These can be general or specific, subjects, titles, and phrases. Come up with as many as possible, including alternates for the same thing. Explore using a thesaurus, wikipedia, or encyclopedia to compile a comprehensive list. Other search terms to start with are names, dates, time periods, styles, places, organizations.

If you are very stuck, nothing is grabbing you, reach out to your professor during office hours. If you have a topic and questions, but are not finding results that move your research further, contact a librarian at your university. Subject librarians and special collection librarians available by email, or through a chat function on the library's website.

Expert Search Functions...

- To narrow down your search, use quotations marks " " around the word or phrase you are searching. This will ensure your results match that word or phrase exactly.
 - Try searching spelling variants based on culture. Like rubbish/garbage, artifact/artefact
 - Use the advanced search function to add more parameters and focus your search. Specify material type as "object" or "archival material/ manuscript or rare book".
 - To broaden your search results, use truncation symbols. Truncation symbols can be added to your search terms to account for various spellings, word endings, and other variables. Different databases use different symbols, the most common are *,?, !, or #.
- Examples:
For a search to return results for both women and woman, search wom*n.
Searching with ?phobia will give you results that end with phobia.



WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN USING SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Accessing Materials

You want to view the materials you've found, but they are not online or the digital surrogates are not giving you the information you need. Digitizing special collections material is a monumental and expensive task, therefore not all materials are going to be online. Most special collections use a system called Aeon to automate requests for materials. It can require a special account. For example, on the [UCLA Special Collections](#) asks users to create an account in order to check materials out to view.

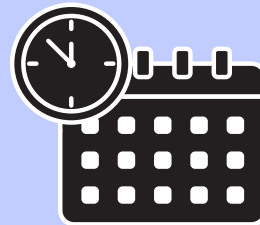
If an institution does not use an automated system to allow users access to their collections, usually an email is provided for researchers to contact librarians and archivists directly.

When you locate the materials you need in the collection guide, catalog, or finding aid take note of identifying information such as...

- the title of an item
- the call number or unique ID
- the date
- and the format

Make sure you reference what you need as specifically as possible when requesting materials.

Checking out or requesting materials in special collections is not the same as using the library. These materials are usually unique and fragile, so they cannot leave the place they are held. By requesting to use materials, you are scheduling an appointment to view and examine these materials in a reading room with the supervision of a librarian or archivist.



It can take a few days for the materials to be pulled, and to schedule an appointment, so give yourself plenty of time to do research with primary sources.



WHAT TO EXPECT CONTINUED...

Reading Room Regulations

Special collections have strict rules. They will likely tell you these rules before you visit, they may even determine whether you can visit at all. In the most severe circumstances, your academic level, purpose of research, as well as letters of recommendation and interviews can be required to visit and use a collection.

The structure and rules of special collections at many institutions comes from a legacy of white supremacy, colonialism, racism, classicism, sexism and professional gatekeeping. So while the freedom and right to access information is a value most information professionals keep, it is important to remember systems of oppression are still at work.



While this is intimidating, special collections are meant to be used. The librarians and archivists want you there, and should encourage and help you in your efforts to do research. The security and care collections are treated with is to ensure that materials can be used for a long time. Do not let any person or any rule convince you otherwise.

Though, in most universities and public institutions, anyone can schedule to do research. The most basic rules of working in a reading room and handling special collections materials are as follows:

- No pens, highlighters, or art materials
- Pencil only
- No food or drink or gum
- With some materials you will wear gloves
- No scanners
- Photos are usually allowed without flash, unless notified. They can only be used for research purposes
- No binders, sticky notes
- Notebooks and personal notes must be approved by staff, writing utensils and paper can be provided to you
- Materials must remain flat and in plain view
- The order of materials must be preserved
- Nothing can be placed on top of materials, except book weights
- Handle everything with care
- Do not removed protective coverings
- Bound volumes must be supported with book cradles, or held in a way where the spine is supported



VISUAL ANALYSIS

The Basics of Visual Analysis

Before analyzing primary sources it is helpful to understand how to do visual analysis, which is a common research method in art history and design related fields. This is also called formal analysis, and can be paired with a functional analysis.



[Here is a longer video where someone is actively analyzing Grand Central Terminal in New York City.](#)



ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

Activity to Engage with Primary Sources

This activity will walk you through the process of analyzing primary sources. Be careful not to leap to inferences (otherwise known as arguments and conclusions). The goal is to help you critically examine objects or architecture, forming analytical data that will back up the arguments about meaning, social, cultural, political implications, that materials communicate. In this activity item, resource, object can easily be replaced with architecture, furniture, system.

Observe

- What are you looking at?
- What are the shapes, lines, colors that stand out?
- What are the materials used?
- What is the content of the item?
- What stands out to you about the item?

Contextualize

- Who is the creator? Producer? Designer? Laborer?
- Is there a date on the item? Are there any markers of time? What was happening in that time period?
- Were all of the elements created at the same time?
- What is the item needed for? How is it used?
- What questions do you have about the item?

Infer

- Who is the intended audience?
- Was the item meant to be shared publicly or privately?
- Based on your observations, how does the item or space make you feel?
- How do your observations contribute to the work?
- What is the significance of the item?
- What message is the creator of the item trying to get across?
- What bias or power dynamic is expressed?
- What is missing, what is not represented in the item?

observe+contextualize=inference

The paper is worn, fraying, and discolored, it smells like mildew + the object was printed in 1673

= This book is really old (and it's

probably been stored improperly)

REFERENCES

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Bourg, Chris. "The Library is Never Neutral." In *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, edited by Jessie Stommell and Dorothy Kim, 456–57. Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2018.

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LINKS

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- Online Archive of California <https://oac.cdlib.org/>
- MIT Library Research Guide for Architecture <https://libguides.mit.edu/architect/special>
- MIT Library Research Guide for Biotechnology <https://libguides.mit.edu/bioleng>
- Science History Institute Special Collections <https://www.sciencehistory.org/collections>
- California Revealed <https://californiarevealed.org>
- Calisphere <https://calisphere.org>
- How To Do Formal Analysis <https://youtu.be/sM2MOyonDsY>
- Formal and Functional Analysis <https://youtu.be/AqGbsMx5Ypc>
- Example of Architectural Analysis https://youtu.be/_b4XQUE_u8o
- USC Special Collections Guide <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/primary-source-literacy--an-introduction/on-materiality?path=analyzing-various-kinds-of-primary-sources>