

Finding Appropriate E-texts

If you're creating a digital edition, you will want to find a good base text to get started with (or you'll need to transcribe it yourself!). How do you identify a good e-text edition?

Characteristics of appropriate e-texts:

1. **Citability.** Beyond the author, do you know the name of the publisher, and the date of the original source used for the e-text? If someone made it digitally available, do you know who that person is?
2. **Pagination.** This is a part of citability, especially for our project goals. Does the e-text contain pagination information? From what edition?
3. **Source.** Who put the digital edition online? What organization? Are they reliable? Have they done this sort of thing before? What editorial practices are they following? Would your professor want to give it to you as a good reading edition? Has it been edited in any strange—or unclear—ways? Can you be confident that it is an accurate representation of the actual book at hand? Find an “about” page on the source website. What details does it contain that help you understand the nature of the source?
4. **Legality.** Can you legally use the e-text, or is it copyrighted? Is the e-text itself legal? That is, should it be online, itself? Look for information about copyright or licensing, and be sure you consider what source the etext came from.
5. **Time of publication.** When was the original source published? Is this digital version a copy of *that* original source, or is it a later edition? If it's a later edition, is that the authoritative edition that scholars or educators typically use? Is it a pirated copy?

Test yourself!

1. This is a less-authoritative e-text. Why? **Note that Project Gutenberg is not always less-authoritative!** <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/151/151-h/151-h.htm> [
2. Here is a slightly more-authoritative e-text. Why? What makes it more and less authoritative? <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43997/the-rime-of-the-ancient-mariner-text-of-1834>
3. Here are two more-authoritative e-texts. Why? What makes them good sources to use as base text for a digital edition?
 - <http://ec2-52-90-79-236.compute-1.amazonaws.com/editions/LB/html/Lb98-b.html>
 - <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/amverse/BAP5379.0001.001?view=toc>