Manuscript Activities You Can Try Right Away

The Short and General Version

**1) Paleography**

**Audience**: first year and up

**Goal**: Learners will investigate how paleography relates to language by learning to recognize letterforms and abbreviations in a medieval manuscript

**Activity**: Give students a transcription of a passage and have them identify the differences between the transcription and what they can actually see on the page. You can let students work in small groups and direct them to think about the following:

* What are the funny letterforms?
* What is abbreviated?
* What kinds of words are abbreviated? Is it whole words or parts of words? Which parts?
* How does writing this way make it easier for the scribe? What are the advantages?

After students have had some time to look at the passage, you can go through the passage pointing out what is strange and asking them why it is strange. You can draw many connections between modern abbreviations.

**2) Transcription**

**Audience**: end of first year and up

**Goal**: Learners will investigate the process of textual transmission by transcribing an authentic text

**Activity**: Assign students in small groups (2-3) to transcribe a small section of text. Have students submit transcriptions for correction. After reviewing corrections have students submit a final transcription along with an analysis of the handwriting (you can have them focus on the questions from activity 1). From here you could also have students present their findings to the class. If you have an illuminated manuscript, it is an excellent opportunity to also have them reflect on how the illuminations relate to the text.

\*If you have a program that has a strong emphasis on translation, you can add a translation component like the project attached\*

**3) Reading**

**Audience**: end of first year/beginning of second year and up

**Goal**: Learners will transcribe and read an authentic text for understanding

**Activity**: Manuscripts offer a great opportunity for active teaching. In the sample attached, the Hedgehog is a good example of the variety of extra resources you can pull in for an activity. Start with a pre-reading activity to introduce terms and even some of the concepts in the text. Work as a class or in small groups to read, comprehend, and/or translate the passage (whatever is appropriate for your classroom!).

**4) Reception**

**Audience**: 3rd year and up

**Goal**: Learners will investigate the reception of Classical texts by comparing a modern edition with the edition of a text in a medieval manuscript

**Activity A**: This activity works best on a text they have already seen and can be used as an extension activity or a review activity. After introducing the basics of paleography and abbreviation, divide students up into groups and assign them short passages to compare the text with a transcription. Focus their investigation on the following questions:

* What are the differences between modern and medieval text: abbreviations, additions, deletions, or substitutions?
* How do the differences change the text as we know it?
* How does the manuscript reflect the knowledge of the scribe who was copying this text?
* How does the manuscript reflect the intended audience?
* How does the manuscript affect our interpretation of the text

You can have students present their findings to each other or submit their findings in a short write up, or both.

**Activity B:** This activity is an alternative extension activity. Instead of looking at the same text in manuscript form, you can have your students look at a commentary of the text or a manuscript with lots of scholia. This project works well with student who have no manuscript experience, but you must be ready to help them decipher the paleography. Project directions and rubrics attached.