

Part I

**WHY TEACH USING
COMMONPLACE BOOKS?**

RESOURCES, MATERIALS, AND IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES FOR INTRODUCING UNDER- GRADUATES TO COMMONPLACING AS PRAXIS

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THIS CHAPTER CONTAINS three separate elements. The first section is a brief introduction to the history and practice of commonplacing and is designed to be used as an assigned reading for undergraduate students. The second section includes models for four in-class activities, and the third section offers a selected annotated bibliography of digitally available manuscript commonplace books and miscellanies.

A Very Short Introduction to Commonplacing

The term “commonplace” is, well, commonplace. We usually use the word to refer to something ubiquitous and expected, often using the term interchangeably with “mundane,” “everyday,” or, indeed “common.” For scholars focused on the history and literature preceding the eighteenth century, this term has a significantly different and more precise meaning. The challenge with defining “commonplace,” whether as noun or verb is that the term has evolved considerably across centuries. Like the act it would eventually end up describing, commonplacing has been adapted and readapted for its context from classical Greece and Rome to medieval encyclopedists to Renaissance humanists to Romantic and modern literati to your Shakespeare professor. But where does it begin? And how did it become what it is now? In this short essay, I trace the origins of commonplaces, the development of commonplacing as a method of both scholastic and humanist knowledge organization in the medieval and early modern periods in Europe, and the importance of commonplaces and commonplacing for modern-day literary and historical study.

Generally, scholars (with varying degrees of specificity) concur that commonplace is the Anglicization of the Latin *locus communis* (*locus* = place or topic, *communis* = common or “in common”), which in turn was an adaptation of the Greek *koinoi topoi*. These terms are directly linked to the prac-

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tice of rhetorical *invention* or the creation of arguments. Ann Moss breaks down the etymology further, explaining that in classical rhetoric, *locus* or “place” refers not so much to physical locations but to conceptual parts of argumentation. The common place (singular) could be a particular passage that dealt with a general point that did not relate specifically to the topic at hand but could be applicable across arguments; or, commonplaces (plural, *loci communes*) could be an actual topic or subject that a speaker could draw on for their speeches or compositions.¹ In the first definition, we see the use of a commonplace as a well-known concrete example that can be deployed in multiple scenarios. This definition fits best with our modern understanding of commonplace as “common knowledge.” The second definition is a bit further removed. Aristotle, in *De Rhetorica* (or, *On Rhetoric*), identifies five common topics: definition, comparison, circumstance, relation, and authority. These topics link to specific questions surrounding the focus of a speech and serve as prompts for rhetorical invention or generating content for a speech.

Aristotle’s early definitions differ considerably both from how we use commonplaces and how medieval and Renaissance writers used them. As David Parker reminds us, “Few medieval works come to us as the sole inhabitants of their manuscripts.”² That is, whereas we tend to read books or stories as stand-alone texts, medieval writers tended to compile and collect fragments for their own use. One of the most popular medieval compilations was called a *florilegium* (plural: *florilegia*), literally a collection of flowers. These manuscripts contained extracts from predominately religious sources, most notably from the Bible and its many commentaries, but other classical sources and *sententiae* make regular appearances. Examples of *florilegia* include early-fourteenth-century Thomas of Ireland’s *Manipulus Florum* (“A Handful of Flowers”). The act of extracting and copying from an authoritative source helped commit the extract to memory.

Commonplacing in the early modern period differs somewhat from medieval commonplacing primarily in that who is doing the commonplacing starts to expand. Whereas medieval commonplacers are likely to be educated men focused on religious life, early modern commonplacers include larger economic swaths of both men and women who commonplace not only religious texts but also literary texts, recipes, and aphorisms, depending on the interest of the compiler. This shift is due to a variety of factors, but two

¹ Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 3.

² David Parker, “The Importance of the Commonplace Book: London 1450–1550,” *Manuscripta* 40 (1996): 29–48 at 29.

of the main ones worth noting in European thought are the development of Renaissance Humanism and the related rise of Protestantism.

This method was particularly popular among Renaissance humanists such as Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives, and Philip Melancthon, and in turn it was passed down to schoolmasters. Though England was a latecomer to this intellectual movement, by the mid-1500s the majority of England's schools followed a humanist curriculum emphasizing careful, rigorous study of classical literature. Though individual humanists would have their preferred methods of commonplacing, which they explained in great detail, the general process of commonplacing is fairly straightforward, as historian Ann Blair explains:

In this method of reading...one selects passages of interest for the rhetorical turns of phrase, the dialectical arguments, or the factual information they contain; one then copies them out in a notebook, the commonplace book, kept handy for the purpose, grouping them under appropriate headings to facilitate later retrieval and use, notably in composing prose of one's own.³

Commonplacing then serves as a notetaking practice, albeit one slightly more involved than what we usually do. You might recall suggestions for notetaking—such as the Cornell method—that involve having two columns of material, one for general notes and another for identifying specific themes or cross-references. This practice, along with many others, evolves from commonplacing. In the following paragraphs, I detail this process using examples from seventeenth-century commonplace books.

The first step in commonplacing is selecting the “thing” worth copying. You may notice parallels to this process when determining what to quote from a particular article or primary text when writing an essay. What counts as worthwhile is unique to the compiler, though we can note a few major trends. Most notably, compilers tend to focus on the final purpose of their commonplace book. Certain genres, usually more prestigious genres from classical literature or higher-brow English poetry, tend to appear far more frequently than lower-brow genres such as ballads or commercial drama, especially in pre-1700 commonplace books. One of the most common metaphors for the act of compiling large amounts of information and organizing it, the honeybee collecting nectar and storing it in honey combs, serves as a representative example. The metaphor endures at the beginning of many commonplace books, including Pastorius's large manuscript book which he

3 Ann Blair, “Humanist Methods in Natural Philosophy: The Commonplace Book,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992): 541–51 at 541.

appropriately titles the *Bee Hive* (begun 1696)⁴ and in Anthony Munday's dedicatory epistle to John Bodenham in Bodenham's printed commonplace book, *The Muses Garden* (1610):

Like to the Bee, thou every where dist rome,
 Spending thy spirits in laborious care:
 And nightly brought'st thy gathr'd hon[e]y home,
 As a true worke-man in so great affaire.⁵

After selecting what was worth quoting, the compiler would copy the quotation into a book and label the extract under a heading. There are a few options for this process that were available and encouraged in early English schools. Drawing from Erasmus's extensive instructions in *De Copia*, Charles Hoole instructs English schoolmasters to have their students "pick out the phrases, and more elegant words as they go along, and write them in a Paperbooke and transcribe what sentences they meet withal into their Common-place-book."⁶ In these instructions, students perform at least two rounds of copying, with at least one transcription being in a book already prepared with listed and organized topic headings. Others, like Obadiah Walker in his treatise on education, tells his readers to write all quotations down "confusedly" and place organizing headings in the margins that cross-reference appropriate commonplace headings in an index:

The best way that I know of ordering them is to write down confusedly what in reading you think observable...Leaving in your book a considerable margin, marking every observation upon the page, as well as the pages themselves, with 1, 2, 3, &c. Afterwards, at your leisure, set down in the margin the page of your index, where the head to which such sentence relates: and so enter into the index under such a head the page of your note-book, wherein such sentence is stored...Your index must be well furnished with

4 Francis Daniel Pastorius, *His Hive, Melliotrophium Alvear or, Rusca Apium, Begun Anno Do[m]ini or, in the year of Christian Account 1696* ([Philadelphia], 1696–1865). Manuscript. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, MS Codex 726. Available digitally through Penn Libraries, *Penn in Hand: Selected Manuscripts*, http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/medren/detail.html?id=MEDREN_9924875473503681.

5 Anthony Munday, "To his louing and approoued good friend M. Iohn Bodenham," in *The Garden of the Muses. Quem referent Musa viuēt dum robor a tellus, Dum cælum stellas, dum vehet amnis aquas*, compiled by John Bodenham, 2nd ed. (London by E. A. for John Tap, 1610), A2r. In the quotation above, I have normalized the long S and u/v, but have otherwise retained original spellings. Any insertions for clarity are indicated in brackets.

6 Charles Hoole, *A New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching Schoole, in Four Small Treatises* (London: Printed by J. T. for Andrew Crook, 1661), 174, H4^v.

heads; yet, not too much multiplied, lest they cause confusion. Your own experience will continually be supplying what is defective.⁷

In both instances, Hoole and Walker instruct their students to cast a wide net when looking for quotations and to impose an organizational structure upon those quotations. Ultimately, the process of organizing the material, whether via marginal notes and an index or extracts under already-present headings, is what distinguishes the commonplace book from a miscellany or general compendium of notes and quotations. The quoted material itself does not impact whether or not the collection is a commonplace book. Rather, the commonplace book is defined by its use of organizational headings and categorization of material under those compiler-assigned headings. This act ends up being one of the more labour-intensive aspects of commonplacing, both physically and mentally. It is one thing to read and note useful information—it is quite another to categorize it in logical and useful ways.

While organization themes varied according to individual compilers, we can determine a few major trends. Later commonplace books, especially those from the eighteenth century, used an alphabetical scheme, though the individual entries under a category were not themselves alphabetically ordered as the extracts were continually added. Frequently, but not exclusively, in older manuscript commonplace books, the organization tends to be hierarchal, starting with God and moving down the Great Chain of Being, or oppositional, meaning that opposites were often placed next to each other. Bodenham's printed commonplace book follows this schema, beginning with God and moving through Heaven and several abstract, heavenly virtues before reaching "Love," which is immediately followed by "Hate." Once it finishes with these abstract virtues, the headings deal with concrete matters like "Of Kings and Princes" and things relevant to relationships among humans like honour, war, and patience. Interestingly, "Women" receive their own category, which is immediately followed by headings with more negative contexts like "ambition," "treason," and "sloth." The book concludes, appropriately enough, with "Death." Other books following this scheme might also include sections on angels and demons, placed near each other, but between God and Man. This organizational structure bespeaks not only of a desire to categorize, but also suggests a hierarchical structure for early modern thought.

7 Obadiah Walker, *Of Education Especially of Young Gentlemen* (Oxford, 1683), 138. Quoted in Earle Havens, "'Of Common Places, or Memorial Books': An Anonymous Manuscript on Commonplace Books and the Art of Memory in Seventeenth-Century England," *Yale University Library Gazette* 76 (2002): 136–53 at 142.

Without even knowing about commonplacing, we continue this proud tradition of categorizing material with headings. Think, for instance, of Twitter hashtags and other methods of digital tagging that evoke the organizational component of commonplacing. On a smaller scale, providing tags in blogs allows writers to link seemingly disparate posts in their larger corpus, allowing readers the ability to (theoretically) more easily locate similar content. On the larger scale, hashtags in Twitter allow users to connect material across several authors—it's commonplacing on a global scale. We see these methods at play academically and professionally as well, especially in terms of information management. Libraries, for instance, have long been categorizing information according to predetermined lists like the Library of Congress System or the Dewey Decimal system. Taxonomies of different flora and fauna find their origins in Linnaeus's commonplacing. Furthermore, social science researchers use "coding"—identifying and marking important portions of usually qualitative information with categorical markers relevant to their research question—to analyse and compare their raw data.

The commonplacener's act of categorization and, in many instances, re-copying materials into new books, provided another method of internalizing their reading. Thomas Fuller, a prolific doctor of divinity and later Chaplain Extraordinary to Charles II, uses a martial metaphor: "A Common-place book contains many Notions in garison [*sic*], whence the owner may draw out an army into the field on competent writing."⁸ Fuller's description captures how physical technology (in his case, a handwritten notebook) may be deployed in the service of memory, which in turn relates to more physical conceptions of memory as a large house with many rooms.

Finally, the commonplace book and its creation was meant to facilitate retrieval, whether for creating new works of literature, developing natural philosophy, or forming arguments. At its core, commonplacing entails not only memorizing lines, but placing them in some sort of mental category for easy recovery. In his large, three-volume manuscript commonplace book begun in 1696 in Philadelphia, Pastorius writes in his *incipit* (Latin for "beginning") to the first volume:

8 Thomas Fuller, *The Holy State and the Profane State*, (Cambridge: Printed by Roger Daniel for John Williams, 1642), 176, quoted in Peter Beal, "'Notions in Garrison': The Seventeenth-Century Commonplace Book," in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985–1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies and Renaissance English Text Society, 1993), 131–47 at 131.

For as much as our Memory is not Capable to retain all remarkable Words, Phrases, Sciences or Matters of Moment, which we do hear and read, it becomes every good Scholar to have a Common-Place Book, & therein to treasure up what ever deserves his Notice &c. And to the end that he may readily know, both whither to dispose and Insert each particular, as also when upon Occasion to find the same again, &c. he ought to make himself an Alphabetical Index, like that of this Bee-Hive.⁹

Pastorius goes on to directly will the large document to his sons, whom he hopes will use the commonplace book and add their own knowledge to it. He also repeats this incipit at the beginning of the third volume, which contains the index for the first two volumes of material. In these lines, Pastorius extolls the benefits of outsourcing memorization to physical technology and illustrates how the commonplace book is only truly useful to the compiler if he can actually locate the material within it and use that material in a new, creative context. For Pastorius, this organizational tool is the “Alphabetical Index,” which takes up nearly thirty pages in the third volume of the commonplace book. For others, organization takes the form of multiple columns featuring pre-generated headings.

Once we understand that commonplacing was a major method of understanding various bits of knowledge, we can start to see the many ways it came to impact an early modern’s understanding of different kinds of evidence. Indeed, as Lorraine Daston emphasizes, “ways of reading, absorbed at a young age and constantly practiced, may supply the templates for other ways of making sense of objects quite distinct from the manuscript or printed page—the morphology of a plant, the trajectory of a comet, the slide under the microscope, the ‘reading’ of an instrument.”¹⁰ Simply put, commonplacing methods not only affect literary knowledge production but also scientific knowledge production. In his discussion of philosopher John Locke’s “new” method of commonplacing, Michael Stolberg explains that by the end of the seventeenth century, the practice “was widely used also by physicians and natural philosophers as an important means to collect and organize excerpts as well as personal observations and empirical knowledge acquired from others.”¹¹ As a method, commonplacing does not require literary examples or even specific quotations in order to be effective.

9 Pastorius, *His Hive, Melliotrophium Alvear or, Rusca Apium*.

10 Lorraine Daston, “Taking Note(s),” *Isis* 95 (2004): 443–48 at 444.

11 Michael Stolberg, “John Locke’s ‘New Method of Making Common-Place Books’: Tradition, Innovation, and Epistemic Effects,” *Early Science and Medicine* 19 (2014): 448–70 at 451.

We still engage in this same kind of transformative practice today by taking popular quotes and updating their context. For instance, consider the adage “To thine own self be true.” A good, twenty-first century reader could read this phrase and say, “Yes. Being authentic and honest with oneself is a good thing.” A savvy reader who knows quotations would add, “Yes, that’s Shakespeare! *Hamlet*, I believe.” And both readers are correct; however, once we look at the context of this line, we learn that it comes from Polonius, the pompous old man character who is spilling forth several wise-sounding sayings without any real understanding of what they mean. Indeed, “To thine own self be true” is also a Renaissance commonplace. What do we make of this? We are operating at several removes, with each iteration adding a different and often unintended meaning from the writer who came before. When studying the dramatic and poetic works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, therefore, we should be attuned to the ways common ideas, phrases, images, and metaphors were widely available. Commonplac-ing throughout the centuries also informs us of different practices of reading that we can apply today. Specifically, when writers commonplace, they take a quotation or reference out of context and place it into their own work.

Related to this network of meanings, commonplaceing makes clear that early moderns had significantly different understandings of what counted as copying and creativity. In our time and Western context, copying another person’s ideas, let alone their exact words, and incorporating that information in our own texts without attribution would be considered plagiarism, an offense punishable by varying degrees of severity depending on the stakes and the disposition of the adjudicator. For early moderns (and for their classic and medieval predecessors), this was not an issue. Re-deploying common sayings in new contexts or playing off accrued meanings was a mark of creativity and cleverness.

At its core, commonplaceing is a method of organizing information across several sources to make it easier for the organizer to deploy in whatever circumstances they find themselves to be in. Whether that be a Roman orator preparing for debate, a fifteenth-century schoolteacher designing lecture notes, a Renaissance playwright drawing inspiration from Ovid or English history, or a modern-day student compiling information for a research paper (or perhaps making dank memes for the lulz while they avoid writing a research paper), methods of commonplaceing endure. As the information moves from person to person, it is transformed and absorbs new and complex meanings. Fundamentally, commonplaceing changes not just *what* you know, but *how* you know it.

COMMONPLACING IN THE CLASSROOM

AN IN-CLASS ACTIVITY GUIDE FOR INSTRUCTORS

THE COMMONPLACE BOOK is a popular long-term assignment for many teachers in English Studies for good reason—commonplacing assignments are often deployed as a way to encourage students to keep up with assigned reading (similar to journaling, short reflection papers, discussion questions, or forum posts) as well as develop some long-term thoughts that synthesize the many readings.¹² However, for those of us partway through a semester or quarter, assigning another long-term project on top of a required final paper is challenging if not outright impossible if we do not want a full-fledged mutiny on our hands. Fortunately, there are ways to incorporate commonplacing methods on a smaller scale in day-to-day meetings. In this section, I offer multiple suggestions for in-class, hands-on assignments that utilize commonplace books and commonplacing methods that instructors may adapt into their classes at any point of the semester.

Before determining which in-class activities will work for your students, first decide what you want the students to gain from commonplacing.

- Do you want your students to understand commonplacing as a historical method of reading and writing?
- Do you want your students to see how adaptation works in the early modern period?
- Do you want them to develop literary or historical research methods?
- Do you want them to read their assigned texts more closely?

All of these options are valid and worth pursuing during class time, but there are distinct ways to approach them. Individual classes will also vary in their learning preferences just as the professor will vary in theirs. In the activities below, I have aimed to address several common learning outcomes using multiple modes of student engagement and instruction. As a rule, all activities require extended engagement with at least one text (whether a

12 In addition to other chapters in this collection, see Kate Ozment, “Teaching Manuscript Circulation,” *Sammelband, Women in Book History Bibliography*, August 1, 2018, www.womensbookhistory.org/sammelband/2018/8/1/teaching-manuscript-circulation, and Callan Davies, “Commonplace Books: A Classroom Introduction,” *Tympan and Frisket*, August 29, 2013, <https://tympanandfrisket.wordpress.com/2013/08/29/commonplace-books-a-classroom-introduction>.

commonplace book or other instructor-assigned reading), manipulation of some physical object (even if it's just their pencil, a tablet, or laptop), and discussion in small and large group settings. In these activities, the role of the professor is the role of a guide who provides materials and coaching whereas the students take on the majority of intellectual labour once the activity has begun. For those of us whose courses are already stuffed to bursting with lectures or other activities, these activities may instead be used as individual or group homework assignments.

ACTIVITY ONE — Commonplacing for Themes I

In this activity, your students will practise a hands-on method of commonplacing by selecting quotations relating to the major themes of the text(s) you have assigned for that day's reading. This activity is suitable for students at all undergraduate levels.

Required Materials

- Access to assigned primary text (Student and Instructor)/
- Technology for sharing student-generated documents (Google Docs or chalk/white board)/

Directions

- Identify (either in collaboration with the class or on your own to give to students) major themes in the text. Reduce these themes into keywords like “Love, Revenge, Death, Parent, Justice,” etc.
- Place students in pairs or small groups.
- Assign groups a thematic keyword OR have groups select their own keyword.
- You may also want to assign multiple groups the same word for ease of comparison.
- Task students to locate, copy, and cite examples of their keyword onto a notebook or electronic document.
- For longer class sessions, briefly model how to locate examples and how to cite material.
- Assign groups to compose a short, written analysis comparing the quotations and examining how the thematic keyword changes or

develops in meaning across their extracts. This write-up may be collected as a part of a participation grade or serve as a guide for final discussion.

- Discuss, in large class format, each group’s analysis.

ACTIVITY TWO — Commonplacing for Themes II

In this activity, students practise developing their own thematic categories based on a series of quotations they have either selected for themselves or received from the instructor. While this activity can also be conducted digitally, students report that they like manipulating the physical notecards. This activity is particularly suitable for lower-level classes who are learning about quoting and synthesizing materials.

Required Materials

- Copy of Assigned Reading.
- Notecards or Slips of Scrap Paper.

Directions

- Optional: Prior to class, locate ten relevant quotations from the day’s reading. These quotations should have some thematic overlap. These extracts may also come from a previous reading assignment.
- Introduce students to quotation and why one would want to quote as opposed to paraphrase.
- Task students to locate a number of useful quotations from the past reading assignments. They should copy these down on slips of paper or notecards.
- Review a sample of the quotations that the students gathered either in conversation with a small group or as a large class. Note particularly good or interesting extracts and ask students to explain why they selected what they did.
- Share, if available and if students are having difficulty generating content, the quotations you shared prior to class. Students should copy these onto their notecards or scrap paper.
- In small groups (3–4 works well for this activity), assign students to cluster their quotations according to a key word or idea.

- Optional: Offer students a sample category or two to get them started if they're having trouble.
- Have students take a photo of their clustered notecards and compose a short explanation of their categories, why they placed each quote where they did, what they did with “miscellaneous” quotations, and what interesting things they noticed. This written assignment may be used as a participation grade and/or serve as a script for a small-group share.
- Optional: Review the idea of commonplacing, highlighting popular categories from Renaissance humanists like Erasmus and how those commonplace headings compare with the headings the students generated. What is the difference when you are given categories versus creating them yourself?
- Optional: Discuss, at end of class or during a later class period, how this assignment prepares students to write essays by gathering and arranging textual evidence.

ACTIVITY THREE — Introduction to Paleography

Reading early hands, especially early modern secretary hand, is a challenge for scholars at any level. In this activity, students practise transcribing short extracts. This activity is intended for upper-level majors and graduate students, but it may be adapted for lower-levels by using shorter extracts and easier hands.

Required Materials

- Access to multiple digital or hard copy (if available) commonplace extracts.

Directions

- Prior to class, select extracts from a manuscript commonplace book or miscellany (see list below). These extracts should be of varying levels of difficulty.
- Share copies or links of the selected extracts to the class.
- Introduce students to paleography and early hands, noting common confusing letter forms like the long “s” and minims.
- Practise transcribing an extract as a large group.

- Task students, individually or in groups, to transcribe an extract. This can be an extract from the same writer as the practice transcription, or an extract of the same poem or variations of a poem or song across various books.¹³
- Optional: Assign students to create their own cheat-sheet of letter forms that their writer uses.
- Compare transcriptions, noting challenges and, if using different copies of the same poem, specific differences.

ACTIVITY FOUR — Cross-Referencing Literary Extracts

IN THIS ACTIVITY, your students will practise paleography and internet research as they compare dramatic and poetic extracts. For Shakespeare courses and early modern courses in general, I recommend *Hesperides* (for access information, see the Annotated Bibliography) as it contains extracts from his plays as well as Sidney’s *Arcadia*. This activity is best suited for survey-style courses at upper levels.

Required Materials

- Access to a commonplace book or verse miscellany that contains extracts from or related to course content.
- Student web access via laptop computer, tablet, or phone.
- Technology for sharing student-generated documents.

Directions

- Identify a commonplace heading that contains several literary extracts prior to class.
- Share the link to the leaf featuring the desired commonplace heading to students via email, CMS, or printed handout.
- Assign individual students or groups a quoted extract.

13 The Union First Line Index of English Verse, housed at the Folger Shakespeare Library, is an indispensable tool for locating manuscripts containing copies of poems. The Index is available at <https://firstlines.folger.edu/search.php>. Common poems that work well for this assignment include James Shirley’s “The Glories of Our Blood [or Birth] and State,” Ben Jonson’s “On Shakespeare,” and Walter Raleigh’s “[What is our life?]”

- Task students to do the following:
 - Transcribe the quotation.
 - Locate, using Internet searching skills, where the quotation appears.
 - Compare the extract to its source. This may be done in writing, in discussion, or both.
 - Upload their transcription to a shared document such as Google Docs or shared Wiki.
 - Compare, as a class, the relationship among the extracts as well as any noticeable differences between the quotations.

ACTIVITY FIVE — Analysing [Digital] Commonplace Books

IN AN IDEAL world, all students would be able to examine a physical, extant commonplace book or miscellany; however, given the limited availability of such resources, we can turn to the next best thing: freely available digital versions. In this activity, students (either alone, in pairs, or groups, depending on the class and instructor’s preference), locate and analyse a commonplace book or miscellany available on the web through various libraries. I have included a curated selection of ten appropriate manuscripts in the Annotated Bibliography. This activity encourages digital literacy, bibliography, and introductory archival methods.

Required Materials

- Access to digital (or physical) commonplace books or miscellanies.
- Activity Handout.
- Ruler with centimeters.
- Scrap paper.

Directions

- Introduce students to commonplace books and miscellanies, noting particularly organizing features like headings and indices as well as their purpose.
- Assign or have students select a commonplace book to explore.
- Provide students with handout below.

- Discuss findings and link to course topic.
- Analysing Commonplace Books Handout.
- Use your digital commonplace book to answer the following questions.
 - What is the provenance of your book? (Who were the compilers and/or owners?)
 - How large is your commonplace book?
 - What are the dimensions (in centimeters or inches)?
 - How many pages or leaves does the book have?
- Using scrap paper and a rule, measure and re-create the size of the book. Attach this to your handout.
- Browse your book. How many different “hands” (that is, scripts or handwriting styles) do you see? What are some differences between the hands?
- What organizational apparatus did the compiler(s) include?
- If your book has headings, what are some examples of headings?
- If your book has headings, what relationships can you identify between them?
- Attempt to transcribe one or two short entries below:
- Based on your analysis, how might this commonplace book have been used?

SELECTIVE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF DIGITALLY AVAILABLE MANUSCRIPT COMMONPLACE BOOKS AND MISCELLANIES

BELOW IS A curated selection of manuscript commonplace books and miscellanies that are freely available on the web. While this list is hardly exhaustive, it seeks to provide instructors with a variety of options to choose from for their classes. For instructors looking for even more resources, I suggest examining the online repositories noted below. Three particularly useful locations for further digitized material include University of Pennsylvania's *Penn in Hand*, the Folger Shakespeare Library's *LUNA*, and Princeton University Library's *Digital PUL*; see also Laura Estill's Appendix A in this volume. I included books from across the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries that include aspects of pedagogical interest, including physical features; special topics like medicine, fishing, or magic; and/or compilers/owners of historical note. The entries are organized chronologically with the acknowledgment that such texts are difficult to date.

Compiler: Unknown

Title: [Commonplace book and recipe book]

Date: Post-1567

Physical Location: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Collection: Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts

Call Number: UPenn Ms. Codex 823

Online Location: *Penn in Hand: Selected Manuscripts*

Web Link: <http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/d/medren/9929766543503681>

Description: This sixteenth-century English's manuscript's 43 leaves contain extracts from the Psalms, a deathbed statement of Lady Katherine Gray, recipes, and an alphabetized index on folios 9v to 12v. The handwriting, while consistent, uses a variation of secretary hand and will be challenging for novice students of paleography.

Compiler: Mrs. Carlyon

Title: *A book of such medicines as have been approved by the special practice of Mrs. Carlyon*

Date: ca. 1606

Physical Location: Folger Shakespeare Library

Call Number: Va.388; formerly Folger MS Add 334

Online Location: LUNA

Web Link: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/d5781o>

Catalogue Description: Early seventeenth-century receipt (or recipe) book of medicines that is organized by subject and features a table of contents at the beginning of the text.

Compiler: Unknown

Title: Commonplace book of poetry

Date: Seventeenth Century

Physical Location: Princeton University Library

Collection: Robert H. Taylor collection of English and American literature, 1280s–1950

Call Number: RTC01 (no. 36)

Online Location: Digital PUL, dpul.princeton.edu

Web Link: <https://dpul.princeton.edu/catalog/0z7090076>

Catalogue Description: Verse miscellany that includes content from printed works by Rochester and Dryden. Several selections focus on English political turmoil as well as bawdy material. Physical features of note include multiple hands, the use of pre-made manuscript lines, and the use of red ink, primarily for titles of early entries. The handwriting is suitable for intermediate students of paleography, though instructors will want to watch for common manuscript elisions and abbreviations.

Compiler: John Evans

Title: *Hesperides, or, The Muses garden*

Date: ca. 1655–1659

Physical Location: Folger Shakespeare Library

Call Number: V.b.93

Online Location: LUNA

Web Link: <http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/7n3p1d>

Description: This massive 900-page manuscript folio is the largest known copy of John Evans's unpublished anthology, *Hesperides, or The Muses Garden*. Organized by alphabetized subject headings, this manuscript includes quotations from Elizabethan and Stuart drama as well as Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*. The hand can be slightly difficult to read, but the material tends to be very familiar to undergraduates studying early modern literature.

Compiler: Nathaniel Bridges (creator); George Weare Braikenridge and Daniel B. Fearing (former owners)

Title: *Commonplace book: on angling*

Date: 1694–1717

Physical Location: Houghton Library, Harvard University

Call Number: MS Eng 1490

Online Location: Open Collections Program at Harvard University

Web Link: <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL.HOUGH:3392037>

Description: This delightful 250-page early eighteenth-century commonplace book compiles various treatises on fishing, organized alphabetically with categories including “Of the Carp” and other fish, and angling techniques and tools.

Compiler: Francis Daniel Pastorius

Title: *Francis Daniel Pastorius, His Hive, Melliotrophium Alvear or, Rusca Apium, Begun Anno Do[m]i[n]i or, in the year of Christian Account 1696.* Also known as “The Beehive Manuscript.”

Date: 1696–1865

Physical Location: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Call Number: UPenn Ms. Codex 726

Online Location: *Penn in Hand: Selected Manuscripts*

Web Link: http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/medren/detail.html?id=MEDREN_9924875473503681

Description: This three-volume manuscript codex of 478 leaves contains the commonplace book and index of Francis Daniel Pastorius for his two sons. Composed in Philadelphia near the beginning of the eighteenth century, the handwriting, while small, is precise and readable. Contents, according to the catalogue description, include “inscriptions, epitaphs, proverbs, poetry, Biblical citations, theological citations, quotations, and a list of books he read or knew, copies of letters, and notes on science, useful herbs and other plants.”

Compiler: Unknown

Title: Receipt book, ca. 1700.

Date: ca. 1700

Physical Location: Folger Shakespeare Library

Call Number: E.a.4

Online Location: LUNA

Web Link: <http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/nv8831>

Description: Miscellany with Latin commonplaces and medical recipes. The text contains several distinct hands of varying difficulty.

Compiler: Thomas Jefferson

Title: Literary commonplace Book

Date: 1758–1772

Physical Location: Library of Congress

Collection: The Thomas Jefferson Papers at the Library of Congress

Call Number: Microfilm Reel: 059, Series 5: Commonplace Books

Online Location: Library of Congress

Web Link: www.loc.gov/resource/mtj5.059_0379_0487/

Description: Unlike the other manuscripts in this bibliography, Thomas Jefferson's commonplace books (both this one and his legal commonplace book, also available through the Library of Congress) are available as digitized microfilm. Jefferson's literary commonplace book does not contain noticeable categories, but it does contain considerable quotations in Greek, English, and Latin. His hand is fairly legible for twenty-first-century students, but the microfilm scans occasionally cut parts of words in the gutter.

Compiler: Charles Rainsford

Title: [Notes on cabala]

Date: ca. 1783

Physical Location: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Call Number: UPenn Ms. Codex 1702

Online Location: *Penn in Hand: Selected Manuscripts*

Web Link: <http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/d/medren/9962935863503681>

Description: This eighteenth-century codex contains a pasted copy of a 1783 print edition of *A New Common-place Book in which the Plan Recommend and Practised by John Locke, Esq. is enlarged and improved*, a partially completed index template, and several entries dealing with magic and cabala. The hand is in a cursive script that should be legible to students familiar with modern cursive.

Compiler: Jonathan Bayard Smith, 1742–1812

Title: Commonplace book

Date: Eighteenth-Century

Physical Location: Princeton University Library

Collection: Treasures of the Manuscripts Division

Call Number: C0938 no. 481

Online Location: Digital PUL, dpul.princeton.edu

Web Link: <https://dpul.princeton.edu/catalog/0r9676951>

Description: Another American commonplace book, this manuscript belonged to an eighteenth-century student at Princeton University (then the College of New Jersey). Smith's hand is fairly readable throughout. The manuscript contains marbled paper wrappers, doodles and initials, and multiple cross-outs.