

# ENCODING EARLY MODERN COMMONPLACE BOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM

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EARLY MODERN COMMONPLACE books and miscellanies, those important artifacts of literary and textual culture, reflect historical tastes, attitudes, and learning practices.<sup>1</sup> This chapter uses the broad definition of commonplace book as a volume consisting primarily of commonplaces, that is, “well-phrased sayings that express a pearl of wisdom.”<sup>2</sup> For centuries, readers copied passages into their notebooks: some, commonplace books, filled primarily with textual excerpts and commonplaces; others, miscellanies, filled with receipts (recipes), poems, and other textual bits and bobs. As Eric Rasmussen and Ian H. De Jong explain, “Commonplace books are rich with historical evidence, shedding light on individual readers’ habits

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1 For more on the importance of commonplace books and their role in understanding literary history, see Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Peter Beal, “Notions in Garrison: The Seventeenth-Century Commonplace Book,” in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Texts Society*, 1993, ed. W. Speed Hill (Binghamton: Renaissance English Texts Society, 1993), 131–47. On commonplaces and the history of thought, see Joan Marie Lechner, *Renaissance Concept of the Commonplaces* (New York: Pageant, 1962) and Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

2 Laura Estill, “Commonplacing Readers,” in *Shakespeare and Textual Studies*, ed. Margaret Jane Kidnie and Sonia Massai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 149–62 at 149. Not all manuscripts described in this chapter are organized by commonplace headings, which, by Beal’s definition, are an important component of commonplace books. See Peter Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology 1450–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

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of mind, the cultural permeation of different types of literature and dates of composition”; they note that “Some commonplace books were printed, but this was primarily a manuscript tradition.”<sup>3</sup> As manuscripts, that is, handwritten documents, many commonplace books and miscellanies exist only in one copy, which can make finding and accessing these important textual objects challenging. Ongoing digitization and transcription efforts have opened new avenues for researching early modern manuscript miscellanies and commonplace books and offered an expanded corpus for our studies. This chapter explores how university students can contribute to making commonplace books and other manuscripts accessible to a public audience by transcribing and encoding their contents.

As the other chapters in this collection detail, commonplacing is a long-standing pedagogical practice;<sup>4</sup> indeed, many of the works collected here show the benefits of having students create their own commonplace books.<sup>5</sup> Reading and analysing historic commonplace books can offer a productive learning experience.<sup>6</sup> This chapter demonstrates how the rigorous reading practices encouraged by transcribing and encoding these manuscripts can lead to original student research on commonplace books as well as a better understanding of early modern literature and culture.

Literature students might be surprised to be asked to encode selections from a manuscript, which is why this assignment focuses on exigence: why manuscripts? why digital? why us? This scaffolded assignment encourages students to build the appropriate skillsets, from paleography to text encoding using the TEI (Text Encoding Initiative), while also fostering the criti-

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**3** Eric Rasmussen and Ian H. De Jong, “A–Z of Key Terms and Concepts,” in *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Textual Studies*, ed. Lukas Erne (London: Arden, 2021), 286–319 at 293.

**4** See, for instance, this volume’s Introduction and the chapter by Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt.

**5** Beyond the essays in this volume, see also Joanne Nystrom Janssen, “Teaching Students to Imagine Nineteenth-Century British Readers,” *CEA Critic* 77 (2015): 306–12; Paula Carbone, “Using Commonplace Books to Help Students Develop Multiple Perspectives,” *English Journal* 99 (2010): 63–69, which focuses on high school classes but is equally appropriate for post-secondary instruction; and Vimala Pasupathi, “The Commonplace Assignment,” *The Journal of Interactive Technology & Pedagogy*, March 11, 2014, <https://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/the-commonplace-book-assignment/>, and her reflection in this volume. See also Colleen Kennedy’s detailed “Creating a Commonplace Book” assignment, available at [https://docdrop.org/download\\_annotation\\_doc/Creating-a-Commonplace-Book---Kennedy-Colleen-E\\_-0r3r1.pdf](https://docdrop.org/download_annotation_doc/Creating-a-Commonplace-Book---Kennedy-Colleen-E_-0r3r1.pdf).

**6** See, for instance, Alison Harper’s chapter in this volume.

cal thinking required to explicate an early modern commonplace book or to understand a digital resource. At the end of this assignment, students reflected on how digital scholarly resources are created, what kinds of questions they can ask of scholarly resources, why we transcribe and encode manuscripts, and which manuscripts should be encoded in the future. This chapter concludes by considering the stakes and ethics of publishing student encoding projects as part of a larger digital project (in this case, *DEX: A Database of Dramatic Extracts*).<sup>7</sup>

Transcribing, encoding, and analysing early modern commonplace books and miscellanies is, ultimately, a lot of work—but it is one kind of work we do as literary scholars. As this chapter outlines, adopting this assignment, like many new assignments, requires a great deal of instructor outlay, such as a course redesign to fit into an existing course, or, at the very least, extra preparation. The benefits are that this assignment equips students to undertake original research and make a genuine contribution to scholarship, and it helps them ask questions of the digital projects they use.

I have taught variations on this assignment in multiple formats: as a three-hour workshop for English graduate students, as final project for an undergraduate independent study, and as a midterm assignment in an undergraduate class of English majors.<sup>8</sup> I will briefly describe the first two classroom contexts before spending the bulk of this chapter on the undergraduate class. These three contexts demonstrate that this assignment can be used with different levels of students and within different time constraints, which, of course, will lead to different learning outcomes. To draw on Bloom's taxonomy of learning outcomes: this assignment can be used to help students achieve knowledge of new fields, to apply that knowledge (with transcription and encoding), and to evaluate and analyse texts and resources using a previously unfamiliar critical lens.

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**7** Laura Estill and Beatrice Montedoro, eds., *DEX: A Database of Dramatic Extracts*, Iter, dex.digitalearlymodern.com.

**8** At the time I was teaching these classes, I was at a large research-intensive state school, Texas A&M University. I look forward to teaching a version of this assignment at my current school, St. Francis Xavier University (Nova Scotia, Canada), a small undergraduate-focused institution.

## Encoding Manuscripts in a Range of Classes: From a Single Workshop to a Special Topics Course

The graduate workshop on encoding manuscripts was part of a class on early modern literature and culture with a focus on drama. This three-hour workshop introduced some students to encoding, and for others it built on their existing digital humanities expertise. For some students, it was a paleographical trial-by-ordeal, whereas others were confident reading early modern handwriting. In class, we began by transcribing, as a group, two commonplaces from a facsimile of London, British Library, Add MS 18044. The two couplets we transcribed were copied from Samuel Daniel's play *Philotas*. As co-editor of *DEx: A Database of Dramatic Extracts*, I am particularly interested in what parts of plays early readers and playgoers copied into their manuscripts. These two selections are of note because they are copied under the heading "Out of Daniels Phylotas" (fol. 142r); the manuscript compiler signaled them as important because of their dramatic source, unlike the other short verses he copied, which appear below more traditional headings, such as "Of Cowardize," "Of Kinges Court," and "Of vnlawfull pleasures" (all also found on fol. 142r, which students had in facsimile). For this workshop, students had not read *Philotas* beforehand, but had read other early modern plays. This was, in some cases, their first exposure to commonplace books and commonplacing, which led to some fruitful discussion about historical textual transmission, changing or contingent textual meaning, and reception studies.

After transcribing the couplets and their heading, as a class, we encoded the extracts in TEI: following the direction from students, I typed and projected our work so the whole class could see and, if they chose, follow along on their computers. After class, I was able to upload the encoding and transcription to *DEx*,<sup>9</sup> where it has since been searched, seen, and considered by scholars interested in the early reception of drama. For the second half of the workshop, students had the option of working on either transcribing other manuscript pages or encoding existing manuscript transcriptions, with the option of sending me their work later in the week. Most of the students continued to work on their manuscript passage after our workshop ended, and most sent me their work later that week, asking for it to be put to

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<sup>9</sup> *DEx*, <https://daikatana.digitalearlymodern.com/manuscripts/?query=BLMSAdd18044.xml>. Students unanimously agreed to share this in-class work and be credited as a group (and not by name) in the freely available XML on the site. When these classes took place, *DEx* was published by Iter Community, [itercommunity.org](http://itercommunity.org).

use on *DEx* or by other students. Graduate students were not graded on their participation in this workshop; rather, the learning outcome was to introduce students to paleography and encoding, both of which could open up new potential areas of research for people about to embark on their biggest research project to date.

At the far end of the continuum from an ungraded graduate workshop were two undergraduate independent study courses, each of which was structured entirely around a given theme: “Early Modern Plays and Manuscripts” and “Encoding Early Modern English Manuscripts.” Both independent studies were undertaken as a complement to paid student internships.<sup>10</sup> In the first independent study course on plays and manuscripts, John Heggelund read plays by Shakespeare and lesser-known playwrights as well as turning to commonplace books and miscellanies where early readers had copied selections from plays. Heggelund’s final project, which included a transcription from Sancroft’s miscellany, argued, “By analyzing what [Archbishop] Sancroft chose to extract from *Coriolanus*, we can infer how the historical context in which he read it affected how he interpreted it.”<sup>11</sup> The second independent study, with Bethany Radcliff, focused less on reading drama and more on reading about text encoding and the editorial decisions made in archivally oriented digital humanities projects. Based on Radcliff’s enthusiasm for manuscript encoding, we hired her to continue as a research assistant for *DEx* beyond her initial one-semester internship. In both cases, these students expressed the genuine and sustained intellectual curiosity that arises from archival research—albeit, in this case, performed with digital facsimiles. The primary learning outcomes of the graduate workshop were exposure to manuscript studies and encoding, discussing different ways of understanding early modern texts, and, as a group, starting to apply these concepts; whereas by the end of an in-depth semester of work, undergraduate independent study students applied their skills to solve problems and generated original research.

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**10** I would like to thank the Texas A&M English department for the University Professional Research Experience Program (UPREP) paid internship and the opportunities it affords. I met with UPREP students weekly to discuss the internship and independent study; they were paid for their internship work (checking transcriptions from early modern print sources or encoding manuscripts) and received course credit with the independent study for gaining new skills, writing reflections, and undertaking critical analyses beyond the paid internship.

**11** All student work is cited with permission of the student; all students are named by permission.

## Encoding Manuscripts as an Assignment in the Undergraduate Class: Transcription, Encoding, Reflection

It seems natural that graduate students will be enthusiastic learners, as will independent study students who help co-design their course and syllabus. But how and why should we introduce concepts like transcription and encoding to the broader audience of undergraduate students, some of whom might have signed up for the class because it is the only one that fits in their schedule? I debuted the “Transcribing and Encoding Commonplace Books” assignment in an undergraduate class called “Approaches to English Studies” that was required of all English majors. For our class, the theme was “How to Judge a Book By Its Cover,” that is, a consideration of how the meanings of a given work change depending on paratexts and contexts. The catalogue description simply ran, “A writing intensive exploration of the methodologies and major topics of English studies.”<sup>12</sup> With a broad mandate and centuries of literary approaches to explore, the conjunction of old (commonplace books and miscellanies) and new (encoding) seemed particularly appropriate.

There were three major components to this assignment: transcription (initial and final); encoding and metadata; and reflection. The course was designed around a series of small assignments. Leading up to this larger midterm assignment of transcription-encoding-reflection, students read a cluster of essays on why manuscript studies are important,<sup>13</sup> spent two hours outside of class learning paleography from online resources, and wrote a brief response about their thoughts on being introduced to manuscript studies and paleography (see Appendix B for an overview of the work leading up to the assignment and Appendix C for the paleography response prompt). In class, we brainstormed the possibilities afforded by manuscript research across all historical periods and turned to two of Emily Dickinson’s poems written on envelopes for an example of how medium (manuscript) affects meaning. After this training and discussion, students undertook the first component of the commonplace book assignment, the initial transcription: each transcribed a single page of manuscript on their own.

While I have, in the past, had honours students successfully transcribe manuscript materials from Texas A&M’s Cushing Memorial Library and Archives, for this project, I wanted students to be able to contribute to *DEx*:

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**12** Texas A&M University Undergraduate Course Catalog, “ENGL 303,” [catalog.tamu.edu/undergraduate/course-descriptions/engl/](https://catalog.tamu.edu/undergraduate/course-descriptions/engl/).

**13** Peter Beal, Margaret J. M. Ezell, Grace Ioppolo, Harold Love, and Steven W. May, “The Future of Renaissance Manuscript Studies,” *Shakespeare Studies* 32 (2004): 49–80.

*A Database of Dramatic Extracts*, which limited my selection to seventeenth-century manuscripts wherein someone had copied a line from a play. Versions of this “Transcribing and Encoding Commonplace Books” assignment can be done at any institution, regardless of the proximity to special collections, precisely because of the ongoing digitization efforts that create publicly-accessible facsimiles. These projects are often driven by libraries and archives themselves; and while they will do not proclaim themselves as “commonplace book” digitization projects, they often include commonplace books as some of manuscripts they have digitized (see Appendix A for a list of sites with open access facsimiles). While some online projects already offer transcriptions of their digitized manuscripts, the majority, as yet, do not. Transcribing parts of an early modern manuscript is one way students can make a genuine contribution to current scholarship, as evidenced by the current vogue for transcribathons, for instance, by EMPOP, Early Modern Poetry Online Project, discussed by Joshua Eckhardt in this volume.

Working with digitized manuscripts rather than originals offers both opportunities and challenges. Some digitization projects, such as *British Literary Manuscripts Online (BLMO)* can provide hard-to-read facsimiles.<sup>14</sup> Other projects, such as the *Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project*, take particular care in digitizing the original manuscript object with high-quality images.<sup>15</sup> Still other projects, such as *Early Modern Manuscripts Online* and *Bess of Hardwick's Letters*, offer both facsimiles and transcriptions, to make the text machine-readable, searchable, and legible to readers without paleographic training.<sup>16</sup> While digitized manuscripts with transcriptions are useful for paleographic training and pivotal for scholarly searches, they also make student transcription projects redundant. In this case, I wanted students to have a true exigence for their transcriptions.

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**14** In this case, *BLMO* digitizes existing low-quality microfilm images. For an extended discussion of the advantages and drawbacks of *British Literary Manuscripts Online*, see Laura Estill and Andie Silva, “Storing and Accessing Knowledge: Digital Tools for the Study of Early Modern Drama,” in *Shakespeare's Language in Digital Media: Old Words, New Tools*, ed. Janelle Jenstad, Mark Kaethler, and Jennifer Roberts-Smith (London: Routledge, 2018), 131–43, esp. 135–37. *British Literary Manuscripts Online*, Gale-Cengage, paywalled. Information here: [gale.com/primary-sources/british-literary-manuscripts-online](http://gale.com/primary-sources/british-literary-manuscripts-online).

**15** See Grace Ioppolo, Introduction to the *Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project* catalogue, for a description of their photography practices: [henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/catalogue/catalogue/](http://henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/catalogue/catalogue/).

**16** *Early Modern Manuscripts Online*, Folger Shakespeare Library, [emmo.folger.edu](http://emmo.folger.edu); *Bess of Hardwick's Letters*, Alison Wiggins, project leader, [bessofhardwick.org](http://bessofhardwick.org).

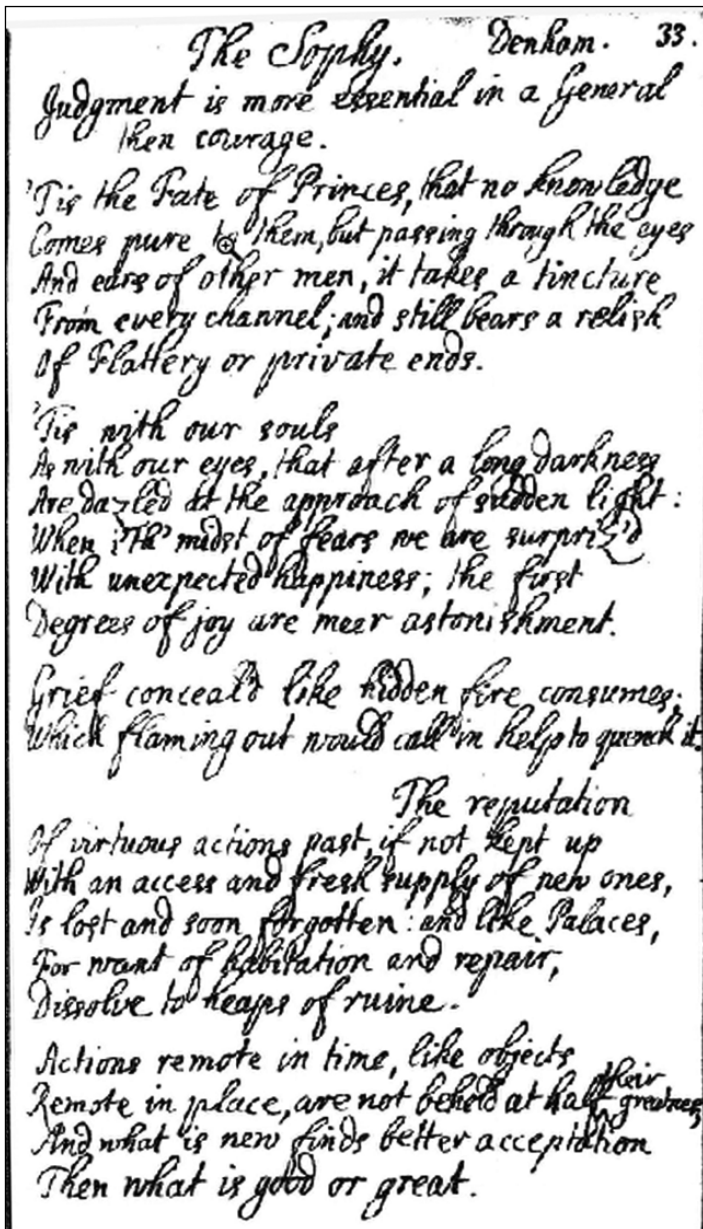


Figure 2. Folger MS V.a.226, vol. 1, fol. 33r; facsimile from *British Literary Manuscripts Online*, which was used by my students. Note that this is not an image of the original, but rather, an image of the facsimile my students used, which was itself digitized from microfilm.

Original manuscript in the Folger Shakespeare Library. Microfilmed by Harvester Microform by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library; microfilm digitized by British Literary Manuscripts Online by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library. With grateful thanks to the Folger Shakespeare Library for their permission to share this image again in this volume. Some additional page images from this volume can be found on [luna.folger.edu](http://luna.folger.edu).

Few lower-division or introductory undergraduate courses will have vast amounts of time to devote to paleography training and transcription practices. For the purpose of this assignment, then, I was bound not only by the scope of the project (seventeenth-century English manuscripts containing dramatic extracts), but also by newly acquired abilities of my students to read and decipher handwritten documents. In the end, I chose a manuscript written in mid-seventeenth century italic script, with letterforms familiar to undergraduates from modern cursive, Washington, DC, Folger Shakespeare Library, MS Va.226 (see Figure 2).<sup>17</sup> This simple sentence belies the amount of groundwork that it took to find the ideal manuscript for this exercise: in the future, I can imagine assigning students sections from multiple manuscripts or transcribing manuscripts that relate to another digital project. Indeed, this assignment would work well with manuscripts from different time periods or by different writers. Students worked with a facsimile, a page of which is reproduced here (Figure 2).<sup>18</sup> After their brief experiments with paleographical training that included secretary hand and scribal abbreviations, students expressed their pleasure at working with a manuscript as relatively straightforward as Folger MS Va.226.

The genre of commonplace books themselves can also help students with transcription: commonplaces are, by their nature, taken from other sources, although they are often changed as they are copied or recopied. The pages my students transcribed from Folger MS Va.226 were all taken from John Denham's play, *The Sophy* (1642). I provided my students with a facsimile of the first printing of Denham's play, taken from *Early English Books Online*, another site comprising digitized microfilm facsimiles. Since my institution does not subscribe to *Early English Books Online*, in the future, I will turn to the EEBO-Text Creation Partnership in order to give my students access to transcriptions of printed versions of texts that were often used in manuscript compilation.<sup>19</sup> And though, of course, manuscripts were often copied from other manuscripts or from oral or memorized text, they were also at

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**17** Catalogue description from the Folger Shakespeare Library: [hamnet.folger.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?BBID=230941](http://hamnet.folger.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?BBID=230941); in the new Miranda catalogue, [miranda.folger.edu/detail/dramatic-miscellany-with-extracts-from-verse-plays-by-dryden-orrery-and-others/cb1a4ce3-5969-4bc7-9cab-e8d3d36a812d](http://miranda.folger.edu/detail/dramatic-miscellany-with-extracts-from-verse-plays-by-dryden-orrery-and-others/cb1a4ce3-5969-4bc7-9cab-e8d3d36a812d).

**18** An untranscribed facsimile of this manuscript is available through the *British Literary Manuscripts Online* database, a subscription database. See Appendix A for open access options for other manuscript commonplace books.

**19** Denham's *The Sophy* is available through Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership (EEBO-TCP), [name.umdl.umich.edu/A35657.0001.001](http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A35657.0001.001).

times copied from print, which can give students a baseline for comparing their transcription. In the case of Folger MS V.a.226, the compiler (William Deedes) was relatively faithful to his source-text, which was clearly identifiable as a full-text version of the play—likely the printed 1642 version. Other manuscript compilers made broader changes to what they copied, tweaking words and phrases to craft their source into a self-contained couplet or sentence, or for reasons of personal taste.<sup>20</sup>

I was first introduced to the pedagogical technique of fill-in-the-blank paleography in graduate school: in Alexandra Gillespie’s “Medieval Vernacular Book” course (University of Toronto), we were asked to transcribe a poem from a photocopy of a medieval manuscript that was almost too faint to read. I puzzled my way through as much as I could before turning to Google and finding a digital copy. In class, when Professor Gillespie asked us who had “cheated” by looking online, I was ashamed of myself—that is, until she pointed out that the best way to learn was to use all possible sources of information available. While it is true that giving students a facsimile of a printed text for comparison can lead them to jump to paleographical conclusions, it is exactly those moments that can lead to valuable moments of discussion and interpretation.

Even though Folger MS V.a.226 was, by reason of its handwriting and content, an easier transcription than many, for this class, we followed the best practice of having students create duplicate transcriptions and then compare them. Two students transcribed each page (in one case, three students), and then brought their transcriptions to class and compared them in order to create the second component of the assignment, the final transcription. Double-keying, that is, having two people transcribe the same text, can greatly reduce transcription errors.<sup>21</sup> Having students double-key is valu-

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**20** For more on this, see Laura Estill, *Dramatic Extracts in Seventeenth-Century English Manuscripts: Watching, Reading, Changing Plays* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2015). For instance, in BL Add MS 18044 (mentioned above), the compiler changed “Now good my Lord, conform you to the rest” to “Lett all wise men conforme them to thir rest” (fol. 142v) making a moment of direct address in Daniel’s *Philotas* more universally applicable.

**21** For more on this practice, see Susanne Haaf, Frank Wiegand, and Alexander Geyken, “Measuring the Correctness of Double Keying: Error Classification and Quality Control in a Large Corpus of TEI-annotated Historical Text,” *JTEI: Journal of the Text Encoding Initiative* 4 (2013), <https://journals.openedition.org/jtei/739>. Notably, the EEBO-TCP texts are double-keyed (as described here: <https://search.lib.umich.edu/databases/record/8975>); the English Broadside Ballad Archive also uses double-keying; see [ebba.english.ucsb.edu/page/facsimile-transcriptions](http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/page/facsimile-transcriptions).

able because it makes the work they create publishable and also gives them the opportunity to learn from each other as they compare their work. For projects that use double-keyed (or even triple-keyed) transcriptions, usually a computer compares the transcribed texts, finds any variants, and then has an expert assess any discrepancies and correct the transcription. For our scaled down version of this practice, students compared their transcription with a peer using Microsoft Word's "Compare Documents" function, I consulted on any challenging interpretations, and I checked the transcriptions once finalized by the students.<sup>22</sup> Most students achieved consensus about their transcriptions, and I was asked to consult on the familiar "is that a comma or an inkblot?" questions.

The second part of the assignment was for students to encode their finalized transcriptions using TEI (the Text Encoding Initiative) and to provide the correct metadata.<sup>23</sup> Having taught TEI previously as an instructor at the Digital Humanities Summer Institute and in programming4humanists, I cautiously devoted three 75-minute classes to installing software, learning basic encoding, and ensuring students understood how to interpret the encoding guidelines.<sup>24</sup> This proved ample time; most students completed their encoding entirely within class time and some used this time to work on their reflection. Rather than having students encode the entire page they transcribed, each student encoded half of their final transcription, that is,

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**22** I also gave my students the options of using Juxta to compare their texts (juxtasoftware.org). The online Juxta Commons is now down permanently and as of 2023 the website is no longer up. An archived version of the page can be found at the Internet Archive, <https://web.archive.org/web/20201127061212/https://juxtasoftware.org/download/>.

**23** For more on teaching with TEI in humanities classes, see Mackenzie Brooks, "Teaching TEI to Undergraduates: A Case Study in Digital Humanities Curriculum," *College and Undergraduate Libraries* 24 (2017): 467–81; Kate Singer, "Digital Close Reading: TEI for Teaching Poetic Vocabularies," *The Journal of Interactive Technology & Pedagogy* May 15, 2013. <https://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/digital-close-reading-tei-for-teaching-poetic-vocabularies/>; and Maura Ives, Victor Del Hierro, Bailey Kelsey, Laura Catherine Smith, and Christina Sumners, "Encoding the Discipline: English Graduate Student Reflections on Working with TEI," *JTEI: Journal of the Text Encoding Initiative* 6 (2013), <https://journals.openedition.org/jtei/882>. See also Stella Dee's overview, "Learning the TEI in a Digital Environment," *JTEI: Journal of the Text Encoding Initiative* 7 (2014), <https://journals.openedition.org/jtei/968>, and Heather McAlpine, "Digital Meters: Using Text Encoding to Teach Literature in the Undergraduate Classroom," conference presentation, Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations—Pedagogy Special Interest Group conference, University of Victoria, June 8, 2019.

**24** Digital Humanities Summer Institute (DHSI), [dhsi.org](https://dhsi.org/); Programming4Humanists, <http://programming4humanists.tamu.edu>.

between 12–20 lines of text. The goal of this assignment wasn't to create vast amounts of transcribed and encoded texts: it was to learn how to transcribe and encode. Although there has been a push for archivists to have "More Product, Less Process" (MPLP),<sup>25</sup> for students, the reverse is true. Applying new skills (transcription, encoding) and experimenting with new heuristics (commonplacing, textual studies, reader response) requires an emphasis on process.

Our first encoding class went as I expected: I offered a brief introduction to XML (eXtensible Markup Language, of which TEI is a subset) and then we undertook any troubleshooting necessary. Before class, students read two primers about why scholars produce online texts using TEI and introducing them to how TEI works.<sup>26</sup> Some students in the class were already familiar with pointy brackets from HTML (HyperText Markup Language), a different subset of XML used to create webpages; for others, it was a new experience. Although students had been asked to install oXygen (an XML editor, among other things) on their computers before class,<sup>27</sup> we spent necessary class-time troubleshooting to get everyone up and running. After the initial class period that introduced basic concepts of TEI and got everyone up to speed on oXygen, the second class period was spent focusing on the specifics of encoding in TEI and the encoding principles used for *DEx: A Database of Dramatic Extracts*. The third class was for hands-on work with instructor guidance, which is when most folks completed encoding their section of the commonplace book and many started working on the reflection.

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**25** Mark A Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing" *The American Archivist* 68 (2005): 208–63.

**26** Women Writers Project, "What is the TEI?" [wwp.northeastern.edu/outreach/seminars/tei.html](http://wwp.northeastern.edu/outreach/seminars/tei.html); TEI@Oxford, "Getting Started Using TEI," Chapters 1 and 2, which is no longer live but available through the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine: <https://web.archive.org/web/20180706115042/tei.oucs.ox.ac.uk/GettingStarted/html/index.html>.

**27** I would like to thank Texas A&M's IDHMC, the Initiative for Digital Humanities, Media, and Culture (now CoDHR, the Center of Digital Humanities Research, pronounced coder) for providing oXygen licenses for my class. Another freely available XML editor that could be used in the classroom is Atom. Thanks also to Texas A&M's Department of English for having laptops available for students. These class sessions could also be taught in a computer lab, ideally with oXygen or another XML editor pre-installed. oXygen also has a trial academic license that could be used for an assignment like this.

Encoding is editing; it requires analysis and decision making.<sup>28</sup> Because this assignment was introductory, students were not asked to create their own editorial models and frameworks, but they were asked to understand existing choices. In the particular course I'm describing, this consideration of existing encoding decisions related directly to previous assignments where they had been asked to evaluate the paratexts of print scholarly edition and an online scholarly edition.<sup>29</sup> For students in an introductory undergraduate class, learning about the decisions that had been made in order for a text to be presented—from spelling normalization to copytexts to editorial apparatus—can be a valuable foundational skill. Indeed, asking students to reflect on existing digital projects, and, in this case, an in-progress digital project, raises larger questions of what is edited and/or encoded in the first place, which, in turn, leads to discussions about canon and access.

In the end, students handed in their transcription (initial and final), encoding, and a brief reflection on the process of transcribing and encoding a manuscript commonplace book. Their reflections reveal what they learned from this assignment (see Appendix D for the reflection prompt). Some students pronounced platitudes that might seem like old hat, such as “Different scholars have different goals for texts”—yet, this realization is actually quite important, and one that is appropriate for an undergraduate student.

Some students reflected on the value of manuscript studies and how digitization affects access: “The field of manuscript studies is an incredibly important branch of literary studies, and the work done by manuscript scholars is constantly adding to and changing the vast bank of information that can be accessed by the internet. Today, students and teachers from all

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**28** For more on encoding as editing, see Rebecca Niles and Mike Poston, “Re-modeling the Edition: Creating the Corpus of Folger Digital Texts,” in *Early Modern Studies after the Digital Turn*, ed. Laura Estill, Diane Jakacki, and Michael Ulliyot (Toronto: Iter Press and Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2016), 117–44; and Julia Flanders, “Data and Wisdom: Electronic Editing and the Quantification of Knowledge,” *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 24 (April 2009): 53–62. Editing is, indeed, a formal data model with pre-digital roots: see Julia Flanders and Fotis Jannidis, eds, *The Shape of Data in Digital Humanities: Modeling Texts and Text-based Resources* (New York: Routledge, 2019), esp. their introduction, “Data Modeling in a Digital Humanities Context” (3–25) and C. M. Sperberg-McQueen, “Playing for Keeps: The Role of Modeling in the Humanities” (285–310).

**29** In this case, they each had to bring in a different edition of Shakespeare's *Henry V* for discussion; they all had to read James Mardock's print edition (Toronto: Broadview-Internet Shakespeare Editions, 2014); and everyone also read Mardock's digital edition and explored the paratexts available online (Internet Shakespeare Editions, [internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/Texts/H5/](http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/Texts/H5/))

over the world can look at archaic documents never before available for casual access.” Another student noted the importance of contributing to a project that encoded manuscripts: “Furthering this digitization of literature and manuscripts ensures that the research done on them stays relevant meaning the texts themselves stay relevant.” In short, the students caught “Archive Fever.” This adaptation of the Derridean term is particularly apt to describe the excitement students express at understanding and contributing to digital archives, as it relates to the themes in Derrida’s essay, such as the importance of electronic media to storing, accessing, and understanding data and knowledge.<sup>30</sup> It seems overdramatic when a student suggests that “text encoding allows the invaluable work done by scholars to be distributed across the internet, forever changing the way we as humans examine the world around us”—yet it parallels Derrida’s claim that email “is on the way to transforming the entire public and private sphere of humanity.”<sup>31</sup>

As well as the grandiose, and dare I say, unconsciously Derridean claims made by some students, other students reflected on the process of learning to encode: the time and effort needed, the attention to detail required, the challenges for humanities students. Every student who commented on the amount and type of work, however, also commented on its value: “While it may take some practice to learn how to use the system, the work is certainly worth the rewards that will inevitably follow.” One student echoed one of our earlier readings by Matthew Kirschenbaum about the role of digital humanities in English Departments<sup>32</sup>: “It [TEI] can be difficult until one finally gets used to the code, but I found it interesting and a useful tool in English.” And one student even expressed the desire to learn more about encoding in order to transcribe additional texts.

## Students as Collaborators

Student enthusiasm about manuscript transcription and encoding is gratifying, but also raises ethical concerns: what should you do when a student volunteers to undertake unpaid labour for a faculty project? Or, to ask an even more germane question: what are the stakes and ethics of asking students to work on published (or “published,” as the case may be) digital humanities

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**30** Jacques Derrida, “Archive Fever,” translated by Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics* 25 (1995): 9–63.

**31** Derrida, “Archive Fever,” 17.

**32** Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, “What is Digital Humanities and What’s It Doing in English Departments?” *ADE Bulletin* 150 (2010): 1–7.

projects? Spencer D. C. Keralis forcefully contends that “Under the rationale of promoting skills building and in-class collaboration, the faculty essentially get the benefit of free labour on their projects.”<sup>33</sup> Keralis excoriates faculty who “provide just enough training in code, content management, and style sheets for students to contribute some basic programming, write content for blogs and wikis, transcribe manuscripts and primary source documents, or develop visualizations and design for faculty projects.”<sup>34</sup> To move towards solving these quandaries, Keralis recommends adhering to the Student Collaborators’ Bill of Rights, which addresses key concerns like ensuring students are credited fairly.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the Student Collaborators’ Bill of Rights declares that “course credit is generally not sufficient ‘payment’ for students’ time, since courses are designed to provide students with learning experiences.” When designing an assignment, particularly one related to transcription and encoding, it is important to design an assignment where students are, indeed, learning, and not simply undertaking unpaid labour (or, as Keralis insightfully notes, labour for which they are often accruing debt as they pay their tuition<sup>36</sup>). And while these criticisms are often voiced in relation to digital humanities projects, the ethical concerns certainly apply every time a student contributes to a faculty project.

In the assignment outlined here, students learned how to undertake primary research and get a taste for advanced research in the humanities. This assignment also introduced them to questions of online access, textual studies and representation, and canonicity. The final products the students created as a class were small, but credited to their name if desired as well as to the entire class.<sup>37</sup> I encouraged students to put this experience on their

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**33** Spencer D. C. Keralis, “Disrupting Labour in the Digital Humanities; or The Classroom is Not Your Crowd,” in *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, ed. Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel (New York: Punctum, 2018), 273–94 at 278.

**34** Keralis, “Disrupting Labour,” 277.

**35** Haley Di Pressi, Stephanie Gorman, Miriam Posner, Raphael Sasayama, and Tori Schmitt, “A Student Collaborator’s Bill of Rights,” UCLA Digital Humanities Program, [humtech.ucla.edu/news/a-student-collaborators-bill-of-rights/](http://humtech.ucla.edu/news/a-student-collaborators-bill-of-rights/). See also Katrina Anderson, Lindsey Bannister, Janey Dodd, Deanna Fong, Michelle Levy, and Lindsey Seatter, “Student Labour and Training in the Digital Humanities,” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 10 (2016): [digitalhumanities.org:8081/dhq/vol/10/1/000233/000233.html](http://digitalhumanities.org:8081/dhq/vol/10/1/000233/000233.html).

**36** Keralis, “Disrupting Labour,” 278.

**37** See Appendix D for the assignment prompt, where students were asked if they wanted their names shared. Their names appear in the TEI-XML files they

résumés. The Student Collaborators' Bill of Rights envisions students undertaking internships for which they are offered course credit, but it does not directly address the practice of having students undertake small in-class projects such as the one described in this chapter. The Student Collaborators' Bill of Rights suggests that if students are offered course credit for work on a project, they should receive "a high level of mentorship." I would add to this that one way to gauge if an in-class transcription or encoding assignment is ethical is to consider the amount of time spent on process versus product. For instance, in this assignment there was much more emphasis on process (including the written reflection) than product: in the end, students submitted encoding for just half a manuscript page, whereas paid student research assistants who have worked on this project contribute significantly more based on an afternoon's work.

In the end, it certainly would have been faster for me to transcribe and encode these lines of text myself and have students write a traditional midterm exam or midterm essay. I could, similarly, have asked students to undertake reduplicative and not publishable work by asking them to produce transcriptions of already-transcribed manuscripts or by encoding already-encoded manuscripts, both of which could be graded by a computer. Although this is hardly a revelatory statement, it bears repeating: it is far more work for an instructor to support students as they create entirely new materials for dissemination to an academic audience. In this case, students were excited that they were not simply producing busy-work and were making a genuine contribution: they wanted to contribute to pushing the boundaries of knowledge forward even if just by providing one half-page manuscript transcription. I contend that by excluding students from our research projects altogether, we do both them and the field a disservice: we undervalue their potential and deny the expertise they would gain through apprenticeship. Undoubtedly, however, we must ensure fair practices that prioritize student learning when we engage them in faculty research projects.

In future courses, I will teach variations of this assignment because I will customize it based on the different commonplace books and miscellanies for each class. For instance, I would have loved to have students read all of Denham's *The Sophy* and analyse why William Deedes copied the parts of

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created, which are available at the "Download TEI" button: [https://daikatana.digitalearlymodern.com/manuscripts/?query=FolgerMSVa226\\_vol2.xml](https://daikatana.digitalearlymodern.com/manuscripts/?query=FolgerMSVa226_vol2.xml). Students who worked on the project as paid research assistants contributed far more and are credited on the Project's "About" page.

the play he did, but that seemed beyond the scope of this class. In a course based on many short assignments, I would like to experiment with having students create their own commonplace books while also analysing existing historical commonplace books, as described by Gabrielle Dean.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, I will also undertake versions of this assignment when students do not directly encode texts, but rather use online tools like 18<sup>th</sup>Connect's TypeWright or TAPAS: The TEI Archiving, Publishing, and Access Service.<sup>39</sup>

I look forward to continuing to incorporate both manuscript studies and text encoding into my classes. Although they might seem to be disparate scholarly fields (except in the very small subset of manuscript encoding described here), both manuscript studies and encoding highlight the importance of how texts are created, disseminated, and interpreted, which is foundational to humanities research. Ultimately, encoding selections from a commonplace book can introduce students to archival research, foster awareness of editorial choices and how texts are (re-)mediated, encourage thinking beyond canonical authors, and raise questions of digital access and how to undertake literary studies in the twenty-first century.

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**38** Gabrielle Dean, "Teaching by the Book: The Culture of Reading in the George Peabody Library," in *Past or Portal?: Enhancing Undergraduate Learning Through Special Collections and Archives*, ed. Eleanor Mitchell, Peggy Seiden, and Suzy Taraba (Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries, 2012), 12–23.

**39** TypeWright, [18thconnect.org/typewright/documents](https://18thconnect.org/typewright/documents); TAPAS, [tapasproject.org](https://tapasproject.org).

## Appendix A

**SELECTED OPEN-ACCESS ONLINE FACSIMILES OF EARLY MODERN ENGLISH COMMONPLACE BOOKS**

ACCORDING TO PETER Beal's *Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology*, commonplace books are, by strictest definition, organized according to subject headings;<sup>40</sup> commonplaces, however, can also be found in other manuscripts such as florilegia and miscellanies. Not all of the projects listed below use the strict definition of commonplace book, which can be useful because manuscript miscellanies are also ideal for many of the projects described in this volume.

You can find additional manuscript commonplace books by searching the sites described in Estill and Levy, "Evaluating Digital Remediations of Women's Manuscripts," *Digital Studies/Champ numérique* 6 (2015): [www.digitalstudies.org/articles/10.16995/dscn.12/](http://www.digitalstudies.org/articles/10.16995/dscn.12/). See also Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt's annotated bibliography in this volume. The list below is not meant to be exhaustive. For some of the digital archives below, the quickest way to narrow results is to search "commonplace(s)." You can often narrow by date or language.

**British Library Digitized Manuscripts**, [www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Default.aspx](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Default.aspx)

**Cambridge Digital Library**, <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

This includes the manuscripts previously published online in Cambridge's now-defunct *Scriptorium*

**Digital Scriptorium**, [www.digital-scriptorium.org](http://www.digital-scriptorium.org)

**Folger Luna**, <https://luna.folger.edu>

This includes manuscripts that have not yet been transcribed for *Early Modern Manuscripts Online*

**National Library of Wales Digital Gallery**, [www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/early-modern-period/](http://www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/early-modern-period/)

**Penn in Hand: Selected Manuscripts**, <http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/medren/index.html>

**Wellcome Library Digital Collections**, <https://wellcomelibrary.org/collections/browse/>

**Yale Digital Content**, <http://discover.odai.yale.edu/ydc/>

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40 Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology*.

## Appendix B

### ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE AND DESIGN

THE SCHEDULE OUTLINED below was implemented in a class with 75-minute periods. All readings are cited in footnotes above. “Short Assignments” were evaluated separately from the “Transcribing and Encoding Commonplace Books” assignment.

#### **Preliminary Classes**

These classes weren’t directly devoted to the assignment but offered foundational concepts for the assignment.

#### **Scholarly Editions**

Short assignment: evaluation of scholarly edition one-page chart

Reading: any edition of *Henry V* beyond our required textbook

#### **Digital Editions**

Short assignment: evaluation of scholarly edition one-page chart

Reading: *Internet Shakespeare Editions Henry V* ed. Mardock

#### **Introduction to Digital Humanities**

Reading: Kirschenbaum, “What is Digital Humanities and What’s It Doing in English Departments?”

Masterclass: Distant Reading and the Digital Humanities

Guest class by Rebecca Kempe offered in Texas A&M’s Humanities Visualization Space (CoDHR: Center of Digital Humanities Research)

#### **Paratexts and Literary Publications**

Short assignment: description of paratexts in a non-scholarly literary book

## **Class Periods devoted to Transcribing and Encoding**

### **Manuscripts and Paleography**

Short assignment: Paleography Exercise and Reflection (see Appendix C)

Reading: Beal et al, “The Future of Renaissance Manuscript Studies”

In class: Emily Dickinson’s poetry<sup>41</sup>

### **Introduction to oXygen and Text Encoding**

Before class: install oXygen and explore *DEx*

Reading: Women Writers Project, “What is the TEI?”

Reading: TEI@Oxford, “Getting Started”

### **Text Encoding**

(half class period): Encoding a sample poem together

Hands-On Workshop

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**41** This class relied heavily on materials from the Dickinson Electronic Archives ([emilydickinson.org](http://emilydickinson.org)) and the Emily Dickinson Archive ([edickinson.org](http://edickinson.org)).

Appendix C<sup>42</sup>**PALEOGRAPHY RESPONSE PROMPT**

- National Archives Paleography  
([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/))
- English Handwriting 1500–1700: An Online Course  
(Cambridge University; [www.english.cam.ac.uk/eres/ehoc/](http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/eres/ehoc/))
- English Handwriting: An Online Course  
(Cambridge University Scriptorium; [now defunct]<sup>43</sup>)

Choosing from the above online courses [linked on course website], pick a handful of lessons to complete. Give yourself at least two hours (ideally, broken up into two one-hour chunks) to complete the online lessons. Write a 200–400-word response about the experience of learning to read handwritten documents. Reflect on how you could use manuscripts in your research or what manuscripts might be understudied in your field of research. Append a bullet-point list of some of the kinds of documents that might be relevant to your field of study and research interests.

It will be particularly useful for you to complete the readings before writing your response.

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**42** Appendices C and D offer examples of prompts that were part of a series of short reflections over the semester. These reflections were graded on thoughtful engagement with the materials, which means that, in this case, students were not graded on paleographical proficiency.

**43** For a website linking to the component parts of Scriptorium, see [cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/scriptorium](http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/scriptorium).

## Appendix D

**REFLECTION PROMPT**

Write a 300–500-word reflection on the work it takes to create a scholarly resource. Consider:

- What do you need to know about a search engine or scholarly tool in order to effectively use it?
- Are there tools that you use for your undergraduate research that you will use differently?
- Why is TEI the standard for scholarly editing and how does it change what we can do with digital texts?
- What texts should be encoded? (You might not be able to cover all of this, but these are ideas of directions you can go.)

At the top of your reflection, please include this note: I [would like]/[would not like] to be credited in the official XML document for *DEX: A Database of Dramatic Extracts*.