

# Introduction to Bibliography as a Relative Practice

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## **OVERVIEW**

**Total Class Time:** 3.5 hours minimum, including breaks, in person.

In a virtual setting, recommend teaching across multiple days/lesson periods.

**In person:** 9-15 (3 groups of 3, 4, or 5).

Could be done with as few as 3 students, and as many as 18 but would advise keeping groups to 5 students or fewer.

**Virtual:** Depends upon the number of book that you can pull/supply.

Tips on Class Size:

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. Textual objects *and* bibliography shape and are shaped by social dimensions of time and culture whenever they are produced, collected, and read.
2. Distinguish between different types of description and sites of authority for descriptive practices.
3. Acquire general awareness of bibliographical competencies that facilitate deep readings and descriptions of material texts; how might these be obtained & *why* they are important.

These fall into 3 categories:

- a. Material specific competencies – analysis of bindings, paper, parchment
- b. Manufacturing (by machine and by hand) specific competencies – printing (duplication, letterpress, xylographic, intaglio, lithographic), scribal practice
- c. Cultural & critical competencies – language skills, critical analysis, knowledge of historical and stylistic contexts, ethical obligations

*Gloss for instructors re: #3:*

Key to stress here that this isn't about gatekeeping, it's about sensitive, respectful, and self-aware engagement.

## **PART 1: OBJECT NARRATIVE EXERCISE (45 Minutes)**

In this exercise, students encounter a buffet of physical and/or digital objects across 3 stations, each selecting 1 object about which to write a descriptive interpretation that integrates a person's subjective experience and brings out to the surface.

Logistics

- 3 groups of 2-6 students have 15 minutes at each station.
- Each student writes their own description of one object. Descriptions by individual students should be 2 sentences.
- Descriptions are left behind with the object as groups rotate. Students choose new objects at each station and add to the existing description. Additive

descriptions of objects should not repeat any information that has been said by another student.

- In the buffet, mix and match physical examples, digital surrogates, and born digital objects.

The Buffet:

1. Is it a book? books: Books and textual objects that encourage abstraction of the concept of a book. Examples:
  - a. Scrapbooks
  - b. Artists' Books
  - c. A born digital text (a Tweet, a text, a newspaper article)
  - d. pre-literacy children's books without much text (board book; pop-up books record books/multimedia books Fischer Price "Talk To Me"
  - e. moving books with tabs etc.)
2. Beyond the Canon & Beyond the West. Examples:
  - a. A book in a non-western language
  - b. a Braille book
  - c. screenplay or other duplicated material text;
  - d. Romance novel or any pulp paperback,
  - e. comic book
3. Ye Olde Rare Books: Any object that can represent a popular assumption about what a rare book is. Examples:  
Medieval manuscript (book of hours) or manuscript fragment from any period; incunables; First Folio; *Moby Dick* or other canonical titles in multiple instantiations;

15 minute bathroom break & leg stretch

## **PART 2: AUTHORITIES OF DESCRIPTIVE PRACTICE (1 hour)**

This exercise attempts to locate and question the authoritative context for practices of description as a metaskill and a form of scholarly engagement.

Teacher overview (30 minutes) & student discussion (30 minutes) traditional bibliographical sources and records which could include:

1. (academic) enumerative bibliographies, descriptive bibliographies,
2. (commercial) booksellers catalogs,
3. (professional) library catalogs.

*Gloss for Instructors:*

This is a key moment to underline the stakes as bibliographical – academic, commercial, professional descriptions include information that comes from practitioners’ investment in learning core competencies that enable close looking. See Learning Objective #3.

In discussion, students should question and compare the goals of each type of description: what is the goal of an academic in bibliographical analysis and description vs. a librarian vs. a bookseller? How might students apply critical lenses to elucidate the goals of bibliographic description and analysis?

15 minute bathroom break & leg stretch

### **PART 3: REDESCRIBE AND RELOCATE (1 Hour)**

1. 30 Minutes in the classroom or as a collaborative homework assignment/group project

#### *Option 1:*

Students rotate through the buffet again, writing new descriptions informed by what they learned in Part 2. As in Part 1, each succeeding student must write a new description that does not repeat the approach of a description already written for that object.

Depending upon time, students can rotate through the buffet more than once, creating longer, collaboratively written descriptions which may include the same information repeated in different styles.

#### *Option 2:*

Each student re-describes 1 object from Part 1, intentionally integrating a dialectal framing behind their choices for description. Before beginning their descriptions, students should clearly delineate the goal(s).

Descriptions can be flexible and open to possibilities. They should be grounded in traditions of scholarship while challenging them in a constructive way.

2. 30 Minutes (during a class meeting)

Students share their descriptions, glossing these with discussion of their descriptive and analytical choices. How does their description meet the goal(s) they set for themselves?