

Joel Silver
L-25v: Reference Sources for Researching Rare Books
2-6 June, 2025, Online

1) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Are there any readings that you would like to see added or removed in future years?*

1. {no response}
2. Yes.
3. {no response}
4. I found the pre-course reading to be a good introduction for the material that was then covered over the course of the week.
5. The assignments were useful. I think it was a good amount of material but not overwhelming. The video we were assigned was very interesting.
6. Yes!
7. The pre-course reading assignments were the perfect overview to get my mind into the right state to begin processing all the information covered in the course; I found them very useful.
8. The reading assignments didn't add much to my store of knowledge, but other people might well have appreciated them.
9. The pre-course readings are very helpful for this course.
10. The readings were useful. I cannot think of any that should be added or removed.
11. The pre-course readings were very useful for the course. It gave me a basic understanding of the types of sources we would be covering in class and the process for researching a rare or historical book.
12. I think the advanced readings were definitely worthwhile. The Tanselle article was a bit of a slog, but it ended up being well worth it and I think it provided some solid groundwork for the course.
13. Yes, they were. I particularly thought that TB's "Descriptive Bibliography" chapter in *Book Collecting: A Modern Guide* was a great place to start with these concepts. The video documentary regarding the Sotheby's sale was also helpful to get acclimated to some of the terms and types of materials that we ultimately discussed; it was nice to see those materials ahead of time, to have an image to go with a term.
14. The Tanselle is pretty dry, but as a novice it was a helpful overview of the types of bibliographies that exist and it will be another helpful resource to locate more information in the future.
15. Very helpful in setting out useful context and background for the course.
16. I think that all of the readings and the video were useful for setting a baseline of knowledge about the book trade and terminology. Readings were short and concise.
17. Yes, all were useful and interesting. It was a rather short reading list.
18. I think they were fairly useful, though I think it's hard to have advanced reading that won't overwhelm to prepare for the breadth of the resources and concepts for this course.
19. {no response}

20. Yes! I liked the balance between textual resources and an audiovisual resource, the latter of which really provided me with a visual basis for our subsequent online lectures.
21. The pre-course reading assignments were useful and I am excited to dive into the additional resources that JS provided.
22. {no response}
23. {no response}

2) *What are your thoughts on the course workbook and/or other teaching materials distributed during class? Was the content appropriate and useful? Will it continue to be useful for you after the course?*

1. {no response}
2. Very helpful; yes, it will.
3. The course workbooks were great. Everything I learned in this class will be very useful for me in the future.
4. The workbooks worked well together, and having something I could copy to then make notes on made the course much more accessible.
5. I thought the list we worked through was very useful. I plan to continue referring to it in order to answer reference questions and to catch up with a few purchases.
6. Very useful and I will continue to use it in my career.
7. The workbooks are clearly a product of a well-established course flow refined over years of proctoring. I will continually reference the notes I've taken and the workbooks provided for years to come, and I predict it could be as long as the rest of my career.
8. The workbook system functioned well, and I will certainly consult the long list of bibliographies in the future.
9. The course workbooks are invaluable, and I will use these resources heavily in the future.
10. The list of sources will be very useful to use in evaluating our collection of reference sources as we look to strengthen our collection in this area.
11. The course workbook was great because it allowed us, the students, to see inside the resources in ways we would not have been able to otherwise. It made the resources more real.
12. The course workbooks were great. I had "Workbook I" printed out so I could take notes on each resource and I was able to pull up the PDFs of "Workbook II" for visual reference. I think this system works pretty well.
13. Thank goodness for the workbooks, because they have all of the important information I'll need to come back to those sources later. I was grateful that I was able to download the documents to make my own notes; plus, having the scanned pages from the selected titles to look at is a huge benefit as well. That was such a great way to facilitate the course concepts and offer samples, and it was one of my favorite parts of the course.
14. The workbooks are indispensable. I was able to add notes to the list of sources in the Word document as we proceeded, and the sample PDF pages will be helpful for future quick reference to recall whether the source has the appropriate

information. I did not have any issue with these being separate documents. I also appreciated the practice question sets and discussing them to demonstrate how to practically apply the course information.

15. A very wide-ranging selection, and much appreciated.
16. The main text was the list of sources, which I marked up extensively during lectures. I think the list was appropriate for the various members of the course, and I certainly discovered sources I didn't know about, even in my own areas of specialization.
17. All the teaching material in the shared Google Drive folder were wonderfully organized and useful. I am going to return for many years to come to the note pages and the additional reading attachments. I triple checked that they are saved on my Drive!
18. Such an incredible list of sources that we were given. I intend to use it after the course.
19. {no response}
20. Yes, the combination of reference source list (as an editable document) and scans of actual pages from many of those sources was really useful. This really helped to illustrate what we could expect from these reference books. I plan to keep this workbook, combined with my own notes from the lectures handy at work to refer to when I am wondering where to go for information about a rare book that comes across my desk.
21. The course workbook and teaching materials distributed were appropriate and valuable. I particularly liked being able to view "Workbook I" and "Workbook II" on my screen side by side while JS discussed each resource.
22. {no response}
23. {no response}

3) *Which aspects of the course were most intriguing and relevant for you as an individual? Did you walk away with any new insights, ideas, or project plans?*

1. {no response}
2. Books that related to my job (religious books, bibles, and books published between fifteenth and eighteenth centuries.)
3. {no response}
4. A lot of information was covered, and I am impressed by the amount JS covered in the span of a week. He managed to touch on so many different areas of bibliographical study that were both relevant to personal and professional interests, as well as areas I had never thought to explore.
5. I don't cover American materials in my job, but it was very interesting to learn about all the kinds of references sources available in that area.
6. {no response}
7. I came into this course during a fellowship, having only finished my M.L.I.S. degree less than two years ago. As a total newcomer to many of the resources discussed, and working at an institution that allows me access to a large number of the materials referenced and suggested for further reading, I am eager to take a look at some of the ones that struck me over the last five days.

8. The greatest benefit was becoming acquainted with various bibliographies that I can read for free on archive.org.
9. I was most intrigued by the discussions of reference sources on Americana, book collecting, and bibliography, as these are my interests. I left the course with numerous resources to incorporate into my work and several ideas that will help me become a stronger rare book professional.
10. I think a lot of our cataloging needs to be updated to reflect information contained in the resources we covered this week. I also think there is plenty of information contained in the sources which could be used to create presentations for various collections of our rare books.
11. I loved JS's ability to discuss the 'why' of the resource, and to do it in a storytelling format. It really highlighted the resources' uniqueness, usefulness, and placement within the research process.
12. I definitely walked away with new ideas and plans. This course helped identify gaps in our reference collection and also helped me learn how to utilize that collection more effectively. I am sure the information from this class will improve the quality of my work going forward.
13. I'm excited (and intimidated) by all the things I realized I didn't know: different source types, terminology, areas of study, &c. There's so much out there to learn, and I think my biggest inspiration was determining what I want to learn more about and applying it to my work. Definitely my first task is to create myself a glossary of useful terms, and/or get copies of the sources available along those lines (we did, of course, discuss them)!
14. Hugely helpful just to know that some of these sources exist—and pleasantly surprised to see that my institution holds many of them already. I made a list of titles to look at further once back in the office to dive a little deeper into specific areas where I'd like to know more about.
15. Introduction to reference books I had not previously heard of.
16. During the week, I ordered about a dozen new books that JS put on the list and discussed. Many are ones I didn't know about before this course.
17. I walked away with a whole list of books I want to purchase, some of which I already have. Understanding the citations and learning about famous catalogues were most relevant to me professionally, but my favorite parts were actually the stories around some of these bibliographers and JS's own experiences and insights.
18. While I attended for work and was able to take some useful notes, I also found resources for my personal interests outside of work, so I'm excited to be able to have use for both of those.
19. {no response}
20. I greatly appreciated the way that JS infused each of these sources with a richly detailed and sometimes quirky history, introducing the volumes themselves as special individuals as much as the bibliographers who wrote them!
21. As a beginner in the field of rare books, this class offers me a solid foundation for using these resources in my research, teaching, and continuous learning. While I was initially focused on the resources relevant to my area of interest—nineteenth-century British literature—I also found the book arts resources engaging and applicable to my everyday work.
22. {no response}
23. {no response}

4) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Did you learn what you had hoped to learn?*

1. {no response}
2. Yes, to all.
3. I learned exactly what I was hoping to learn, and a lot more.
4. Yes.
5. YES and yes.
6. Yes, very much so
7. I learned more than I thought I could within the span of five days. The class material was presented in a way that was mindful and clear, and the course achieves its goal of providing a firm foundation of resources.
8. I had hoped for more information on methods of researching not just books but the people and events that might appear in them—historical information that helps to date or describe a book.
9. Yes, I learned exactly what I hoped to learn. This course is a lot to take in, but it does not disappoint. I'm glad JS incorporated several breaks into the schedule. This was necessary to fully retain all the information.
10. Yes.
11. Double yes!
12. Very much so. It was a lot of ground to cover, but JS did a great job moving at a steady pace, and taking well-timed breaks to keep us on track and make sure everything was fairly digestible.
13. I would never have believed the amount of information that JS was able to impart during our course—his breadth of knowledge is astounding, and his discussions were so smoothly and engagingly given!
14. Yes! Feeling excited and prepared to move forward.
15. As a relative newcomer to the world of rare books, it will take me some time to digest all the topics covered, but the class gave me a good start.
16. Absolutely, and then some!
17. It is a lot of material to cover in just five days, so acquiring the desired skills will take years of going back to the notes and becoming comfortable with the sources, but, that being said, I did learn as much as I had hoped and it gave me a confidence boost.
18. Yes.
19. {no response}
20. Yes, I came away feeling like I learned more than I even anticipated. Of course, now I need to reinforce this knowledge through use, but I am glad that the knowledge pertains so directly to my work with rare books and that the scope of coverage was so wide.
21. The class met my expectations, providing an introduction to rare book reference sources as described in the course description.
22. {no response}
23. {no response}

5) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*

1. {no response}
2. Researching rare books in my special collections and having research skills for future employment in rare book/special collections.
3. {no response}
4. There are many resources I am looking forward to purchasing for my home institution for our own research into our collection.
5. I'll make a few purchases for our library; I'll also use the list of sources to help students looking for primary source material.
6. For referencing materials as I begin to compile catalogues.
7. Often and with rigor! Reference and research work encompasses what I hope to do daily for the rest of my career and the information covered in this course is invaluable to being successful in these endeavors.
8. I plan to share the information with my colleagues so we can familiarize ourselves with various bibliographies and find better information about the books we come across.
9. I plan to use the skills I acquired to create better rare book research guides for undergraduate students. I also plan to restructure the "rare book research" unit of the honors class that I teach.
10. To build our collection of reference materials and ensure our junior staff members become familiar with them and how to use them in their daily work.
11. I plan to use the resources and research process demonstrated throughout the course to describe bibliographical, historical, and social aspects of texts in a teaching collection.
12. I am sure this will make me more adept at navigating our reference collection and improve my research when it comes to many of the books in our collection. Just being able to identify the appropriate reference source for a given book or topic will be very helpful for us, especially given my institution's holdings in Americana and book arts. I expect a lot of the resources covered to become go-to resources for any number of questions.
13. My background is specific to archives/archival administration, but I've recently "inherited" a special collections responsibility in my new position, and our rare books collection is a highly requested instructional resource. I'm so glad to learn more appropriate terminology and source types to share with students, as well as point them to resources to research these materials in more depth. This is the perfect way to help me get acclimated to my new role, and I'm so grateful for the timing.
14. During the course, my colleague (who also attended) and I were able to identify useful resources for current cataloging improvement projects, as well as collaborate on a shopping wish list that we think will help enhance our reference collection. There were also a number of resources which, beyond lists, also include important essays and histories that will be helpful (and interesting) to read.
15. It will help with research methods to buy and sell rare books and further my ambitions to become a professional dealer.

16. As both a collector and scholar, I think the sources I discovered here will help me find printed materials I need much more efficiently. The course is a huge help to building one's personal library, but I also expect that I will introduce my undergraduate and graduate students to some of the reference sources I learned about here.
17. I do a lot of research at work, so I plan on incorporating new sources and improving my catalogue descriptions. As someone who is obsessed with books just like the rest of us here at RBS, I am excited that I found another subject to collect. I now have a greater appreciation for having a reference library. Before, I had discounted and failed to take advantage of our shelves of reference at work, instead using the easier online websites.
18. Research to assist in cataloging our rare book collection, and to help reassess the scope of our rare book collection.
19. {no response}
20. I hope this will make me better able to know where to look to find information about particular titles, and also how to interpret the references in dealer descriptions (and when to take them with a grain of salt!). I have also already purchased a number of the more general references from the recommendations in the workbook, and these I hope will give me improved foundational knowledge.
21. The skills and knowledge acquired during the class, as well as the books arts entries, have given me a strong set of resources that I can use to learn about provenance research, bookbinding, typography, and printing, all of which I can immediately apply. The class has also provided me with practical ideas for incorporating these resources into primary source instruction sessions.
22. {no response}
23. {no response}

6) *Who might benefit the most from taking this RBS course?*

1. {no response}
2. Booksellers and special collections librarians/staff.
3. {no response}
4. Special collections librarians and catalogers, booksellers, and book collectors.
5. It's useful for people who work with rare books. As a purchaser, I've benefited. I'm sure that rare book cataloguers would also find this course useful.
6. {no response}
7. Anyone with interest in rare books —graduate students, librarians, catalogers, collectors, curators, booksellers, &c. As a recent graduate this is the perfect continuing education resource to stay up to date and to grow as a scholar.
8. Antiquarian booksellers.
9. Rare book librarians, special collections librarians, reference librarians, catalogers, booksellers/book dealers, and curators.
10. Any librarian, collector, or book dealer who wants to know more about the rare books they encounter.
11. Anyone.

12. I think anybody in or adjacent to the world of rare books would benefit: booksellers, buyers, and librarians, especially anyone working in a special collections library like catalogers, reference librarians, and curators. There's a lot of really essential information here.
13. Anyone interested in the topic, but especially folks who are starting out in related fields. I imagine that folks with a lot of experience recognized some of the sources and names shared here, but for those of us who are newer to the conversation, this is an invaluable starting point.
14. Special collections librarians, catalogers, booksellers, and scholars—basically anyone who has ever held a book and wondered “how do I find out more about this?” —whether their inquiry is about the specific title or the general subject.
15. {no response}
16. Librarians, booksellers, and book collectors. I also think literary scholars who still care about textual scholarship and bibliographical work should take this course because most graduate programs in literature don't offer this kind of course any longer.
17. If you are a cataloguer and/or researcher, or simply want to become a more educated collector, then I would say this class is beneficial. If you ever wanted more information on what books you should add to your personal reference library or what to use to dig up more information on books that you are having trouble researching or just want to understand citations at the end of a description better.
18. {no response}
19. {no response}
20. Everyone! I have already recommended it to multiple colleagues. But working in a library, I am inclined to recommend it particularly to special collections librarians who might not know the wealth of reference books that their institutions have (and what other titles might be beneficial).
21. {no response}
22. {no response}
23. {no response}

7) *If applicable, what were the most original, powerful, or otherwise noteworthy educational moments in the course? Were there any "aha!" moments you'd like to share?*

1. {no response}
2. {no response}
3. {no response}
4. {no response}
5. {no response}
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. {no response}
9. This course helped reveal how information about rare books is highly connected. I have a better understanding of the individuals and institutions who have contributed to rare book research over the course of several centuries.

10. I was pleased to see resources on science and technology which I was not aware existed.
11. {no response}
12. {no response}
13. Thinking about titles in my institution's rare books collection and how I could learn more about them, or teach students more about them, was really fun as we were going along. It definitely reminds me that the possibilities for exploration are endless, and that was a really exciting realization to have on the first day.
14. This is the first time I have heard about organizing materials in "Proctor Order" (i.e. in the order in which printing was introduced across Europe). That was fascinating. But really there were so many tidbits of information, anecdotes, and other information that JS shared made me go, "oh!"
15. Introduction to book references and descriptions.
16. Learning about the catalogues of the Pforzheimer and Rothschild collections was especially huge for me. I ordered both sets of books immediately. I also was astounded to learn about the indexes of booksellers' signs and about the street maps in the back of the printed Short Title Catalogue. I think a lot of other resources were revelations as well, but the Pforzheimer and Rothschild were the biggest.
17. {no response}
18. {no response}
19. {no response}
20. I particularly liked the sample reference questions, which demonstrated how these reference books can work in concert to provide researchers with the answers to very sophisticated questions!
21. {no response}
22. {no response}
23. {no response}

8) *Are there any other ways in which the course could have been improved?*

1. {no response}
2. {no response}
3. {no response}
4. {no response}
5. {no response}
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. Setting aside time for a group discussion would be good—there were discussion questions, but the instructor answered them himself.
9. N/A
10. {no response}
11. {no response}
12. {no response}
13. {no response}
14. Nope, I loved it.

15. {no response}
16. I'd like to hear more stories from JS about how a particular resource or two helped him when acquiring for the Lilly Library, or when tracking down books for collectors or sellers.
17. {no response}
18. {no response}
19. {no response}
20. {no response}
21. {no response}
22. {no response}
23. {no response}

9) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? How likely are you to recommend this course to others? On a 1-10 scale, 1 would indicate that you disagree that you got your money's worth, 5 would indicate a neutral response, and 10 would indicate that you agree that you got your money's worth.*

1. 9
2. 9
3. 10
4. 8
5. 10
6. 10
7. 10
8. 7
9. 10
10. 10
11. 9
12. 10
13. 10
14. 10
15. 8
16. 10
17. 10
18. 8
19. {no response}
20. 10
21. 10
22. {no response}
23. {no response}

10) *If your course made any (virtual) field trips outside of the classroom or had guest speakers, do you feel that they enhanced the course experience?*

1. {no response}
2. N/A
3. {no response}
4. {no response}
5. {no response}
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. {no response}
9. I think that a virtual field trip may have enhanced the course. I'm not sure exactly what this looks like logistically, but it sounds interesting. I think the course would benefit from having a respected bookseller as a guest speaker. It would be very interesting to hear about their research process.
10. {no response}
11. {no response}
12. {no response}
13. There were lecture opportunities happening this week that were available virtually, but I wasn't able to attend, unfortunately.
14. N/A
15. {no response}
16. N/A
17. {no response}
18. {no response}
19. {no response}
20. {no response}
21. N/A
22. {no response}
23. {no response}

11) *Do you have any additional thoughts or advice for anyone considering taking this course in a future year?*

1. {no response}
2. {no response}
3. {no response}
4. This is a very lecture-heavy course with a lot of information. Give yourself grace with processing information and make sure to take notes!
5. One of my library's interests is pseudoscience. It would be interesting to see if there are any reference bibliographies in this area.
6. {no response}
7. {no response}
8. {no response}
9. Come to class energized and ready to learn. There's a lot of information to mentally digest, but it is very worth it.

10. If you work with rare books, I would take this course as soon as possible. The sooner you are familiar with the reference sources in your field the more comfortable you will feel in your knowledge of your collections.
11. Do it! It will make you a better librarian.
12. It's definitely more captivating than you might first expect.
13. Take the course, without question. The amount of information is somewhat overwhelming, and you will be jealous that you can't keep it all in your head the way JS can. But you will get a TON of resources to refer to later on, and a great experience during class. Overall, it's a wonderful opportunity to expand your knowledge of different types of resources and the different fields of study that they cover (and it'll be way more than you can imagine).
14. With apologies to Nike, Just Do It.
15. It is a very detailed course, and requires a lot of concentration. It is not for anyone expecting an easy ride.
16. Be prepared to take notes on each and every source on the list. For a lot of sources, the printed document won't allow you enough space for notes, so you'll have to use a notebook, but it might be even better if you can type notes directly into your digital version of the list. That's a little awkward if you're taking this course through Zoom, but if there's a way to arrange it, that will keep all your notes in a single place.
17. I don't see who would regret taking this course. JS is full of knowledge and an impressive person to have been allowed to listen to. His love for this subject is infectious. It is a lecture course, but there are plenty of breaks and I haven't felt overwhelmed.
18. {no response}
19. {no response}
20. {no response}
21. {no response}
22. {no response}
23. {no response}

12) *If you had to sum up your RBS experience with a single sentence, phrase, or haiku, what would you say?*

1. {no response}
2. Absolutely wonderful. I wish I could take these classes all the time!
3. It was a ton of information in a very short time, but I loved it!
4. {no response}
5. {no response}
6. Amazing and insightful.
7. {no response}
8. Write it all down!
9. This was my second time taking the course (it's that good), and I'm so glad I chose to repeat it.
10. It was a great ride through the history of books about books.
11. {no response}

12. {no response}
13. I'm trying to think of a good haiku, but I'm too impressed by the breadth of JS's knowledge, so I'll just say that I'm so grateful to have experienced this course. It was such a great opportunity.
14. You will want this to last longer.
15. Great.
16. The education I wish I'd received when I started a Ph.D. in English!
17. One of the most enjoyable weeks I have had in a long time.
18. {no response}
19. {no response}
20. Far more than I expected, I have come away from this course enriched both as a library professional and as a wistful scholar.
21. {no response}
22. {no response}
23. {no response}