

Heather Wolfe  
M-70: The Handwriting and Culture of Early Modern Manuscripts  
19–24 July 2015

**Narrative Course Evaluations**

1) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Did you do any additional preparation for your course? Are there any books or articles that you would like to see included in future years? Any that you might suggest removing?*

1. Pre-course readings were useful, as were the instructive websites.
2. {no response}
3. Pre-course assignments were useful, but overwhelming. What makes this course fantastic is that you are *not* self-taught—all learning is collaborative, and the reading on your own is just the opposite.
4. They were extremely useful. I found the online tutorials especially helpful for pre-course practice as they had lots of examples, while the books were better for background information.
5. It was helpful (but hardly necessary) to look at the online tutorials; if you have a background in paleography, you will be fine. Selected (optional) articles on manuscript culture {private response} would be nice.
6. The assigned readings were useful. Having done some other reading in book/text culture of the period was nice for context. The online resources were useful to know about.
7. Very useful. I can now go back to them and review.
8. Yes. I did some of the online reading, though it wasn't necessary for the course. Prioritizing the reading might help: i.e., if you're going to read just one title, the most important is....
9. The pre-reading was useful, but some of the material might have been used a bit more *in* the sessions.
10. Yes. No extra prep. There are no articles I would suggest adding or removing.
11. The assignments were useful, but I feel I will get more out of them when I go back to reread them.
12. I wish I had completed an online tutorial before class.

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. The workbook is—and will continue to be—very useful to me.
2. I think the course workbook is entirely well suited to the class. Only parts of it were immediately useful during the week of class meetings, but it is evidently filled with useful charts, lists, and citations for useful resources.
3. Course workbook was spot on. Teaching materials varied, adequate, thought provoking.
4. The workbook is amazing! It's incredibly helpful in the course, and will be a perfect resource going forward for both scholastic and archival work.
5. Yes.

6. Excellent. It will continue to be useful well beyond the course.
7. *Very* good and very useful. The instructor made sure to have material that reflected a broad range of examples and that was engaging.
8. The workbook was very helpful, and I will use it after the course in my research.
9. The workbook is excellent, a resource I will use often in the archives.
10. The coursebook will continue to be *very* useful, as will other handouts of exercises.
11. The course workbooks were put together well, and the material will be useful for future endeavors with English secretary hand that I may come across.
12. Yes, will keep the workbook handy.

3) *If you've taken previous RBS courses, how did this one compare?*

1. This course ranks similarly to other RBS courses.
2. {no response}
3. Top of the line!
4. N/A
5. N/A
6. {no response}
7. N/A
8. {no response}
9. Both of the RBS courses I've taken have been exemplary as models of methodology and in conveying a *lot* of information/skill in a very short time.
10. N/A
11. It was more relaxed and hands on, but just as enriching as the last.
12. Top ten.

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

1. I appreciate how the instructor spoke to the larger culture of manuscripts, letter writing, letter locking, &c., in addition to the details of letter forms and transcription techniques. It has inspired me to wonder when, why, &c., English handwriting changed from century to century and what we have today.
2. The course was a great motivator and left me with the feeling that close work with manuscripts of this period, and in particular, transcriptions of manuscripts, would be enormously rewarding work.
3. All of it was new information—part on the last day was the most interesting personally; the idea of transcribing and tagging solidified.
4. This was mostly new to me, so all of it was useful and relevant as I continue pursuing textual studies. I don't have any particular project insights, but I now feel much more equipped to study paleography.
5. Many new insights! Hope to contribute to crowdsourced transcription projects.
6. The course and what I learned are vital to my research as a student, and I feel much more confident about that research. It will help me formulate aspects of my research project.
7. I now feel confident to tackle seventeenth-century-and-earlier material. I gained insight into eighteenth-century practice (from earlier), and can expand my inquiry into letter writing and forms.
8. Transcription exercises were most useful.

9. I learned a new skill, and also a methodology for teaching in my own courses.
10. All of it was relevant, but I especially appreciated the unit on online resources for finding and researching manuscripts. This gave me ideas for future research.
11. The ideas on how to approach comparisons of hands and how to read early modern English manuscripts, yes.
12. Essentially “started” to learn a new language; my challenge will be making the time to “keep my hand in.”

5) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Was anything left out or undeveloped? Did you learn what you had hoped to learn?*

1. Yes, she was very patient with all of our learning levels in meeting the goals of the course.
2. The skills that the course helped to develop were precisely those that were promised in the course description, with the small qualification that we as a class went much further toward proficiency in reading secretary hand than I would have thought possible.
3. Yes—more time could have been spent on the eighteenth century. Yes.
4. HW was wonderful, and somehow managed to cram paleography, history, culture, literary practice, and more into the week-long course. I learned all I wanted to and more. I especially appreciated how willing she was to answer our questions and go down rabbit holes with us.
5. Yes. A more structured class session (lecture?) on the *culture* aspect would have been interesting, but we did find some ways to incorporate that into questions and discussion.
6. Yes! The instructor was excellent in introducing/teaching the skill as promised. Feel very prepared, and this was exactly what I wanted/needed.
7. Yes.
8. Paleography was very well covered. I would have liked a bit more on the manuscript culture side, but I realize time was limited.
9. The course was as advertised. It exceeded my high expectations.
10. Yes. I wanted to learn to read early modern hands, and I did.
11. Absolutely; HW was a fountain of knowledge, and was more than willing to help and teach us. I learned all I had hoped and more.
12. Yes. Not that I’m aware of. Again, started.

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

1. Not only to transcribe manuscripts in our collections, but also to vet future acquisitions.
2. {private response}
3. Facilitating the crowdsourcing/tagging of materials for research use.
4. I plan to continue researching paleography and manuscripts in my career as a graduate student and beyond, so this course provided an excellent base for me to jump off as I go forward. If I can decipher secretary hand, everything else will be easy, right?
5. Time will tell—hopefully in cataloging and arranging.
6. To do my dissertation research.

7. Personal research. Professionally: to develop materials for classes, website on handwriting/letterwriting.
8. Archival research.
9. I will use these skills and the knowledge acquired in this class both in the archives and in my own classrooms.
10. Researching archives of unedited/unprinted Tudor manuscripts.
11. I plan on using it to help with projects in the coming years of school.
12. In my everyday business.

7) *Please briefly describe the intellectual level of the course. What sort of person might benefit the most from taking it?*

1. Maybe the answer to this question is evident in the fact that I've started and erased my feeble thoughts several times.... We all learned together.
2. The course was fast paced and demanding. It is an introductory course, but because it asks students to interpret historical English documents, I would think that a graduate-level preparation in English history would make it less bewildering.
3. People working in archives, teaching literature, getting higher education degrees, book dealers.
4. This course was more of an introduction than a course for truly seasoned early-modern paleographers, but everyone should find something useful and exciting from taking it.
5. For anyone doing research with or managing early-modern materials. Not a highly "intellectual" course.
6. Intellectual level was high, but not overwhelming. Anyone who is in need of this skill would benefit from the course.
7. Students, collectors, scholars, librarians/archivists—very high.
8. Someone interested in early-modern culture who needs practical skills in reading secretary hand.
9. This course is best for those working with early-modern manuscript materials—researchers, academics.
10. Suitable for young early modernists needing to learn secretary hand, as well as anyone interested in the culture of early modern letter writing, record keeping, and literary circulation.
11. People at all levels above high school would benefit, but I would suggest being late in a B.A./B.S. or at the masters level at least.
12. Appropriate for class members.

8) *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, the key to this course is practice, practice, practice.
2. {no response}
3. Aha—this was hard when I was in first grade, and I managed to learn how to read—maybe I can do it again.
4. Realizing you can read this stuff, which initially looks like complete gibberish, is incredibly rewarding. Continual "aha"s abound.

5. {no response}
6. Not just being able to read the handwriting, but placing the items in a larger, material context.
7. Being able to sight-read a document that was unintelligible the day before.
8. There were many individual moments of transcription eureka's, so it's hard to name just one.
9. The method of teaching paleography was so intuitive—once you've experienced it—to start with legal documents and formulaic language and build from there. *Great!* (Also—writing with quill and ink, to feel it.)
10. The instructor chose great manuscripts to transcribe.
11. N/A
12. {no response}

9) *How could the course have been improved?*

1. {no response}
2. {no response}
3. One of the great strengths of the course was the *variety* of exercises.
4. Nothing!
5. Sometimes the student-initiated tangents were not the most relevant.
6. {no response}
7. Two weeks.
8. Perhaps less time spent correcting transcriptions in detail as a group, and more on manuscript culture.
9. Maybe expand the time spent practicing with the quill a bit?
10. It exceeded my expectations.
11. A little more time getting to read the manuscripts, but the continual practice transcribing was helpful.
12. {no response}

10) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? Would you recommend the course to others?*

1. Yes, and yes.
2. Absolutely, absolutely.
3. Yes, yes.
4. I certainly would!
5. Yes, yes!
6. Yes. Yes.
7. Yes, and yes.
8. Yes, yes.
9. *Absolutely.*
10. Yes, and yes.
11. Absolutely!
12. Yes, and yes.

11) *If your course made any trips outside of the classroom, do you feel that they were time well spent?*

1. We had one field trip, but I don't think it added to the class, in that the RBS collections were just as useful.
2. Yes. We visited SC to view manuscripts from that collection. This was a bit of useful exposure to documents that expanded our range of experience with English manuscripts.
3. Yes.
4. The trip to SC was great. They have some wonderful pieces, and it was good to see new hands.
5. Sort of. My hand is cramping, and others will probably cover this one for me.
6. While the trip to SC and the materials we saw there were interesting, being unable to spend enough time with the items made it less compelling. The hands-on aspect of the other class sessions was more interesting/useful.
7. Yes, although a tour behind the scenes at SC would be good.
8. The SC trip was interesting, though less useful than classroom work (especially because it was not hands on).
9. The time in SC was well worth the tradeoff in practice time.
10. Yes, I enjoyed seeing the manuscripts in SC.
11. Yes, the trip to SC was engrossing and helped me have a better sense of the evolution of early-modern handwriting.
12. Yes.

12) *If you attended any of our optional evening events, do you feel that they were a good use of your time? Were there any that were particularly important to your RBS experience? Any that you could have done without?*

1. {no response}
2. {no response}
3. Yes.
4. I think all the lectures were great, if a bit dry.
5. Yes, yes.
6. The lectures did not really capture my attention. Felt I would have done better to catch up on sleep.
7. Yes. The Smithsonian lecture was too fluffy, but the questions were very good. Video Night was charming.
8. Evening lectures were not very informative—they tended to be fairly basic.
9. Both evening lectures were informative and pitched appropriately for the RBS (diverse) audience.
10. I only attended Singerman's lecture. Distressing, but I learned a lot.
11. N/A
12. {no response}

13) *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. Relax.
4. It's fantastic—do it!
5. {no response}

6. Do not hesitate to take this course. It is excellent.
7. Take it! Don't be intimidated!
8. Students should be aware that the course is very handwriting-focused; HW is a wonderful educator.
9. {no response}
10. Come prepared to learn how to read all over again.
11. Definitely find the time to take this course; it's worth it!
12. Take an online tutorial prior.

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

1. I am never disappointed with the quality of the education I receive at RBS. Period.
2. {no response}
3. Exhilarating.
4. Everyone who loves books of any kind should come to RBS—one learns so much and finds so many kindred spirits that it's more of a soul refresher than an educational experience.
5. It was super hot/but book people are so great/that we kept our cool.
6. Very thankful I was able to take this course, despite the debt I incurred doing so.
7. Fabulah!
8. Insightful, specialized, motivating.
9. RBS is a model of educational technique—I learned as much watching how it is administered, organized, and run as I did from the course itself.
10. Alphabets. Butcher hooks.
11. *Fantastic* (I'll be back).
12. Tres bon, tres bon, tres bon.

## **Student Data**

*Number of respondents:* 12 (of 12)

*How did you arrange for time off to attend this course?*

My institution/employer gave me professional leave time: 6 (50%)

I am self-employed, and can arrange my own schedule: 1 (8.33%)

I am a student or non-year-round employee, with a more flexible summer schedule: 4 (33.33%)

I am retired, and can arrange my own schedule: 1 (8.33%)

*Who paid your RBS tuition costs?*

I paid 100% myself: 5 (41.67%)

My institution/employer paid 100%: 4 (33.33%)

I used a scholarship/fellowship to pay/waive 100%: 2 (16.67%)

I used a scholarship/fellowship to pay/waive part; I paid the rest: 1 (8.33%)

*Who paid your RBS housing expenses?*

I paid 100% myself: 7 (58.33%)  
My institution/employer paid 100%: 3 (25%)  
I stayed with friends/family, or stayed in my own home and commuted: 2 (16.67%)

*Who paid your RBS travel expenses?*

I paid 100% myself: 6 (50%)  
My institution/employer paid 100%: 2 (16.67%)  
My institution/employer paid part; I paid the rest: 2 (16.67%)  
I live locally, and had no travel expenses: 2 (16.67%)

*Which of the following **best** describes your current occupation?*

**Library disciplines:**

Curator: 1 (8.33%)  
Special collections librarian: 1 (8.33%)

**Student working toward a/n:**

B.A./B.S.: 1 (8.33%)  
M.A./M.S.: 1 (8.33%)  
M.L.I.S./M.L.S.: 1 (8.33%)  
Ph.D./D.Phil: 2 (16.67%)

**Professional educator:**

Lecturer/adjunct: 1 (8.33%)  
Assistant professor: 1 (8.33%)

**Book trades:**

Antiquarian bookseller: 1 (8.33%)

**Other occupations/vocations:**

Book collector: 1 (8.33%)  
Other: 1 (8.33%)