

English 1210H: Special Collections Assignment

Due: Friday, February 7 by 4 p.m. in my mailbox (all the way at the back of Tate 114)

Length: 2-3 pages typed, double-spaced in Times New Roman 12-point font

Please place your name, the date, and my name (Anne Myers) in the heading on the first page.

Steps:

1. Friday, January 31: Meet in the Special Collections Reading Room in Ellis Library, rather than our regular classroom. In preparation for working with rare materials, please wash your hands and bring a notebook and a PENCIL (not pen). Bring this assignment sheet with you.
2. We will be looking at some manuscript materials and some printed materials, dating from the medieval period through the eighteenth century. Technically, the word “manuscript” means “written by hand.” The librarian will give you an introduction to the materials, and you will have a chance to browse through some of them.
3. Choose **one manuscript document and one printed book or document** on which to take detailed notes. In your notebook, describe the features of each as carefully as you can, taking special note of any characteristics that differ from those of modern printed books. Be sure to identify each by its title and date.

Some things you might take into consideration:

- a. What is the paper like?
 - b. What do you notice about the handwriting or type?
 - c. What do you notice about the language or spelling?
 - d. Does the document have illustrations or ornamentation of any kind?
 - e. Does the document have footnotes or marginalia (text in the margin) of any kind? If so, what seems to be the purpose of these notes?
 - f. Does the item have a title page? If so, what information is recorded on the title page? How does it look?
 - g. What are you able to generalize about the content of the item? Is it a single text or a collection of texts bound together? If it is a collection of texts, what is their relationship to one another?
 - h. For printed books especially: What sort of prefatory material does the text have, if any? What do you encounter before you reach the main text? What seems to be the purpose of this material?
 - i. Does the item have any interesting or unexpected features not covered on this list?
4. Using your notes, write a brief paper (2-3 pages) about your observations. The first half of your paper should describe the two items you chose in detail. The second half should reflect on the differences between these older items and the modern texts you purchase for your classes (*The Norton Anthology of English Literature* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provide perfect examples. As you write about these differences, you should also include some reflection on how the features you compare might affect the experience of reading the text. How might you encounter, understand, or interact with a text differently if you were reading it in its older form, as opposed to in a modern edition or anthology produced specifically for students?