

**Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition**, edited by Alexis E. Ramsey, Wendy B Sharer, Barbara L'Eplattenier, and Lisa Mastrangelo. Southern Illinois UP, 2010. 336 p.

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As a 1980s graduate student at Texas Christian University (TCU), the inaugural home of *Composition Studies* (CS), I developed interests in archival research and the history of rhetoric and composition (RC) while studying with leading lights Jim Corder, Winifred Horner, and Gary Tate. At TCU, I was strongly influenced by foundational works in this emerging field, particularly Winifred Bryan Horner's *The Present State of Scholarship in Historical and Contemporary Rhetoric* (first edition 1984), Gary Tate and Edward P. J. Corbett's *The Writing Teachers' Sourcebook* (second edition 1988), and Nan Johnson's *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America* (1991). I had the pleasure of reviewing Johnson's important work in the spring of 1992 when the journal *Freshman English News* got a new name and look, adding CS to the title. However, the 2010 publication of *Working in the Archives* (*WitA*) concretized the trajectory of my career by giving a face and credence to the kinds of research and teaching I had been doing since entering graduate school. In providing practical methods to undergird archival investigations, this collection's essays, penned by experienced archival researchers, de-mystify primary research for students and scholars new to this research method, inspiring novel applications of archival investigation. Adding to researcher narratives found in Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan's *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process* (2008), *WitA* made archival research personal and approachable, suggesting avenues of investigation that included pedagogy, interdisciplinary scholarship, and efforts to unsettle collections. Contributors to *WitA* not only invite readers to join ongoing scholarly conversations, but also provide the necessary tools, vocabulary, and encouragement to speak up.

RC as a field has long advocated interdisciplinary investigation, but historically researchers proverbially stayed in their own (comfortable) lanes, except for occasional cross-departmental work within humanities and social science departments. In the classroom, for example, Bonnie Stone Sunstein and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater's textbook *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research* (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1996) famously offered instructors a platform for combining observation, mapping, and community primary research methods with writing instruction. Many of us interested in teaching composition with archives began with this text, supplementing Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater's excellent ethnographic heuristics with exercises requiring examination of ephemera and artifacts. However, the 2010 publication of *WitA* (although not a traditional

textbook) introduced RC instructors to jargon and expert information easily adapted into classroom exercises focused specifically on archives. In *WitA*, Marshall's "Looking for Letters" and Zinkham's "Finding and Researching Photographs" addressed artifact analysis; Morris and Rose's "Invisible Hands" and Lucas and Strain's "Keep the Conversation Going" inspired teachers to design course projects including finding aids and oral histories; and Gaillet's "Archival Survival" and Yakel's "Searching and Seeking in the Deep Web" offered advice for visiting brick and mortar archives and accessing digital collections. *WitA*'s practical essays spawned interests in teaching with archives and provided adaptable materials for doing so throughout the vertical curriculum (see subsequent pedagogical scholarship including Beuhl, Chute, and Fields; Comer, Harker, and McCorkle; Enoch and VanHaitsma; Gaillet and Eble; Graban and Hayden; Greer and Grobman; Hayden; VanHaitsma).

*WitA* also asked researchers to look outside their own narrow disciplinary interests to expand understandings of archival investigation, foreshadowing later essays by special collection librarians who remind us that archival research (a niche methodology within RC) is actually the domain of trained colleagues. Information Specialist Michelle Caswell, for example, laments that "humanities scholarship [rarely engages in] conversation with ideas, debates, and lineages in archival studies" (para. 4). *WitA* made inroads into interdisciplinary acknowledgement and cooperation, visible in Morris and Rose's library science/RC scholarly collaboration and through inclusion of essays by Yakel (Professor of Information and Preservation of Archives) and Zinkham (Curator for Library of Congress). Current RC researchers note the importance of special collection scholarship and have begun citing archivist scholars (particularly when attempting to unsettle archives, discussing community archiving practices, or when investigating pedagogy/information technology). However, important pieces by RC/special collection collaborators such as Morris and Rose's "Invisible Hands: Recognizing Archivists' Work to Make Records Accessible" or Amy Lueck and Nadia Nasr's "Frameworks for Collaboration: Articulating Information Literacy and Writing Goals in the Archives" aren't commonplace in RC scholarship. Coauthoring with special collection librarians can extend *WitA* contributor's notions of "Archival Research as a Social Practice" (Lerner) in overt and meaningful ways. As a field, humanities scholars need to accept Caswell's challenge not only to acknowledge and co-investigate with our interdisciplinary colleagues but also to coauthor with them; RC archivist researchers and teachers (who have a long history of relying upon the expertise of archival librarians both to guide our scholarship and mentor students) are uniquely poised to engage in this mutually-beneficial collaborative work.

Partnering with archivists also enriches RC's efforts to unsettle archives—decolonize and repatriate materials, recognize community and ground up

archives, and resist entrenched collection practices and spaces—by expanding archival researchers’ knowledge of ethical practices alongside practical methods. Embedded in *WitA*’s how-to essays (e.g., essays by Glenn and Enoch; Ritter; Graban; Bergmann) are principles that move us towards elements of contemporary practices of unsettling archives, now evidenced in cutting-edge scholarship like the 2021 double special issue of *Across the Disciplines*, “Unsettling Archival Research across the Disciplines: Engaging Critical, Communal, and Digital Archives,” and the forthcoming 2022 collection *Unsettling Archival Research: Engaging Critical, Communal, and Digital Archives*. This scholarship overtly promotes “important cross-disciplinary conversation by bringing archivists, librarians, and information scientists into dialogue with rhetorical scholars doing archival work” (Kirsch, Smith, Allen, and García 2021) and provides models for engaging in collaborative, necessary, and game-changing primary research that addresses both historical investigation and current pressing social justice issues. Contemporary unsettling scholarship extends discussions of positionality, serendipity, archival responsibility, digital investigation, primary methods, and the need to research outside narrowly defined repositories that *WitA* contributors explore alongside practical methods. *WitA*’s longevity and enduring relevance lies in its warm invitation to take up the mantle of archival research, sage advice that encourages readers to confidently and skillfully approach academic and cultural topics aligned with personal interests, and open discussions concerning the inherent possibilities and challenges within this (sometimes mysterious) methodology.

Like *WitA*, the design and mission of *CS* also invites readers to discover the possibilities within writing studies for themselves and to reinterpret/recalibrate scholarly conversations. Over the years, my students (now professors and academic professionals in their own right) have published course designs, book reviews, and articles in the pages of *CS*, a journal that welcomes intergenerational exchanges and collaborations (e.g., “Where We Are” in issue 49.1). I am grateful to the editors and contributors (past and present) of this award-winning, independent journal for introducing me to the field all those years ago and helping to shape my career as a researcher, administrator, and teacher in innumerable ways. Happy Birthday, *Composition Studies*!

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