

Key Terms: Introducing Manuscripts and Transcription

Some of these terms and definitions are taken from the Newberry's list of key words for palaeographers (<https://paleography.library.utoronto.ca/content/glossary-of-terms>), from The National Archives (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/latinpalaeography/glossary.htm>), from the Folger's glossary of manuscript terms (https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Glossary_of_manuscript_terms), and from the British Library (<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/glossary.asp>).

Ampersand: &, the symbol that represents 'and'.

Binding: The sewing and covering of a book.

Brevigraph: A type of symbolic abbreviation such as &.

Catchword: A word at the bottom of a page matching the first word of the following page, usually intended to ensure the book would be bound in the correct order.

Colophon: A statement providing details of publication, usually at the end of a manuscript.

Contraction: A type of abbreviation where letters in the middle of a word are missed out, usually for common words like 'which' (w^{ch}) or 'with' (wth).

Fair copy: A manuscript showing signs of polish or finish, unlike drafts.

Foliation: The numbering of folios (rather than pages) within a manuscript.

Folio: A size of page produced by folding a standard printing sheet once, or a book comprised of pages of that size.

Hand: The writing of one individual in one distinct style. A single person could have more than one hand, in the same manuscript or on the same page, if they have learned different styles of writing.

- **Italic hand:** A style of handwriting developed in Italy, used in early modern England alongside secretary hand. See the alphabet: <https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/eres/ehoc/alphabets/italic.html>.
- **Secretary hand:** A style of handwriting in use from the 15th to 17th centuries, named for its use by copyists and secretaries in professional contexts. See the alphabet: <https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/eres/ehoc/alphabets/secretarie.html>.

Leaf: A single sheet of paper or vellum.

Manicule: A symbol of a pointing hand, used to draw attention to a passage in the text.

Manuscript: A text written by hand, abbreviated MS (singular) and MSS (plural).

Marginalia: In Latin, 'things in the margin'. Refers to writing or other interventions in the margins of a manuscript.

Minim: A minim in handwriting refers to a short, downward stroke. Some transcribers find it helpful to count the minims in a word to distinguish individual letters.

Miscellany: A manuscript containing a variety of elements, or literary genres.

Octavo: A size of page produced by folding a standard printing sheet three times, or a book comprised of pages of that size.

Page: One side of a leaf, or one side of a single sheet of paper or vellum.

Pagination: The numbering of pages (rather than folios) within a manuscript.

Palaeography: The study of historical or old forms of writing.

Parchment: The generic term for stretched animal skin used as a writing support.

Pen trial: Early modern writers frequently tested their quill pens with letters, names, doodles and scribbles, which you can sometimes spot on the page.

Provenance: The history of a particular manuscript's ownership or sale.

Quarto: A size of page produced by folding a standard printing sheet twice, or a book comprised of pages of that size.

Recipe (also called **receipt**, **receite**): A text including instructions, ingredients, formulae, remedies, procedures or processes for the production of foods, medicines, or other items.

Recto: The front of a folio or leaf.

Rubric: A word or part of the text written in red, usually for emphasis.

Shelf mark: The combination of numbers and letters by which a manuscript or book is known within a library or archive. Often manuscripts are called by their shelfmarks.

Silently expanded: This means that the transcriber has chosen to write out letters, words, or phrases that were abbreviated in the original manuscript, e.g. w^{ch} becomes which.

Subscript: Subscript letters are written or printed below the line.

Superscript: Superscript letters are written or printed above the line, e.g. y^e contains a superscript e.

Tilde: A tilde is a horizontal mark above a word that lets the reader know that some letters have been missed out, e.g. occasiõ for 'occasion'.

Transcription: A copy that records the appearance of a manuscript text. Types of transcription include:

- **Diplomatic:** A diplomatic transcription copies everything as close to the original manuscript as possible, e.g. maintaining contractions and abbreviations.
- **Semi-diplomatic:** A semi-diplomatic transcription makes changes to the original manuscript for clarity and readability, e.g. expanding contractions, but maintaining original spelling. Changes should be indicated in the **transcription policy**.

Transcription policy (or **statement of conventions**): A document in which the transcriber explains how they have chosen to present their transcription. See an example:

<https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/eres/ehoc/conventions.html>.

Vellum: Calfskin used as a writing support.

Verso: The back of a folio or leaf.

Watermark: A design left on early modern paper by the wire frame used in paper-making, usually visible when the paper is held up to the light.

XML: Extensible Markup Language, used to encode transcriptions to permit a computer to read them efficiently. See EMROC's guide: <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/category/transcribing>.