

James Madison University

JMU Scholarly Commons

Printing and the Book During the Reformation:
1450-1650, an NEH Summer Seminar for
College and University Teachers

Conference Proceedings

2023

200-level Assignment series: book history methods in an introductory-level English literature course

Simone Waller

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/sscut>



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#), and the [Renaissance Studies Commons](#)

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the Conference Proceedings at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Printing and the Book During the Reformation: 1450-1650, an NEH Summer Seminar for College and University Teachers by an authorized administrator of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.

Simone Waller

NEH Summer Seminar: Printing and the Book During the Reformation

July 2022

200-Level Introductory Seminar Assignment Series

The following activities and assignments aim to scaffold foundational skills and knowledge for students utilizing book history methods in an introductory-level English literature course.

Three in-class activities prepare students to undertake a larger research project split over the midterm and final assignments. Specific learning objectives accompany each activity and assignment.

Resources referenced in activities and assignments include:

Books:

Bland, Mark. *A Guide to Early Printed Books and Manuscripts*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

Gaskell, Philip. *A New Introduction to Bibliography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.

McKerrow, R.B. *Printers' & Publishers' Devices in England and Scotland: 1485-1640*. London: Bibliographical Society, 1913.

McKerrow, R.B. *Title Page Borders Used in England & Scotland, 1485-1640*. London: Bibliographical Society, 1932.

A transcript of the registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554-1640. London: Edward Arber, 1875.

Journal Article and Book Chapter:

Adams, Thomas and Nicolas Barker. "A New Model for the Study of the Book," in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society*, edited by Nicolas Barker, 5-43. London: The British Library, 1993.

Darton, R.B. "What Is the History of Books?" *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 65-83.

Websites:

Early English Books Online (EEBO), <https://www.proquest.com/eebo>

English Short Title Catalog (ESTC), http://estc.bl.uk/F/?func=file&file_name=login-bl-estc

WorldCat, <https://www.worldcat.org/>

In-Class Activity #1

Learning Objectives:

- Describe material features of a book
- Connect material features of a book to the book's social, emotional, or intellectual function
- Identify need(s) for standard terminology and measurements in book descriptions to facilitate comparison and communication

Part I

Take five minutes to reflect on your experiences with printed books as a child or a young adult. What book do you remember the best? This book could be a book you read, a book someone read to you, or a book you saw without ever reading. Picture this book in your mind and recall your experiences with this book.

Part II

Write down answers to as many questions about the book's appearance, construction, and feel as you can.

1. What did this book look like when it was closed?
 - a. Was it large or small?
 - b. Was the book hardcover or paperback?
 - i. If it was hardcover, do you remember what material covered the book boards? Paper? Leather? Fabric?
 - ii. Did the book have a dust jacket (removable paper slip that fits over the book cover)?
 - c. What kind of binding technique was used to hold the pages and cover of the book together? Were the pages punctured and held together with a metal or plastic spiral? Were the pages glued together? Were the pages sewn together?
 - d. What color was the book's cover?
 - e. Was there an image on the book's cover?
 - f. Were there words on the cover or the spine of the book?
 - g. How thick was the book?
2. How did the book feel in your hands?
 - a. Was the book heavy, or light?
 - b. Did the book fit in one hand, or did you need two to hold it?
 - c. Could the book be held aloft as it was read, or did it need to rest on a surface?

3. What did this book look like when it was open?
 - a. What kind of paper was the book printed or written on?
 - i. Was the paper thick or thin; rough or smooth; shiny or dull?
 - ii. What color was the paper?
 - iii. Did the paper have a smell?
 - iv. Was the paper generally clean, or did you notice stains on the pages?
 - b. What did the printed type look like on the page?
 - i. Large or small?
 - ii. Was the type consistent, or did it change across the book or a single page?
 - iii. How would you describe the font? Ornate or plain? Loose or tight? Angular or rounded?
 - c. Do you remember how the pages were formatted?
 - i. Were there page numbers or running titles?
 - ii. Were there columns of text, or some other organization?
 - iii. How much white space was in the margins or between lines?
 - iv. Was there type or writing in the margins or anywhere else you found memorable?

Part III

Now, take five minutes to think about how you or someone else used the book. Answer the following questions.

1. Where was this book stored when no one was using it? What did you think or feel about this place?
2. Where was this book used? Outside, inside? In a particular room? At a desk or on a countertop, etc? What did you think or feel about this place?
3. Who used this book? What did you think or feel about this person?
4. Who owned the book? What relationship did you have with this person or organization?
5. How did you or someone else use this book? Did you read it in whole or in part? Did you use it to prop open a door or window? Did you decorate your shelf with it?
6. What did interacting with this book make you think?
7. How did interacting with this book make you feel?
8. Why is this book memorable to you?

Part IV

Now, read through your answers to Part II and Part III. Are any of your answers to Part III related to the material features of the book that you described in Part II? Why or why not?

Part V

Share your written reflection from Part IV with your small group. Are there any commonalities between your answers? Do you notice any significant differences? Write down one conclusion or question arising from your small group discussion to share with the group.

Prompts for Further Discussion:

1. How many people had ever thought about the material features of a book before? In what context?
2. Could a few people give examples of the titles or genres of the books you chose?
3. What did you remember most about your chosen book? Did anyone have a difficult time remembering what their book looked or felt like?
4. Why do you think you remembered this book in particular? What made this book important to you? Can you think of others for whom this book would hold significance? How much does your personal investment in this book align or misaligned with others' investments in it?
5. What was it like to try to compare notes about your books? What kind of language did you use as you attempted to describe your books?
6. What challenges did you notice in attempting to describe and share your descriptions?
7. On a scale from 0 to 100%, how confident in your description do you feel?

[Note: For next class, try to locate a few of the books students described to share with the group. Pass an example around as you read the student's description. Ask everyone to judge how well the student remembered and described the book, as well as to note what features were forgotten or misremembered.]

In-Class Activity #2

Learning Objectives:

- Apply standard terminology to describe features of early printed books
 - foliation versus pagination
 - catchwords and direction lines
 - spatial descriptors- head and tail; fore-edge and spine
 - margins- head and tail; outer and inner
 - gatherings and signatures
 - format- folio, quarto, octavo, etc.
 - paper impressions- watermarks, chain lines, wire lines
 - paper edges- uncut versus cut; unopened versus opened
- Apply standard terminology to describe type size and type face
- Practice measuring paper size, type size, and chain lines
- Compare material features of books using standard terminology

Part I

After viewing all of the books in the exhibit, work with a partner to choose two to describe in detail. Referencing Philip Gaskell's *A New Introduction to Bibliography*, work independently to answer the following questions:

1. Referencing pages 80-107 in Gaskell, determine the format of your book.
 - a. Measure a leaf, adding 1-2 cm for large books or .5-1cm for small books to account for cutting
 - b. Identify the direction of the chain lines
 - c. Locate and describe the watermark and its orientation
 - d. Use the signature marks to determine the number of leaves per gathering
 - e. Follow Gaskell's guide to Key I, II, or III to determine the format
2. Describe the features of the title page
 - a. Referencing pages 12-33 of Gaskell, what type faces and sizes are represented on the page?
 - b. Does the page include any illustrations? Referencing pages 154-159 of Gaskell and the handout of examples, identify the method used to print the illustration(s).
 - c. Referencing pages 167-170 of Mark Bland's *A Guide to Early Printed Books and Manuscripts*, write a description of the title page contents.
3. Note the features of a typical page (i.e. not the title page, a preliminary page, etc.)
 - a. Is the book foliated or paginated?
 - b. Does the book use catchwords on a direction line?

- c. Is the text justified?
- d. What sizes are the book's head, tail, outer, and inner margins?
- e. Are there running titles or marginalia?
- f. Referencing pages 12-33 of Gaskell, what type faces and sizes are represented on the page?

Trade books with your partner and repeat the process for the second book.

Part II

For each book, compare your responses with those of your partner. Where are you in agreement? Where are you in disagreement?

When you find discrepancies between your responses, consider how they may have come about. Has an error been made, or have you simply interpreted the material evidence differently? Explain the reasoning behind your choices to each other, and come to a decision concerning whose work is more accurate (or revise both responses for greater accuracy).

Part III

Once you and your partner have agreed on your answers for each book, consider where you see similarities in the way each book has been constructed and formatted. Note where you see differences. How might these similarities and differences be related to each book's contents and function?

Part IV

After receiving a classmate's responses at random, read through your classmate's work. Answer the following question:

1. What kind of book is described? What is the book's likely genre or use?
2. What evidence in the responses led you to that conclusion?

Now, look through the exhibit to find the book described in the responses. Answer the following questions:

1. Which part of the responses was most helpful to you in locating the book?
2. Which part of the responses was least helpful?
3. What could the writer have done to have made their responses more useful to you?

4. How accurate was your hypothesis about the book's genre? What other physical evidence in the book could have helped you come to an accurate conclusion?
5. How does this book compare to the two books you and your partner described? Are there any notable commonalities or differences?

In-Class Activity #3

Learning Objectives:

- Practice reading signatures
- Practice collating and describing book structure

Each student will choose an edition of a work from a pre-selected list of titles available on *Early English Books Online*. Titles will represent a range of genres and topics of interest to the group. Students will download a PDF of the edition's microfilm to use as the basis for their analysis.

Part I

1. Referencing pages 158-166 of Mark Bland's *A Guide to Early Printed Books and Manuscripts*, analyze and describe the structure of your book.
 - a. Surveying the book page by page, note:
 - i. the sequence of signatures
 - ii. the sequence of page or folio numbers
 - iii. any anomalies (letters or numbers out of order; missing letters or numbers; unexpected letters, numbers, or symbols) in these sequences
 - iv. the content of pages (blanks, title pages, preliminary matter, main text, notes, indices, errata, etc.)
 - b. Format your notes according to Bland's models

Part II

1. Determine where physical copies of your book are held using the ESTC and WorldCat.
 - a. Attempt to locate the copy of your book that served as the basis for the microfilm you referenced; note any physical descriptions of that copy in the library's catalog
 - b. Check your book format and page number count against the information in the ESTC and library catalog. Are there any discrepancies? If so, do these discrepancies likely arise from error, or from a difference between the state of the microfilm and the physical copy of the book described? Explain your reasoning.

Midterm Assignment

Learning Objectives:

- Practice collating and describing book structure
- Formulate hypotheses using bibliographic evidence
- Identify appropriate resources for bibliographic research

Each student will be assigned an additional early modern edition of the same work that they analyzed and described in the third in-class activity. Students will continue to work with EEBO PDFs, unless a physical copy is available.

Part I

Repeat the steps of the third in-class activity with your second PDF.

Part II

1. Using your notes from the third-in class activity and Part I of this assignment, compare the structure of the two editions. What differences do you notice between the two editions?
2. Drawing on your knowledge of the printing house practices (described in Gaskell and Bland), Darnton's "communication circuit" model of book production and consumption, and Adams and Barker's "socio-economic conjuncture" model of book production and consumption, what possible social, economic, or material causes could have had a part in producing the discrepancies between these two editions?
3. Choose your strongest or most interesting hypothesis.
 - a. What evidence in your analysis of the books' structures could support this hypothesis? What evidence in your analysis of the books' structures could complicate or disprove this hypothesis?
 - b. What additional information would you need to seek out to confirm, develop, or disprove this hypothesis?
 - i. What resources in the course resource guide would you consult to find this information?
 - ii. What other evidence in the editions might you consult? Review In-Class Activity Two for examples.
 - iii. What information would you only be able to determine by analyzing physical copies of the editions?

Meet with your instructor to discuss your findings in Part II and to finalize your hypothesis and research plan.

Final Assignment

Learning Objectives:

- Employ bibliographic resources to determine facts concerning an edition's production, reception, and/or circulation
- Test hypotheses concerning an edition's production, reception, and/or circulation through evidence-based, reasoned argument
- Relate facts and hypotheses concerning an edition's production, reception and/or circulation to literary interpretation of its content
- Determine limits in evidence and recommend specific questions for further research

Part I

Execute your bibliographic research plan from the midterm assignment. If possible, make sure to determine:

- a. the agents involved in each edition's production: author, printer, publisher, bookseller, patron, etc.
- b. each edition's known, imagined, or likely readers
- c. the context(s) in which the edition(s) originally appeared and circulated
- d. the relationship between these editions and other early modern editions of the work (1475-1700)

If relevant to your research questions, you may also choose to consider the full story of how the book came to reside in its present archive. Doing so will likely involve contacting research librarians and may be outside the scope of work that can be accomplished remotely this semester.

Part II

1. Given the findings of your bibliographic research, consider the ways in which each edition's material form and circumstances of production affect your understanding of the literary work.
2. What new question about the interpretation of this work are you able to ask after undertaking bibliographic description and research?

Part III

Write a 2500-word paper that:

- a) Formulates a question of literary interpretation that can be explored through bibliographic research

- b) Summarizes your bibliographic research
- c) Relates your bibliographic research to a close reading of the literary text
- d) Draws a conclusion about the literary text
- e) Notes areas of uncertainty that affect the viability of your argument and conclusion
- f) Recommends additional research that could resolve these uncertainties, where possible