

#### 4. PROCESS THE MATERIAL

You may need to tweak the images you capture to make them legible or to improve their quality.

- Use photo-processing software (like Photoshop) to make the image lighter, darker, adjust the contrast or manipulate flaws.
- Crop the material to bring focus to a particular section of the document.
- Convert the image into an appropriate format (png, jpg, gif) and file size.

If you are capturing a longer manuscript or other multi-page document, there are two main approaches:

##### Turn the manuscript into regular searchable text.

If there is typewritten text in the images, it can be translated into regular searchable text using OCR software.

- The same mobile document-scanning apps you use to capture images can also translate typewritten text from images into searchable text files using OCR.
- They nearly all will require you to do some manual cleanup after the initial OCR conversion.

##### Circulate the manuscript in the form of images or PDFs.

There are tools that let you easily collect individual images into a single document. It's fairly simple to gang up multiple digital images (typically jpgs) into a PDF, using software such as Adobe Acrobat Pro, Preview on the Mac or document scanning software.

If there is handwriting in the images, that will need to be transcribed by hand into searchable text. When hand-transcribing a document into searchable text or cleaning up an OCR conversion, it's best to keep your process as simple as possible.

Here are some tips:

- Write down or type the words as written, with original capitalization and spelling.
- Don't worry about preserving line breaks unless it's a poem.
- If it's simple for you to transcribe special formatting (italics, bold type, underlining, strike-throughs, accent marks), feel free to do so; otherwise ignore it.
- If you can't decipher a word because of the handwriting, make a guess and mark it with a question mark in double brackets [?].
- Do find a way to include marginal notes and mark them as such.
- Keep track of where the original pages begin and end.
- If you have photos of each page of the original manuscript, you may find it helpful to indicate which photo each section of text corresponds to.
- You may find it more fun to work on this with a friend.
- Remember that the final document doesn't have to be a perfect transcription in order to make a missing voice heard.

#### 5. SHARE YOUR DISCOVERIES

Liberate the material you took the time to find, photograph, or transcribe!

Sharing the material with your community helps it become part of our common history.

- Write about what you found on social media (blog, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). Use hashtags liberally so people who might be interested in the person or the era or the subject can find your post. Tag the institution where you found the material.
- Encourage the archive to share the original document online, through their website or other channels, or ask them if you can share it on your own website. Again, use hashtags and keywords so that interested people can find the material.
- Give a talk about it somewhere in your community—people love hearing stories about places like archives where they may never have been themselves.
- Share it in a class as part of a research project, or write a paper about it for a class.
- Put it on a personal website if it's from a family archive (for more on family archives, see our pamphlet on family archives).

*\*A Note on Hashtags and Keywords: You never know which search terms will bring someone to your post, so try to use as wide a range of tags as possible: people's names, decades, historical eras and events, locations, and relevant topics mentioned like food or fashion or sport or politics. Even the form the document took (#unpublished, #diary, #manuscript, #familyletters, #lovenotes, #passports).*

# BECOMING A CITIZEN RESEARCHER: A GUIDE IN 5 STEPS

Every story matters, but not every story gets told.

Sitting in libraries, small museums, historical societies, and similar institutions throughout the United States are archives holding the personal papers of people whose achievements are no longer well known.

Finding and publishing even fragments of these forgotten witnesses to history helps us gain a new perspective, one that provides a more honest, compelling, and inclusive account of our collective past. The more we know these stories, the better we can know ourselves.

**These archives belong to all of us, and anyone can access them.** You don't have to be a historian, a writer, or an expert.

You can help bring this material to the surface simply by going into these archives and sharing what you find—bits of unpublished manuscripts, autobiographies, diaries, journals, letters, sketchbooks, and photographs. We all benefit from a diverse community of citizens unearthing lost histories and disseminating what they discover.

The purpose of this guide to give you tools to be a citizen researcher. It covers how to find and enter an archive, how to make the most of your time there, how to find the materials you're interested in, how to work with them on the spot, and how to bring some of these historical documents—and their lost knowledge—into public view.

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## 1. FINDING AN ARCHIVE

Archives come in different sizes, affiliations, and accessibilities. You can find them at your local historical society or museum, at a nearby library or research institute, and at the colleges and universities in your area.

To find out what is near you, try a simple Google search driven by your own interests. Type in a few keywords along with terms such as “near me,” “archive,” “manuscripts,” “collections,” and “unpublished”. You might want to include terms for subjects you are particularly interested in, such as “feminist history”, “LGBTQ”, or “Latina”.

## 2. ENTERING THE ARCHIVE

Once you’ve found an archive you want to explore, here are the first things to consider, which are usually on an archive’s website:

- What are the archive’s open hours? Ordinarily, material cannot be signed out but must be viewed and photographed at the archive itself.
- What are the archive’s rules for guest access? They often want to see an ID; there may be time constraints on visits, as well as limits on the materials that can be viewed.
- What are the rules for handling archival materials? You may be asked to wear gloves or to use pencils instead of pens (archives often will have such things ready for use). Inquire about special procedures or rules ahead of time.

## 3. CAPTURING WHAT YOU FIND

When you start opening up boxes and finding interesting things, you will want to capture them. It is important to understand the archive’s rules related to photocopying, scanning, and photographing materials, which will vary from place to place.

- Many archives today allow you to use a camera or cameraphone. However, some archives will have restrictions on the kinds of cameras and/or accessories you may use, such as tripods, stands, mounts, and flash units. Ask before you go.
- Some archives may provide their own stands and/or anti-reflective paper upon which items can be photographed.
- Archives often restrict the examination of materials to a specific room or space, and the lighting and windows within that space can affect the quality of the photographs taken (the presence of shadow and glare on protective plastic, for example).
- In some cases there will be copyright limitations that may prevent a document from being reproduced, but there are many archival documents that are out of copyright. (And even if the document itself is copyrighted, you can help bring it to light by writing about it and quoting from it.)
- If you don’t want to take photos yourself, many archives will do it for you, but will charge you a reproduction fee.

For example, the terms “feminist” + “archive” + “manuscript” yield results that include:

- Duke University’s Lisa Unger Baskin Collection, which documents women’s work from the 15th to the 20th century and includes many thousands of manuscripts, journals, rare books, and artifacts.
- The University of Oregon’s Lesbian Land Manuscript Collection, relating to women-only intentional communities where women sought to live together safely and respectfully; it includes letters, diaries, journals, newsletters, financial documents, and photographs.

The terms “Latina” + “archive” + “historical society” yield results that include:

- The Arizona Historical Society Library and Archives in Tucson (part of the Arizona Memory Project), which gives access to government documents, maps, photographs, and other materials chronicling the state’s past.

The terms “disability” + “activism” + “manuscripts” + “archive” yield results that include:

- A page for finding aids related to disability history at the University of Toledo’s Canaday Center, including the papers of disability activist Lee Lawrence (1923-2002).

## Tools for Capturing Images

### Camera or camera phone

Using a camera or camera-phone to photograph documents in an archive is often the simplest approach; newer cameras can take high-quality, high-resolution images (suggestions for resolution). It’s best to inquire ahead of time what kinds of cameras the archive will allow, and especially whether they permit the use of tripods or flash units.

### Camera phone control app

There are a number of free apps for camera phones that allow for better control of focus and shutter speed, allowing for higher-quality pictures to be taken under the often dim or uneven lighting conditions found in archives. Examples include Camera+ for iPhones.

### Apps for capturing documents or manuscripts

There are many document-scanning apps currently available for mobile phones. They all have slightly different features, but you can use these apps to take photos of documents, collate large documents into a single PDF file, and also translate the text of typewritten documents into searchable text files. Examples include CamScanner and Scannable by Evernote.

### Bluetooth clicker

If you are copying a large number of pages, it may help to use a Bluetooth clicker to trigger the camera remotely for faster picture taking. Not all archives allow these, so inquire first.

### Phone scanner stands

A phone scanner stand is used to stabilize a camera phone and to guide you in positioning the documents you are reproducing in a consistent manner. This can speed up the process of taking pictures and can help make your images all come out of equal quality and in good focus. Not all archives allow these, so inquire first.

### Photocopying machine

If you can’t take pictures yourself, many archives will allow documents to be photocopied on the premises; however, they usually charge per page for this service.