

New Hampshire Historical Society Transcription Project: Quick Reference Guide

Produced by New Hampshire Historical Society, June 2017

Purpose of the Transcription Project: To provide an exact, typed replica of a handwritten letter or document so that the letter and transcription can be held side-by-side and read together. To that end, all spacing (including lines and pages), grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation should match the original letter exactly (including errors).

Font: Times New Roman 12 pt. (used in the header, footer, and body of the document).

Header: The purpose of the header is to easily identify the recipient, writer, and date.

- Template: Letter to FULL NAME (when available) from FULL NAME (when available), dated FULL DATE (when available).
- Example: Letter to Mary Jane Smith from Paul Oakley, dated October 30, 1842.
- Note:
 - The phrase ends with a period.
 - Names and months should be spelled out completely, even if they are abbreviated in the letter. For example, if the letter is dated Oct. 30/1842 – the header should still be transcribed as October 30, 1842.
 - If the name of the recipient or sender is not listed in full in the letter, but is known, include the full name in the header. For example, if John Barkley wrote a letter to “Dear Mom” and signed it “Son”, but it is established that his mother’s name was Betty Barkley, then the header should still read “Letter to Betty Barkley from John Barkley”
 - If the name of the recipient or sender is not known and cannot be ascertained from the rest of the collection, use the name provided in the letter.
 - In this case, a header might include nicknames. Example: Letter to Mom from Harry Smith, dated August 20, 1855.

Footer: The purpose of the footer is to easily identify the collection from which the letter came. The footer should use the Society’s standard citation so that (1) researchers who wish to see the collection in person are able to identify the material and (2) anyone citing from the transcription will have our standard citation.

- Template: [Source: ACCESSION NUMBER, COLLECTION NAME, New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, New Hampshire.]
- Example: [Source: Chinook Collection, 2009.025, New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, New Hampshire.]
- Notes:
 - The source should be enclosed by square brackets.
 - The source should end with a period.
 - The Accession Number has a four-digit year and three-decimal-place identifier.
 - Use a decimal, not a dash. For example, 2010.004 (not 2010-004)
 - Always use three decimal places. For example, 2010.004 (not 2010.4).
 - Minor collections are designated by (m) at the end of the Accession Number. For example, 1933.122(m).
 - There should *not* be a space between the number and (m). For example, 1933.122(m) (not 1933.122 (m)).

Body of Document: The transcription should be an exact replica of the body of the document. To that end:

- Match line-by-line: when the original begins a new line, begin a new line on the transcription.
- Match page-by-page: when the original moves to a new page, insert a page break.
- Use the spelling in the letter. Do not correct misspelled words.
 - If a word is so misspelled as to not be identifiable, the correctly spelled word can be included in square brackets beside the misspelled word.
 - Note that spelling was not completely standardized until the very early 20th century, and prior to that people often wrote phonetically.
- Use the capitalization in the letter. Do not correct punctuation. If a word at the beginning of a sentence is not capitalized – do not capitalize it. If a word in midsentence is incorrectly capitalized – capitalize it.
 - Example: the Deer ran.
- Use the punctuation in the letter. Do not add punctuation the author missed. Do not ignore incorrect uses of periods, commas, etc.
 - Note that punctuation was not standard, and people often used a period or comma when they paused. So a letter might contain two paragraphs with no punctuation.
- Use the grammar in the letter.
- Special Formatting Requirements:
 - To note uncertainty regarding text that is difficult to read: use square brackets
 - Example: [left]
 - Example: Paul A[pple]ton
 - Note: Bracket text when the transcriber is not certain, but is confident in the spelling of a word that is difficult to read. Do not guess on an illegible word.
 - To note text that is illegible in its entirety: [. . .]
 - Include any portion of the word that is legible outside the brackets. Example re[. . .]e.
 - To note when text is missing or cannot be read because the manuscript is torn: [*MS. torn*]
 - If the missing or partially missing word can still be gleaned from the context, include it in brackets following [*MS. torn*]
 - Example: [*MS. torn*] Su[san] [Fel]lows
 - Note: Only note [*MS. torn*] when the tear interferes with words on the document.
 - Text inserted above the line by the author: [^TEXT]
 - Place the inserted text into the line in its intended place.
 - Example: Horace had troubling finding [^his] way.
 - Note: *Do not* use superscript or subscript to indicate inserted text. Use standard 12 pt. font for the entire line, including the inserted text; *do not* use smaller font to indicate inserted text.
 - Postscripts should be transcribed exactly as written. If there is text written below the signature without ‘P.S.’ – do *not* add P.S. ahead of the text. If ‘PS’ is written without punctuation, write it without punctuation.

- Watch out for:
 - The long-tailed ‘s’ in pre-nineteenth century materials. To a modern reader, it can look like an f.



- Periods can look like dashes.

Addresses/Postmarks/Endorsements:

- [*Postmarked:*] precedes the postmark on a letter or envelope. Then type the postmark on the letter or (including a postmark over a stamp).
 - Example: [*Postmarked:*] BOSTON AUG 28
- [*Addressed:*] precedes the address to which the letter was sent.
 - Example:
[*Addressed:*]
Josiah Smith
Concord
NH
- [*Endorsed:*] precedes any information written on the letter or envelope by someone other than the author.
 - Example: [*Endorsed in pencil:*] Letter from Gates, 1776.
 - Note: Text written by someone other than the author is often clear due to the use of pencil or a different pen than the author.

Letterhead:

- [*Letterhead:*] precedes any typed letterhead on the document.

Saving the Document:

- Save the document as a word file in your volunteer folder. Save it in the following format: author's last name_first name_year.month.day.
- Example: Smith_Dorcas_1832.06.02
 - If the part of the author's name is unknown, use as much of the name as is known.
 - Example: Smith_A._1866.11.1
 - If the author is unknown, use unknown author.
 - Example: unknown_1854.04.10
 - If the full date is not known, use as much of the date as is known.
 - Example: Potter_Eliphallet_1846
 - If the date is totally unknown, use undated.
 - Example: Stark_Cornelius_undated