**Rare Books Pedagogy Unit**

Editing and Transcription Exercise

Many, if not most, older works lack modern editions. In order to work with such texts, students need to learn the conventions of older forms of writing, as well as strategies for discerning meaning from texts. This exercise provides an opportunity for students to analyze and interpret older texts, focusing on issues of spelling, vocabulary, and critical apparatus.

**As you work through this exercise, please keep the following in mind:**

You must comply with the rules of the Rare Book Room.

* Please handle all texts with care; do not bend book spines back, bend pages, and so on.
* You may only use pencils while working in the Rare Book Room; pens are not allowed.
* No food or drink is allowed in Special Collections.

**Choose one of the following texts:**

***[Add in the chosen texts here]***

**For the first part of this exercise, you will need to copy a designated passage from a printed text so as to make the passage accessible to a modern reader.**

1. Be sure to copy the passage accurately. (This is not as easy as it sounds).
2. Certain letter substitutions are common in older texts. Watch for the letter “i” where we would use a “j”, “v” for “u,” a long “s” for an “f,” and so on. Such usage is not always consistent, and in some cases, you many need to rely on context to determine whether a letter is substituted or not. Decide whether or not you want to modernize the spelling.
3. Punctuation is highly variable in older texts. Watch for the use of colons (where we might use periods), semi-colons (where we might use commas), and so on. Decide whether or not you want to modernize the punctuation.
4. Capitalization is also highly variable in older texts. In some older works, every noun is capitalized. Look for patterns in the capitalization to determine whether it is being used for emphasis, or not. Decide whether or not you want to retain the capitalization of the original text.
5. Some texts use italics for emphasis, particularly for significant nouns. Check for patterns in italicization, and decide whether or not you want to retain the original italicization.
6. Assess the vocabulary of the passage. Are there any words that are unfamiliar to you? Or words that are being used in an unusual sense? If so, check the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), which provides definitions of words from specific periods. (The *OED* is available through the library database system). Provide notes on vocabulary that you feel will be useful for a modern reader.
7. Evaluate the content of the passage. Provide notes on the author, the text, and/or the ideas in the passage that you think will be useful for a modern reader.

Based on your transcription of the text and your notes on the text, you should be able to write a brief (one to two page) essay in which you develop some ideas about transcription and the editing process.

**Please keep the following in mind:**

1. State your thesis at the beginning of your essay. Your thesis may focus on the editing process (and your choices), on the needs of modern readers, or on the conventions of older texts. Remember that a thesis is a position statement and that you need to stake a position about this passage in your essay.
2. The more specific evidence you use in your essay to prove your point, the better.
3. Your essay should *not* be a list of responses to the questions 1 through 7 above. The questions are intended to give you some strategies to begin your analysis; they do not provide the structure (or the thesis) for your essay, nor are they intended to limit your analysis.
4. Each paragraph of your essay should support your thesis statement. Please make sure that there are transitions between paragraphs so that each paragraph leads to the next, and make sure that each paragraph builds upon its predecessor.
5. Every book, and every passage, reflects a cultural moment. It is your job to make sense of it.
6. This assignment does not require external research—it requires careful viewing, thinking, and writing.
7. Be sure to attach your transcription (including the notes for the transcription) to your essay.

**Grading Rubric:**

A (90-100) – Excellent work. The essay has been completed in a professional and timely manner. The student has engaged with the subject in a thoughtful and thought-provoking manner. The transcription is accurate, and the notes are insightful. The essay has a clearly articulated thesis, and it is clearly organized; the author has chosen compelling evidence to substantiate the analysis. The essay does not require substantive revision, and there are no grammatical or stylistic errors.

B (80-89) – Good work; the essay has been completed in a professional and timely manner. The transcription is accurate, or has minor errors; the notes are relevant and useful. The essay shows that the student has substantially engaged with the subject, but the analysis is either partially incomplete, includes weak evidence, or manifests some difficulty with organization. The essay requires substantive revisions, but few or no stylistic ones.

C (70-79) – Average work; the essay has been completed but not necessarily in a professional or timely manner. The transcription has significant errors; the notes are relevant but incomplete or imprecise. The essay reflects effort by the student, but the analysis is incomplete, includes inappropriate evidence (or a lack of evidence), or shows significant difficulties with organization. The essay requires significant substantive, or stylistic revisions.

D (60-69) - Less than average work. The transcription is inaccurate; the notes are perfunctory, incomplete, and imprecise. The essay has not been completed in a professional or timely manner. The essay shows a lack of effort on the part of the student and a lack of engagement with the assignment. The essay lacks analysis, evidence, and organization; extensive substantive and stylistic revisions are necessary.

F (<59) – Inadequate work. The transcription has not been submitted; if the transcription has been submitted, it lacks notes. The essay has not been completed, or when submitted, the essay demonstrates a significant lack of effort on the part of the student. Such work is marked by the absence of analysis, evidence, and organization; engagement with the illustration and the assignment is necessary before extensive revisions are even possible.