Tips for transcribing documents

STATE LIBRARY OF NSW: 'HOW TO' GUIDE

Transcription website https://transcripts.sl.nsw.gov.au/

Why transcribe?

The State Library of NSW is dedicated to making our collections more accessible and you can help us achieve this goal. The Library hold millions of pages of historically important handwritten documents in our collections.

Handwritten documents are sometimes difficult to read and the text in digitised images is not searchable. Producing transcripts of original manuscripts improves access to these historical documents for researchers, historians and members of the public.

You can help us to transcribe these items, which include diaries, letters, journals and manuscripts. In doing so you will be contributing to the improvement and enrichment of the Library's collections, as well as taking an opportunity to delve deeper into the wonders of NSW cultural heritage.

It takes time and patience to transcribe these items and we are thankful for every sentence you type. By transcribing you become a valuable member of our volunteer team and an important part of the Library's legacy.

Transcribing
A few things to remember before you start transcribing

The words are the most important part of transcribing.

Type what is there.

Transcripts are a copy of the original document.

Do not correct spelling, punctuation or grammar.

If there is writing in the margins or footnotes include it in the transcription and indicate where the text was located on the page e.g. [Note in margin] or [Written sideways in margin].

You don't need to include printed text from the diary such as letterheads, diary calendars or other printed pages, but include all manuscript annotations and pages numbers.

Where the page includes list of names or numbers e.g. an invoice, you can insert a table to replicate the layout of the original.

Formatting

Formatting isn't important so don't spend hours trying to reproduce the same page layout as the original.

You can use formatting tools to underline, strike through or find special characters such as the pound (£) symbol.

Other tools available in the transcribing text area are listed in the *'How to use the transcription tool' guide.*

Spelling

Enter the words as they are spelt in the original.

In the case of place names and significant words which are misspelt and where the correct spelling is known, enter the spelling as in the original but follow with the correct spelling in square brackets. This will allow a word search using the correct spelling to find the entry.

Brackets

Square brackets are only used to denote entries by the transcriber. If the diarist uses square brackets, change to curved brackets.

Deciphering words you can't read

In cases where the words are difficult to decipher there are two alternatives.
1. If the word cannot be deciphered enter [indecipherable] in place of the word.
2. If partially so, enter your best guess, eg. [abcdef?]

Place names and proper names are important and every effort should be made to decipher them. The same word sometimes appears on other pages with greater clarity. If so, go back and correct your previous entries.

You may also find it useful to do a web search to verify a name or any detail.
See this helpful guide from the Natural History Museum for more information on how to decipher unfamiliar handwriting.

Save regularly

Please SAVE regularly as you go along, at the end of a page, when you stop for a break and after any changes.

Persevere

You will get better at reading a person's handwriting over time so some words that you may not have been able to decipher in the beginning will be readable as you go along. You can always go back and edit what you have transcribed as you get to know the author's styles.

Finishing the page

Before closing your transcribed page do a quick read through to check for typos and take the time to compare the transcript with the image for missed lines etc.

To perform a spell check on the transcription select ABCv from the editor tool bar, remembering not to correct spelling in the original.

Now that you've finished your transcription and checked your document, select Save and Close.

If you have completed the transcription of the document, click 'Yes' and submit it for review.

If there is still work to be done, select No.

LOG OUT if that was your last page in the session and you wish to leave the website.

When you login for your next session you will find a list of the documents that you have edited and put into review on your Dashboard page.