

## Transcription Best Practices

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### Formatting – Match What You See

As you transcribe, try to match the format of the document as best you can. This includes matching line or paragraph breaks, hyphenated words, or possibly including a notation such as [crossed out] next to crossed out text to indicate its format. Not only does the content of the document provide us with information about the past, but the form can give us clues and insights.

### Correcting – Maintain the Same

Resist the impulse to correct words or phrases to modern standards. Transcribe the text exactly as you see it, including spellings, capitalization, abbreviations, names, and dates. Not all authors write with consistency, they may capitalize a word in one place but not capitalize it elsewhere.

### Deciphering – Use Clues, Not Guesses

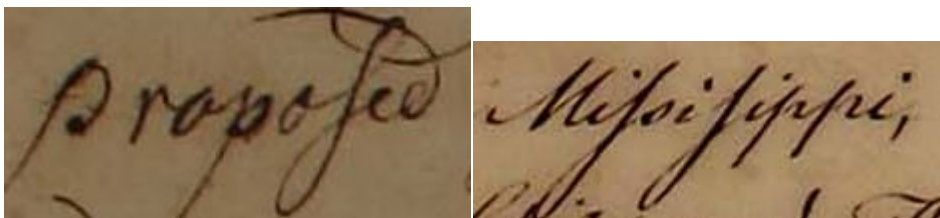
18th century handwriting can be difficult to read. Below are some tips to help you when you encounter a tricky part of the text.

- Look at similar letters in the text that could be used to help decode a difficult word
- Consider the context of the document, or what the document is about, to help figure out what it might be describing
- Continue transcribing part of the document, and then return to the word with fresh eyes

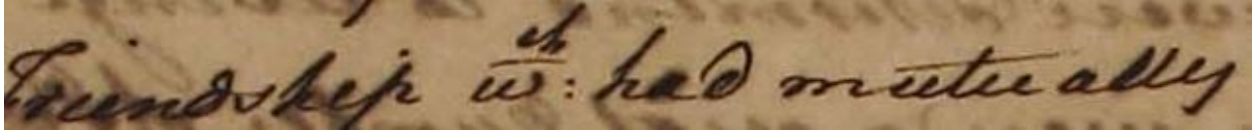
If you think you can read the word but aren't sure, follow the word with a question mark: [encampment?] When you can't make out a word, use [illegible] or in brackets put what letters you can recognize and use dots to mark letters you can't read: [A..m..d]. Do your best and use your best judgement.

### Common Writing Conventions

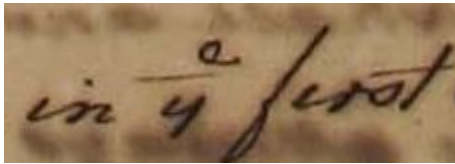
- Upper case letters were used to for nouns, as well as to begin sentences.
- The lowercase s was written in elongated form at the beginning of a word, in the middle of a word, and when written twice, as in pass. The elongated s can be mistaken for an f, and ss can look something like a p. See the examples, “proposed” and “Mississippi.”



- Shortened versions of words were indicated by beginning the word in regular-sized letters and ending with superscript letters, maybe with a line underneath where the missing letters would be. Some writers simply shortened words and left no other indication of the missing letters. In the example below, you see a shortened version of “which”.



- Spelling was not standardized. Writers would spell words differently in different documents or even within a single document. Many writers spelled phonetically, using the way the words sounded as a guide. Although challenging to read, such spelling tells us much about pronunciation before sound recordings existed.
- In words like the, y could stand for the th and the e was added in superscript. The y was pronounced as we pronounce a th today. Here’s an example:



- Depending on the writer, some uppercase letters can look similar. Here are some to watch out for:
  - K, P, and R
  - J and T
  - L and S

For more tips and explanations of 18th Century writing conventions, reference this **toolkit**.