Seward Family Digital Archive

Guide to Transcribing Documents

Introduction

In general, we transcribe documents as written. We retain the capitalizations, spelling, and grammar of the original. When necessary, for the sake of clarity, we may choose to amend indecipherable spelling or clarify punctuation with editorial additions, always marked in brackets. These guidelines are designed to show transcribers how to represent the manuscript page. They will also provide future readers of our transcriptions a better understanding of how we balanced the demands of representation, accuracy, and consistency.

Creating a Transcription Document

All transcriptions will be created in Microsoft Word and be single-spaced.

To begin open a new document. We suggest turning off the autocorrect function for formatting, spelling, and grammar. (Word, Tools, Autocorrect, Uncheck "Automatically correct spelling and formatting as you type.")

Save your document in this format yyyymmddfrom_to1v1. For example, a letter from Frances Miller Seward to William Henry Seward sent on January 17, 1862 would be saved under the file name: 18620217FMS_WHS1v1. (The number after the recipient code differentiates letters if an author drafted and/or sent multiple letters to the same recipient in a day. The image files are already saved with these numbers when they are assigned to transcribers, but be sure to accurately save your file with this number included.) "v1" means that this draft is for your student editor; "v2" goes to Professor Slaughter.

Each letter will have a transcription heading. The heading is enclosed in square brackets and provides essential metadata on the sender, recipient, location of each, and the date. Place commas between all known elements, and if any element is unknown, leave it blank.

[Sender initials, Sender place, to Recipient initials, Recipient place, day month year]

[FMS, Auburn, to WHS, Washington DC, 17 February 1862]

[AHS, to FAS, 10 June 1864] (If locations unknown.)
[AWS, East Greenbush, NY, to FWS, DC, April 1863] (If date unknown, month known.)
[WHS, to FMS, Philadelphia, PA, 03 March 1861] (If sender location unknown.)

Put one line between the heading and the first page break.

Include the page number where it occurs in the transcription. Start with "page 1" in square brackets and with a lowercase "p", "[page 1]," and continue with "[page 2]" for the next page and so on. It is not necessary to skip lines between the page breaks.

Start a new line when the author of the letter begins a new line.

At the end of every document you transcribe, include your three initials in lowercase letters between square brackets, full to the left margin. If you have no middle name, your middle letter will be a lowercase x.

[mhr] [dxg]

Remember to practice thoughtful transcription. Read your transcription for content after you complete it. If your transcription does not make sense, consider whether you have mis-transcribed one or more words in a sentence. Transcribe what you see, but remember the writers of these letters were literate people who almost always made sense in their letters, although there are sometimes small errors such as lack of agreement between subject and verb. After your student editor returns it, read your letter again for coherence as you are revising your transcription.

Be sure to confirm the date of the letter and its authorship. Compare the writer's date to the archivist's date, the postmark, and the recipient's clerical. If there is a discrepancy, use any further clues in the letter (e.g. a day of the week, dateable births or deaths, Civil War battles) to make your decision. Come to a reasoned conclusion, alert a Project Manager to the issue via email, make the agreed upon changes, and create a footnote that calls the reader's attention to the discrepancy and explains very briefly the choice that you made. This is discussed further in Section 5. Questions of Date and Authorship.

Basic Transcription Rules

The sections below detail our transcription rules for manuscript sources. Please familiarize yourself with this document *before* you begin transcribing. Then, refer back to it often to refresh your memory and ensure standard practice among all transcribers.

1. Capitalization, Spelling, and Grammatical Challenges

1.1 *Capitalization.* Retain all capitalization as in the original document. Where the original is unclear, the writer's standard usage prevails. When that is unclear or unknown, modern usage prevails.

1.2 *Misspelling.* Transcribe words as they are spelled in the original, preserving all misspellings. Only offer clarification where reader comprehension may be impaired due to incorrect spelling. Correct in brackets words that are misspelled beyond recognition. You must footnote the bracketed word and indicate the reason for using brackets in the footnote with "Misspelling."

hu[r]t[1]

If the misspelling is indecipherable and cannot be resolved with only one set of brackets, insert the correct spelling in brackets following the misspelled word. Again, be sure to footnote with "Misspelling."

blakguarism [blackguardism][2].

In some cases, the writer may have been in a hurry or may have misspelled a word they clearly knew how to spell. Insert in brackets the correct spelling, but maintain the original incorrect spelling. Be sure to footnote the corrected word.

I way [was][3] in Mexico.

1.3 *Illegible writing*. Illegible letters and words that cannot be supplied should be indicated by brackets and a footnote as:

I found Henry in [illegible][4] and signed the deed.

1.4 *Abbreviations and contractions*. Transcribe abbreviations and contractions as they are written in the original document. If the abbreviation or contraction is ambiguous or unclear, clarify within brackets. The following are a few examples of abbreviations and contractions that do not need to be clarified.

&tc recv'd cant

1.5 *Word spacing*. When two or more words are inscribed together without any intervening space and the words were not a compound according to standard contemporary usage or the writer's or author's consistent practice, the words are transcribed as separate words for readability.

Ithen is transcribed I then
drewforth and *eachother* are transcribed as is, without intervening space added (contemporary usage)

In the case of contemporary words that were separated that may be combined today, maintain the space.

to day is transcribed to day

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[1] Misspelling
[2] Misspelling
[3] Misspelling
[4] Illegible

1.6 *Repeated words (dittography).* Where one or more words are repeated, transcribe the repeated words as they are written. The repeated word(s) should not be deleted, nor should a footnote be used to indicate the repetition.

> the following resolution resolution was voted upon

1.7 *Use of* sic. The term *sic,* often used within brackets in scholarly material to indicate that the preceding word was misspelled or wrongly used in the original, will not be used.

2. Character Styles

2.1 *Underlining.* Underlining will be designated in the text as written. If the writer underlines only part of a word (e.g. w<u>itho</u>ut), in most cases it would seem that the writer meant to underline the entire word. Therefore, underline the entire word, not the partial underline.

2.2 *All caps.* Transcribe any instances of all caps as in the original document.

2.3 *Superscript characters.* Superscript letters will be retained as written. If the author underlined the superscripted characters, underline them in the transcription, but if the author did not underline the characters only superscript them.

2.4 *Fractions.* Do not use superscript fractions.

> 1/2 hour.
> 7 1/2 miles.

3. Punctuation

We maintain the writer's punctuation, including terminal dashes, unless the author's meaning is unclear. Use modern punctuation sparingly and only when the author's original punctuation inhibits readability.

3.1 *Extra space apparently intended to indicate end of sentence.* Sometimes in place of a period or other terminal punctuation, it appears the writer intentionally left a larger-than-average amount of space between words. In such cases, you may supply a period in brackets, both to adequately reflect what is on the page and to help readers understand the text.

3.2 *Run-together sentences.* Periods may be inserted in brackets at the end of a sentence where the original does not provide ending punctuation in extremely rare cases when necessary for readers to maintain the sense of the text.

3.3 *Hyphenation.* See section 4.3 for more information.

3.4 *Dashes*. In handwritten materials, if a writer uses a dash in a range of numbers (e.g., pages 49–72) or uses dashes as terminal punctuation (at the end of the sentence), we use a dash.

Press Option+ - to create an en dash.

An en or em dash is acceptable for terminal punctuation, but use a dash (– or —) rather than a hyphen (-).

3.7 *Ellipsis points*. If a sentence contains ellipsis points, they are retained.

3.7 *Parentheses*. Parentheses should be transcribed as they appear in the original.

4. Formatting

4.1 *General*. In formatting we deviate somewhat from trying to represent the manuscript as it is laid out on the page. We bring the date, salutation, and closing to be flush against the left margin. We also follow standardized spacing when we transcribe paragraphs that the author indented. By placing our transcriptions next to photographs of the manuscript we hope readers will consider questions of spacing for themselves.

4.2 *Paragraph breaks, blank lines, blank pages*. In general, transcribe the writers' indents and paragraph breaks. There will be no blank lines between paragraphs, except that blank vertical space of approximately five or more lines in the original will be noted, but do not automatically note blank vertical space following the final inscription of a document.

[*5 lines blank*]

[*1/4 page blank*] [*pages 99–102 blank*]

4.3 *Line breaks, end-of-line hyphenation*. We transcribe line-by-line as written, but supply hyphens for words broken at the end of the line whether or not the writer includes them.

4.4 *Transcribed datelines*. Salutations, closings, and signatures will be transcribed flush to the left margin, regardless of writer's practice. Continue the text of the letter as the author did. Either continue on the same line after the salutation, start a new line without indenting, or start a new line and indent with a single tab.

4.5 *Clericals*. This is information that is written in a different hand than the author of the letter. Common examples of contemporary clericals are the recipient's endorsements on the final page of a letter and the postage markings. Transcribe the recipient's endorsement, and while we transcribe postmarks, do not transcribe symbols for the postage payments. An archivist has often included modern clericals that clarify the author, recipient, and date. This information is helpful for us, but it is not transcribed.

The clericals contemporary to the document are usually on the final page of a letter. Transcribe such pages in the following order, flush left:

1. *Any text from the body of the letter.* Continue writing the letter as the reader would have read it. This includes text written on the fourth page that continues from above the address to below the address, but it may also include margin notes on earlier pages. 6.4 includes more information on margins.

   Sometimes a letter continuation will be in different hands (e.g. if Gus added a note to his Pa at the end of Frances's letter). Indicate this with a footnoted hand change. [5]Always indicate the hand change with the footnote at the **beginning** of the hand change, not the end.

2. *Name and address of the recipient.* Indicate a hand change only if the hand writing changes to a new hand in the address.

   For example, if Fred wrote a note to WHS on the back of FMS's letter, but FMS addressed the letter. [6]Add the footnote at the beginning of the line where the hand change starts.

3. *Postmark.* This usually is circular and a red or black ink stamp and contains the place the from which the letter was sent and the month and day it was mailed. If there is a postmark, transcribe the city and date and include a footnote, "Postmark," before the postmark as with a hand change. If there is no postmark, there is no need to indicate this.

   [7]ALBANY, NY
   NOV 10

4. *Recipient clerical.* If the recipient of the letter noted the sender and date of the letter, transcribe the information with a footnote to indicate hand change at the beginning of the sentence. There is no need to indicate that this is located in a margin of the letter.

   [8]Frances Seward
   March 1840

5. Questions of Date and Authorship

In any case where there is a conflict on dating, authorship, or recipient between the archivist or the image file name and what you believe to be the accurate information,

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[5] Hand change, AHS
[6] Hand change, FMS
[7] Postmark
[8] Hand change, WHS

consult with a Project Manager, document the issue via email to the Project Managers, and explain the conflict and resolution in a note.

5.1 *Misidentified date:* Please change the date in both the heading and name of the file. Please footnote the change in the header and explain your logic in the footnote.

For example, if the digitized image of the letter listed the date as 18370206FMS_LMW, but Frances writes at the header that she is writing on a "Tuesday" and wishes Lazette a "Happy New Year" we know that she is likely writing on the first Tuesday of January. As such, you would alter the date to reflect this date and provide a footnote explaining your logic. Also alert a Project Manager to this date change via email.

[FMS, Auburn, to LMW, Canandaigua, 03 January 1837[9]]

5.2 *Misidentified authorship*: Please discuss the potential misidentification with a Project Manager before making any changes. After consultation, please update the letter as you and the Project Manager see fit. A Project Manager also needs to be alerted to this change via email.

5.3 *Hand changes:* Please be very thoughtful about indicating hand changes as this is often a place where confusion and hastiness leads to sloppy misidentification of writers. For instance, if WHS is in Washington DC, may the hand change actually reflect a secretary's? If so, identify the hand change if you are able. For several periods Samuel Blatchford wrote many of these recipient endorsements, but if you are unsure who the writer is, put "Hand change, unknown."

5.4 In some cases, letters attributed to WHS may actually be transcriptions by Anna Seward and edited by Frederick Seward. If the original exists, we do not transcribe Fred and Anna's transcriptions. If no original exists, however, we transcribe Fred and Anna's transcriptions with the following guidelines:

1. If the transcriptions are in journal format, transcribers should ignore what is on the first page if it comes before the date of the assigned letter and what is on the last page if it comes after the date of the assigned letter. Instead, start with the date that matches the image file name.
2. Do not transcribe Fred's clericals that are often written in pencil or indicate when he has crossed out Anna's transcription. We want to capture the entire transcription and not only what Fred thought was appropriate.
3. Indicate with a footnote at the beginning of the transcription that this is Fred & Anna's transcription of WHS's letter and that the original does not exist.[10]

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[9] Frances writes "Happy New Year" to Lazette and in the heading indicates she is writing on a Tuesday. I surmise that this is the first Tuesday in January 1837. Thus the correct date is January 3, 1837.

6. Miscellaneous

6.1 *Insertions.* Insertions in the source document by its writer will be rendered in transcript with up carets (SHIFT+6).

>   Please don't send me to ^the^ jail.

6.2 *Material both inserted and canceled.* When one or some—but not all—of the characters in an insertion are canceled, apply the strikethrough bar to the canceled characters only. Do not apply the strikethrough bar to the up carets.

>   Please don't send me ^~~far~~ away to the^ jail.

When a string of words including one or more insertions is canceled in its entirety, apply the strikethrough bar to the entire string, including the up carets symbolizing inserted characters.

>   He previously was taken by the Church ~~^cut off from the^~~ Church.

6.3 *Text written over top of regular text.* There are two types of text written over top of text.

>   A) Crosshatching. Occasionally authors wrote over previous text to fit more information onto less paper. The same rationale and process as text in the margin applies. Follow the order in which the letter was written, not how it is arranged spatially. If the overwriting begins on page one, but follows the line of thinking from page four, indicate the shift at the end of the body of the text in the transcription by writing [page one overwrite] and continue to transcribe.

>   B) Cancellations. Authors may have written over text to edit a word. Try to decipher both the words. For the written over text, use the strikethrough to indicate it was edited out. Then, transcribe the text written over the word beside it without a space between the words.

>   He will ~~wrote~~write

>   If any part of the text is illegible, use [illegible] as explained in 1.3 to indicate illegible texts. Illegible cancellations can be marked as illegible and with the strikethrough function.

>   [~~illegible~~][11]

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[10] The original for this letter does not exist in the Seward Papers. Fred and Anna transcribed this for inclusion in William Henry Seward's Autobiography. As it is the only version of the letter, we have included it as part of the archive.
[11] Illegible

6.4 *Text written in margins.* If text is written in the margins, follow the narrative of the letter in the transcription. Use a page break to indicate the shift with a spatial description of where the text occurs on the page (e.g. [page 1 right margin] or [page 1 top margin]) and continue to transcribe until the end of the marginalia. Indicate the start of a new page or section of marginalia with a page break and continue transcribing.

6.5 *Holes.* When there is a hole in the text that renders the word illegible indicate this with [Hole][12] with a footnote. If you believe you have determined the word simply by context, include the missing words in brackets. For example, "Serene is in the imm[ediate] [neig]hborhood[13] of it." This is supplied information by the transcriber and must be indicated in a footnote.

6.6 *Wax seal.* There may be times the wax seal stuck to the paper, creating a hole. Often, the missing portion of the paper will be stuck to the wax seal, and we can still read the words on the paper attached to the seal even if there is a hole in the letter. In these cases, you will footnote to explain to the reader.

For whole words torn off by wax seal:

Today I saw a [moose][14] walking in the woods.

Follow the same process when part of the word is torn off from seal:

Today I saw a [mo]ose[15] walking in the woods.

6.7 *Printed Text.* Transcribe and italicize text that is printed on a page. This will often happen with stationery in 1860s letters.

6.8 *Printed or written nontextual material.* Do not attempt to reproduce inscribed nontextual material, such as drawings, diagrams, or nonstandard symbols.

6.9 *Inclusions.* There are two types of inclusions.

A) Textual. If something is included in the letter that has printed text, such as a newspaper clipping, do not transcribe the text of the newspaper article. If there is a separate digitized image for the printed text inclusion, indicate a page break and number the page to correspond with the numbering of the digital image files.

B) Nontextual. If a drawing, an image, or an object is included in a letter, footnote at the end of the document indicating that the letter contained two pictures, a pressed flower, a sketch, etc…

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[12] Hole
[13] Hole supplied, "ediate neig"
[14] Located on wax seal, "moose"
[15] Located on wax seal, "mo"

Conclusion

As you can see, transcription presents many challenges. Many of the odd quirks and idiosyncrasies you encounter in your letters are not described here. As issues arise, bring them up with your student editor, a manager, and/or Professor Slaughter. Future versions of this document may be amended to reflect your quandaries and solutions to problems.

Appendices

A. Telegrams

Telegrams are transcribed the same way as letters with only a few minor differences.

A.1 [16]Add a footnote at the start of the transcription, as with hand changes, indicating it is a telegram.

A.2 Transcribe and italicize typed information on the form, but do not transcribe the Terms and Conditions.

A.3. Telegrams should be dated the day they were sent rather than the day they were received.

A.4. We do not note hand changes in telegrams because many individuals wrote the text for the senders in the physical copies we have.

Example:

[FAS, Washington DC, to WSJ, Auburn, 9 June 1865]

[page 1]
[17]*WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH COMPANY.*

To Brig Genl Seward   Auburn June 9 *186*
By Telegraph from Washington *186*

D[r] Wilson[18] removed the last plug
this morning. Frederick[19] is doing nicely

Fanny Seward
DH

[sgl]

B. Bound Volumes, Journals, and Diaries

B.1 *Naming a diary transcription document.* Save your document as yyyymmdd_yyyymmdd_authorjv1. Name your document with the date span of the corresponding images, even if some of those images are blank. Use "j" for both journals and diaries.

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[16] Telegram
[17] Telegram
[18] Dr. John Wilson (unknown-1899)
[19] FWS

B.2 *Page numbers.* Number all pages, including blank pages and bound volume covers, up to the last page that has writing. Blank pages are included only until the author has stopped writing. For example, if Fanny wrote only up until page 70 of her 100-page journal and the last 30 pages are blank, stop transcribing and indicating blank pages on page 70.

> [page 1]
> Front Cover
> [page 2]
> Blank
> [page 3]
> I am very well today.

B.3 *Print on the page.* Transcribe and italicize any printed words. If there are images, such as a printed calendar at the beginning of a diary, transcribe and italicize only any printed text. No description is needed.

> [page 5]
> *Daily Journal*
> *PUBLISHED ANNUALLY*
> [page 6]
> Blank
> [page 7]
> *Counting-House Calendar.*
> *1866.*
> [page 8]
> *Monday, January 1, 1866.*
> New Year's Day. We are to spend it quietly.

C. Fragments

C.1. Save the file for fragments with an "f" for fragment, an underscore, the author of the fragment, and the number the fragment as been assigned. (f_FMS001, f_FMS002, f_FMS003, f_WHS006)

C.2. [20]Include a footnote at the start of each fragment, noting that it is a "Fragment," as with telegrams.

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[20] Fragment