

## The First Timer's Guide to Doing Archival Research

If this is your first time thinking about doing research in an archives, welcome! We're glad you're here! The archivist at North Central College has written this handy guide to getting the most out of your research experience. As with most research, you'll get better results if you plan ahead and know what to expect, and this guide should help you do just that!

### Plan Ahead

- Have a topic and/or time period in mind.
- For NCC topics, check the [Chronicle](#) and the [Spectrum](#). This will help you find useful information such as dates, the names of people involved, and how a particular event was referred to at the time it took place.
- For all topics, check the finding aids. This will save you time because you will have an idea of what the archives has on your topic and (just as importantly) what it doesn't have.
- Make an appointment. While we welcome drop ins whenever we can, you will get the most out of your visit if you make an appointment ahead of time. That way the archivist will have a general idea of your topic of interest and can find material ahead of time. It will also give you time to talk to the archivist about your project or assignment.

### Know what to expect

- Visiting the archives is different from visiting a public or academic library. We follow general rules that are common across archives and special collections libraries. No food or drink is allowed in the reading room, pens are not allowed to be used (only pencils), and there will be a designated area for you to put backpacks and coats away. For more information, read the [Archives and Special Collections Use Guidelines](#).
- On a typical visit, you should expect to meet with the archivist to talk about your project and materials you would like to see. You will use materials in the archives reference room, as they cannot be checked out. The archivist or student assistant will be on hand in the reference room to answer your questions. Plan to spend at least half an hour or more in the archives, depending on your topic.

### Getting the Most Out of Your Visit

- You are welcome to use your tablet, phone, or digital camera to take photos of archival material, but these photos may be used for research purposes only. If you wish to publish photos on the web or in print, please ask the archivist.
- Take notes as you go (using paper and pencil or a digital device). Make sure to note collection title, box number, folder title, item title and date – partly for citation (see below) and partly to locate item again should you need to.
- Sample citation: Letter from Harvey Siemsen to Ruth Beyler, 20 June 1922, in Harvey and Ruth Beyler Siemsen Papers, North Central College Archives.

- Be sure to arrange and rename digital files so they make sense later. If you have questions about how to do this, ask the archivist.
- Let the archivist know if you would like material photocopied or scanned. Some material in our collections is subject to duplication restrictions.