



# Intro to Research

**Hugo van Harlo, December 2019:** Fundamentally, research is an outgrowth of our own curiosity given a structure to better help us find and interpret historical sources. This class should provide attendees with a mindset, a methodological framework, and starter resources to research their own interests and unanswered questions.

## Why Bother?

1. To feed my curiosity about a distant time and place
2. To move from speculation to documentation in my personal projects and commissions
3. To save money, save time, and save face: research first; get the physical object last (*Because it sucks to spend big bucks on a project only to find it's not correct or historical... and then you're stuck with what to do about it.*)

## IT'S ABOUT INFORMED DECISION MAKING

- “Authenticity is a rod with which we beat ourselves.”  
It can also be our shield!
- The SCA isn't a strict living history organization or a university. There are differing priorities about historical authenticity or plausibility.
- Research gives us a more intellectually honest space to defend our choices and interests when compared to “if they had it, they would have used it.”

## RESEARCH MINDSET

- Research is an exciting rabbit hole into the past. Sources lead me to more accurate and historic creations, which is rewarding.
- Research begins *before* we reproduce a historic item or make claims about the past.
- What we learn informs the shape and nature of the work that follows.

- Move way from speculation & justification towards documentation & authenticity
- Understand and celebrate what was in common use

## Methodology

Once you've identified a topic to research:

1. Build up your foundational knowledge of the subject.
2. Create a strategy of where and what to look for.  
Find sources via databases, archives, & search engines.
3. Collect relevant primary and secondary sources.
4. Evaluate and vet those sources.
5. Take notes and keep them organized!

*Writing papers, documentation, and/or blogs all come later.*

## FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

To be comfortable enough with your material to understand what to look for - and once you found something, to judge its relevance.

1. What terminology, concepts, and historical contexts do you need to understand for your subject?
2. What are the most significant primary and secondary sources (authors, researchers, journals, museums, etc.) to become familiar with and monitor?

## FINDING SOURCES: DATABASES, ARCHIVES, & SEARCH ENGINES

1. **Know What to Look For:** What terms are you using? Are there specific terms professionals use (do

you even know, yet)? Can you be more specific or broad with them? Are there foreign-language equivalents?

2. **Know Where to Look:** It's typically more efficient to begin with Academic databases and search engines for scholarly works and museum and archival sites to reference primary sources and extant artifacts.
3. **Have Tools to Understand Foreign Languages**

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## Alternatives to a Basic Google Search

- **Scholarly Search Engines**
  - [scholar.google.com](http://scholar.google.com)
  - [academia.edu](http://academia.edu)
  - [core.ac.uk](http://core.ac.uk)
  - [jstor.org](http://jstor.org)
  - EBSCO
- **Museum Collections**
  - [collections.vam.ac.uk](http://collections.vam.ac.uk)
  - [britishmuseum.org/collection](http://britishmuseum.org/collection)
  - [rijksmuseum.nl/en/search](http://rijksmuseum.nl/en/search)
  - [gnm.de/en/collections/collections/](http://gnm.de/en/collections/collections/)
  - [mnhn.fr/en/collections](http://mnhn.fr/en/collections)
- Local, State, and National Archives
- Historical, Archeological, Genealogical, and Preservation Organizations

For a fuller list, visit

[hugovanharlo.com/projects/research-resources](http://hugovanharlo.com/projects/research-resources)

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## VETTING YOUR SOURCES



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### Identifying Different Types of Sources

- Primary vs. Secondary
- Popular (General Public) vs. Scholarly



If You Have Questions or Want Lecture Notes, Please Contact HUGO VAN HARLO

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## How to Vet Your Source: S.A.T.

- **Substance:** What is the source of publication or home of this item? Is it affiliated with a university or museum? Does the information cite itself and include a bibliography?
- **Authorship:** Who wrote or created this? What are their qualifications, and who or what are they associated with? Do they bring obvious or strong biases to their work? *For primary sources, how is their worldview different than our modern, Western one?*
- **Timeliness:** When was this written or created? Is it out of date, or is there more current scholarship with a evolved understanding that reflects new discoveries?

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## Art and Extant Artifacts

- **Form:** What is the shape, construction, or purpose?
- **Dating:** Is this a contemporary item or depiction, or one representing a past event or in the style of the past?
- **Social Context:** Who created this? Who was the intended audience or users of this art or item?
- **Veracity:** Is this an authentic artifact (see the pros)?

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## ON NOTETAKING

- Look for themes and commonalities
- Systematize and centralize your notes & sources, but don't let perfect be the enemy of good. Use something. *Tags, categories, folders, headings in Word docs, etc.*
- Keep a "to-track" list of new sources, people, and sites