

## Transcribing documents – local decisions and best practices

Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum

This document outlines our approach to transcribing handwritten documents. The overall goals are to (1) render the text searchable and (2) streamline the process for library staff and those doing the work.

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Do not use superscript or graphic treatments like underline or ~~striketrough~~. These do not convert to plain text. With very few exceptions, do not replicate the line breaks and associated hyphenations in the original document.

If a transcription replicates a document's line breaks, add the complete word in brackets, immediately following those that are broken or hyphenated between lines:

...many Trans-  
gretions [transgressions]; for we Do at present Suppose...

Use **question? marks?** to indicate where letters or words are difficult to interpret and/or where you made an educated guess. To retain meaning and searchability, add question marks at the ends of words, not in the middle.

For meaningful words, names, and proper nouns, correct misspellings and abbreviations in brackets immediately following the misspelled word(s):

Jan'y [January]  
Chas Remmond [Charles Remond]

Surround letters or words written above or below the line, or in the margin as a correction or addition, with **{curly brackets}**

For meaningful text that is crossed out, surround it with two bracketed "tags":

**[crossed out]** left turn [crossed out]

For potentially meaningful but unreadable text of one or more letters, use **[illegible]**

For physically missing or damaged portions, use **[lost]**

**Transcribing tables or charts:**

Do not try to preserve the formatting. Indicate column headings in brackets, then enter each row of data as a single line of text separated by periods, numbering the rows if they are numbered in the original. Example:

[column headings: Name. Age. Place of Residence.]

1. Sally. 33. Salem
2. Bill. 47. Rowley
3. Donna. 12. [Crossed out] Salem [Crossed out] Boston

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