Reading Old Handwriting

requires patience and persistence.
It is a tedious process, but it is of utmost importance to transcribe the original documents.

http://copland.udel.edu/~tdoherty


Practice makes perfect
Several handwriting examples with transcriptions
Learn the old alphabets

http://www.genealogical.com/item_detail.asp?afid=1000&ID=5513

The English Alphabet 1640-1790

I=J, i=j
U=V (upper)

Upper = Lower:
E g m n x

Source: Sperry, “Reading Early American Handwriting” (1998), p49-50

The English Alphabet 1600s

I=J, i=j
U=V (upper)

Upper = Lower:
a c E g K m n o u v x y z

The Uncommon English Alphabet
Everybody has their own style!

Transcribing 1795-1838 Words in Wills and Patents
A-E

Easier to transcribe in word/phrase context
Source: http://www.littrails.org/handwritingA-T.html (moved?)

Transcribing 1795-1838 Words in Wills and Patents
E-N

Transcribing 1795-1838 Words in Wills and Patents
O-Z

Credit
Current
Daniel
deceased
December
deed
devides
dispose
dozen
east
Edward
either
ejection
else
establish
estate

Administrators
Aforesaid
Also
April
Assignees
Barrels
Be
Bequeath
Better
Black Oak
Bless
Captain
Charles
Christian
[comma]
Consideration
Court

Executors
Executrix
Expressed
Fee
First
France
Francis
General
George
Give
God
Heires
Hereof
Houses
Imprimes
Item
James
January
John
John
Joseph
Junior
July
Keep
Known
Less
Lying
Madam
March 2nd
Married
Mister
Mr.
Nathaniel
Next
Notary Public
November

October
Order
Our
Ourselves
Pair
Parish
Patent
Percent
Picked
Plantation
Pleased
Possess
Premises
 Presents
Said
Samuel
Scituate
Scotland
Seals
Seized
Senior
September
Soever
Son
Sterling
Such
Sufficient
Sum

Viz (to wit)
Vizt
Wafer
Which
William
With
Ye
Ye said

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Always Begin With a Good Copy

Which one would you want to transcribe?

Light setting (above) - dark setting (below)

Transcribing Handwriting

- Learn the scribe’s handwriting style
- compare same letters/words in document
- copy pages before and after page you want
- local sources to identify misspelled place
- common phrases often repeated

- Scribes abbreviated (paper was dear)
- names: Jno=John, Jos=Joseph
- “=” used to extend a word to next line
- mostly chronological: get bearings by mo/yr

Transcribing Handwriting

- Transcribe slowly - evaluate with care
- Be aware of the context of the sentence
- Transcribe with a friend or relative – it’s more fun than a day at the beach! ?
- Indexes and abstracts are transcribed, as are many vital records
  – but you should try to find the originals

1798 New Castle Co (DE) Estate Appraisals, Benjamin Reynolds, administrator for both George Spain* & Joseph Reynolds

* George Spain married Elizabeth Reynolds 16 Nov 1793

Use original documents to compare signatures

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Transcribing Example: Martha (Ranlet) Melcher’s 1881 Diary

Handout p. 25

Martha Ranlet is the first wife of Samuel Melcher, Civil War surgeon and a difficult guy to live with.

Transcribing Example: Martha (Ranlet) Melcher’s 1881 Diary

Handout p. 25

Saturday, January 1, 1881

I was not able to write at the beginning of the year, but I will now say that I have been here since the 12 of Dec. I came here from O’Connor’s Homoeopathic Hospital. I have been troubling one

Sam’s 1st wife also had mental problems!

Do you want your descendants to read your diary?

Handout p. 25

Sam’s 1st wife also had mental problems!

Would you like to read your great-grandmother’s diary?

Handout p. 25

A List of Delinquents in Murderkill Hundred [1818]

1818

David Aron not able to pay
William Andrewsons personal He dead and no property
Robert Artis Dead and no property
Thomas Armstrong not to be found
Samuel Biron went to the back Countries last spring early
James Bauchamp N worth nothing
David Bear not to be found
Matthews Bethards dead
John Bostick Deceas’d last winter not one Cent

Handout page 13
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Poland, Androscoggin Co ME Town Records p7

Otis Son of William Caswell & Hannah his Wife was Born Middeleborough May ye 12, 1784, Nancy Daughter of William Caswell & Hannah his Wife was Born Taunton June ye 10, 1787, Hannah Daughter of William Caswell & Hannah his Wife was born Poland [Maine] September ye 18, 1793,

Samuel Tillet 1812 Currituck Co NC Will p6

Item. I lend to my beloved wife Lovey Tillett (whose maiden name was Lovey Russell, afterwards the lawful wife of Jesse Ethridge, and married to me after his decease, by which reason I title her now Lovey Tillet my wife) the use of the manor plantation whereon I now live, with the dwelling house and all other out houses belonging to said plantation during her widowhood. Item. I give and bequeath to my son Thomas Tillett, one hundred and thirty acres of land, to the northward of my land adjoining William Ethridges, to him and his heirs forever. I give and bequeath to my daughter Sally Tillett one hundred and thirty acres to the southward of my land, to her and her heirs forever: Als, I give to said daughter one negro, named Luis, to her and heirs forever. I Give and bequeath to [my] son Jesse Tillet one hundred and thirty acres in the middle between my son Thomas and Sally Tillet’s land, to him and his heirs forever. Item, my Will is that my vessel be sold to pay my debts. Item. All the rest of my property not given away, to be equally divided among my wife as before mentioned, and my three children. Thomas, Sally and Jesse Tillet. Item. I do nominate and appoint y brother Thomas Tillet
imprisoned in some stone place
In he managed to pry out a stone.
But the opening was too small
to permit egress with the bulky
clothing of that day so although it
was winter he stripped naked & [and]
squeezed himself out. Then raw
& [and] bleeding he crawled away through
the snow. He daren’t wait to
get out any old thing & [and] daren’t push
any out before him for fear a sentry
would see it before he got it. He
certainly colorful, but Allie, as enumerator, lied in the census (embellished?)

1798 Renunciation of Cain McKenney estate
April 18 1788 Respected Friend
these are to inform thee that I do allow and
appoint william Underwood to settle my
fathers affairs he Being lately Dead
witness Present Jacob Macinney
Josiah Davis
Joseph Underwood

Source (p.28): Cain McKenney
1788 probate case file papers
New Castle Co Delaware

1761 Baptism
Forks of Brandywine Presbyterian Church
Chester Co PA
[p. 28 of handout]

Lords day being the 26 of april 1761
and ye first Sabbath after my ordination
I baptised first one adult person
william temple, & children Sarah daughter of paul mcNight and Margret daughter of william Byrs.
Tuesday [Tuesday] preached in the meeting House
Baptised Thomas the Son of william Temple
Wednesday Baptised two Infants twins Samuel & Joseph the Sons of Joseph Byrs

Source: Sperry, “Reading Early American Handwriting” (1998), p.188
This Indenture witnesseth that John Bowers of medfield in y° County of Suffolk in New england hath of his own free Will and with y° Consent of his Gardian [Guardian] Benjamin Clark hath put and bound him sello unto Samuell wight in said Town and County linen [linen] weauer [weaver] as an apprentice from y° Day and Date hereof untill y° first Day of July in y° year one thousand six hundred ninety and four: in case


To the much honord the County Court now sitting in Boston
The Petition of Margaret Haywood Widow & Relict of Anthony Humbly sheweth Heiwood [Haywood] late of Boston decd
That your poor, afflicted Petitioner is, by y° Decease of her Late Husband, left in a very distressed & desolate Condition, with four young Children to bring up, & nothing wherewithall to doe it,
And therfore praires y° will please to appoint some meek Persons immediatly to set out to her the Thirds of the Houses & Lands that her late husband dece uned at


Mr Peter Ashton } his Cer1 for Land }
These are to Certifie that according to sufficient profe made before this Court there is due to M° Peter Ashton 200 acres of Land for the transportacon of 4 psons [persons] into the Country (vizt [namely]):
Charles Hoyle       }     Eduard [Edward] Dyer   }
Edward Rogers     }     Wm fflorence }

An Attachmnt [Attachment]:
is granted unto Bartholomewe Hoskins agt [against] soe [so] much of
the Estate of John Piggott Marchant as shal become satisfactory for the
some [sum] of One Thousand & fower [four] Hundred pounds of tob:
[toacco] w'h [with] Caske unto y'
sd [said] Hoskins or his assignes beinge made appeare to be due uppon bill
together w'h [with] Co't. [Court] Chardges [Charges]:

Source: Sperry, “Reading Early American Handwriting” (1998), p.278