

Dead Media Research Studio

Guidelines on Research Methods

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1. Scrutinize the artifact carefully
 - a. What are its physical characteristics?
 - b. What are its intended uses? Unintended uses?
 - c. What does it tell us about itself?
 - d. What, if anything, is it trying to hide?
 - e. Does it display traces of earlier media? anticipations of later ones?
2. Consider its contexts thoughtfully and imaginatively
 - a. Was it invented? If so, by whom? When? Where? Why?
 - b. Was it marketed? When? Where? To whom?
 - c. Who used it? What for?
 - d. What records might the inventors, marketers, users, etc. have left behind? Which of these might be available to you?
3. Compile secondary sources, that is, sources by other scholars
 - a. Begin with keyword searches on Bobcat (NYU's library catalogue) and Catnyp (the NYPL's library catalogue) as well as other databases available through Bobst such as
 - i. JSTOR (www.jstor.org, for humanities and social science journals)
 - ii. History of Science, Technology, Medicine database (from Bobst homepage go to the "Find Resources" menu, select "Articles via Databases," and search for "History of Science")
 - iii. Kluwer Online (www.kluweronline.com, for more sources related to science and technology).
 - b. Pay special attention to footnotes and bibliographies, which can guide you to still more secondary sources and, best of all, to primary ones.
 - c. Acceptable: anything that has appeared in print, even if it is now online
 - d. Unacceptable: everything else. The websites of museums and other institutions can be helpful, but we expect that all your references lead back to printed matter
4. Compile primary sources, that is, sources generated by the artifact itself, its users, its contexts
 - a. Make an appointment with Jessica Alverson, Librarian for Journalism, Culture, and Communication at Bobst. Email: jessica.alverson@nyu.com.
 - b. Was it patented? You can use www.google.com/patents
 - c. Was it reported on? Search old newspapers, magazines, etc. for descriptions, instructions, reviews, controversies, etc.
 - d. Was it advertised? Search old newspapers and magazines, especially trade publications
 - e. Was it drawn, painted, photographed? For still images, you might try searching www.artstor.org A simple keyword search will probably not be enough – think about related terms, contexts in which it might have been represented, etc. For moving images, you will have to be even more creative. Perhaps your artifact functions as a plot device? Perhaps there are scenes where it might be in the background? One of the best resources for such searches is the *Chicago Reader's* archive of brief film reviews, searchable by keyword: onfilm.chicagoreader.com/search/briefs. The *New York Times* has also made many of its film reviews available online.
 - f. Keep a record of every item that you examine. Transcribe, photocopy, or photograph anything that might be important
5. Read. Take notes. Be creative. Get lucky.

