

Tips for taking notes in the Archives

1. Allow sufficient time and budget

Archival research can take more time than you anticipate. One key to good notes is to allow sufficient time to do a thorough job, or plan a budget large enough to copy materials to take home.

2. Develop a note taking system

Before delving into the records take some time to get organized. Taking time to get a bit of an overview can help in budgeting time which can affect note taking approaches. Most researchers will revise their system as they get into the research materials.

3. Finding a needle in a haystack

Ask yourself, "Is this sufficient information that I could find this document again?" Include in your notes the name of the archival institution, the fonds, series, file titles and box and folder number and anything else which will assist in relocation.

Record the document details carefully, noting title, author, date, recipients and so on.

4. Record what you are not using

Keep track of what boxes and folders you have viewed even if the records were not relevant. Don't trust your memory. Asking for boxes of material you have already examined is not a good use of time.

5. Copy generously

When making copies, scans or photographs of the documents, be sure to copy enough of the document to enable you to identify it later. For example, if you only need one page from a set of minutes make sure to copy the first page with the information such as date and place of the meeting as well so you can easily identify which set of minutes the page belongs to. Archival staff will only copy the exact pages you request, so be precise. And don't forget to write in your notes, or on the photocopy itself, the citation information noted above. In judging what to copy consider that the extra cost of the copies may be more economical than having to return to the Archives to get the data you need.

6. Ask for advice

Don't be afraid to ask the archivist for advice at any stage. Staff are there to make your visit productive and your research effective.