The Four Stages of Newspaper Research

**Exploration**
- You've picked a topic, and read secondary sources. Now you are ready to begin the exploration phase.
- What database do you want to start with? What geographical region and time period does your topic deal with? Start with a large and comprehensive database. If your topic is US based, I suggest Proquest, Readex, Chronicling America, or Newspapers.com.
- What keywords did you notice in your secondary source reading? Choose a preliminary database and try some initial keyword searches. If you are searching for an exact phrase or name make sure to put it in quotes.
- Try searching your keywords in a second or third database. Are there more or less results than your first database? Are the results more geographically diverse? Do the results cover a different time period?
- Do your search results contain any new keywords you could try searching with?

**Topic Based Reading**
- Be aware it can take up to 2 hours of exploratory reading to find the right keywords for your topic.
- Use the "Advanced Search" page of your database to try a more specific search with specific dates, locations, or multiple sets of keywords.
- Try searching your keywords in a second or third database. Are there more or less results than your first database? Are the results more geographically diverse? Do the results cover a different time period?
- Does this result seem like something you might want to refer to again later? Save this in another window for the transcription process.

**Collecting Data**
- Most importantly, be open to discovery. Try wider search results. Follow new trails in the archive. See what you discover.
- Search again in second database. Did you find more results?
- Decide on the parameters of your data collection. Are you going to read papers within a certain time range or geographical area? If so, refine your search by those metrics.
- How many pieces of data do I need? A good framework is: 50-100 points for a small project, 300-500 points for a medium project, and 1,000+ points for a large project.
- How do you know if you are done with data collection? Have you read through all the search results in your initial database? Read through results in at least one other database. Try one or more national databases and a regional database.

**Transcription**
- Have you made it through all the steps? Congratulations you've successfully completed historical newspaper research!
- You are ready for transcription if you have finished collecting data and topic based reading and have a pile of saved articles.
- Why transcription? Is this necessary? Transcription gives you a set of ready to go quotes, helps you gain a deeper understanding of your topic and prepares you for longform writing.
- How many clippings do you need to transcribe? A good framework is: 20-30 clippings for a small project, 50-70 clippings for a medium project, 100+ clippings for a large project.
- Dealing with a lot of clippings? It can help to sort clippings by topic or use select keywords in the notes section.
- Transcribe your clippings in chronological order. Dealing with a lot of clippings? It can help to sort clippings by topic or use select keywords in the notes section.

**On the newspaper page, do you see the full page? If not click "view full page."**
- Ask yourself, what section of the paper is this? Longform article, classifieds, theatrical advertisements, society gossip? When did this occur? It is okay if you are disoriented or confused.

Written by Maura Nagli-Pradel, 2021.