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2-9-2020

## Qualitative Studies and Textual Document Research in the United States: Conducting Research in National Archives

Theresa A. Ulrich EdD  
Glen Ellyn School District 41, TheresaAUlrich@gmail.com

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### Recommended APA Citation

Ulrich, T. A. (2020). Qualitative Studies and Textual Document Research in the United States: Conducting Research in National Archives. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(2), 359-378. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2020.4173>

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## Qualitative Studies and Textual Document Research in the United States: Conducting Research in National Archives

### Abstract

Qualitative research typically involves gathering evidence through surveys, interviews, and observations. At some point, qualitative researchers may consider including primary source textual documents in their studies. Depending on the study focus, textual document collection may require a visit to a United States national archive. Although preliminary investigations may provide a sense of what to expect during archival research, there is no resource that details the navigation of the U.S. national archive experience. This article will supply the reader with background knowledge related to decisions in choosing textual documents as study evidence, navigating a national archive, and employing the strategy of document sampling. The resulting description is designed to prepare researchers for a successful archival research experience.

### Keywords

Qualitative Inquiry Evidence, Textual Documents, Archival Research, National Archives, Document Authenticity and Credibility, Official Government Documents

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### Acknowledgements

I would like to express gratitude to Dr. Jessica Heybach for her guidance and James Ulrich for his patience and support during the research and writing process.

## On Qualitative Studies and Textual Document Research in the United States: Conducting Research in National Archives

Theresa A. Ulrich  
Glen Ellyn School District 41, Illinois, USA

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*Qualitative research typically involves gathering evidence through surveys, interviews, and observations. At some point, qualitative researchers may consider including primary source textual documents in their studies. Depending on the study focus, textual document collection may require a visit to a United States national archive. Although preliminary investigations may provide a sense of what to expect during archival research, there is no resource that details the navigation of the U.S. national archive experience. This article will supply the reader with background knowledge related to decisions in choosing textual documents as study evidence, navigating a national archive, and employing the strategy of document sampling. The resulting description is designed to prepare researchers for a successful archival research experience. Keywords: Qualitative Inquiry Evidence, Textual Documents, Archival Research, National Archives, Document Authenticity and Credibility, Official Government Documents*

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*“History teaches, but it has no pupils.” ~ Antonio Gramsci, political theorist*

*“You get closest to the truth by not giving it advance warning that you're coming after it.”  
~Michael Marshall, -writer*

Qualitative research is often employed in a variety of disciplines, especially those with a focus on historical or social contexts. These types of studies follow an inquiry-based approach for investigating historical or social questions that are worthy of study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The roots of qualitative research are found in anthropology and sociology, but are inclusive of a wide array of disciplines (Bhattacharya, 2017; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Many qualitative studies rely on evidence drawn from observations, interviews, surveys or questionnaires (Bhattacharya, 2017; Crotty, 1998; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). However, qualitative research may be enriched with document evidence (Kridel, 2017).

### The Rationale for Using Textual Document Evidence

Integration of document analysis into a qualitative study may complement other types of study evidence. The use of textual document analysis is effective in providing evidence for case studies, phenomenological studies, educational trends, policy formation, biographies, historical inquiries, and more (Bowen, 2009). The following are just a few examples of research studies which embed textual document evidence.

*Four Women of Courage: A Historiography of Early Childhood Education for African American Children in Alabama* by Sharon Webb Abrams (2014) investigates the influences in the lives of four African-American women who became leaders in the Alabama state's school system. The author incorporates varied documents in her study, such as photos and artwork, as well as textual documents, such as letters and government archived documents.

*The U.S. War Crimes Trial Program in Germany, 1946-1955: (Contributions in*

*Military Studies*) by Frank M. Buscher (1989) reviews official government documents to trace the efforts of the U.S. in implementing consequences for atrocities conducted by Nazis during World War II. A significant portion of this study relies on government-produced textual documents as evidence.

*An Analysis of Corporal Punishment Practices in the State of Mississippi* by Twyla A. Williams-Damond (2014) investigates trends of punishment practices in public schools in a U.S. state. This study relies on textual documents from school districts and government sources to analyze statistical trends in the practice of corporal punishment within a state public school system.

Textual documents tend to offer rich descriptions that facilitate ease of evidence collection by providing historical timelines or contextual background related to the period or topic of study (Bowen, 2009). Researchers who have determined that textual document evidence will add value to their study will have many decisions to make pertaining to collection and selection methods (Bowen, 2009). As a starting point, they must explore sources for the documents of interest. Sometimes their trail of exploration leads them to archival research (Kridel, 2017). Archived textual documents are preserved records of social issues (McCulloch, 2004).

Researchers who are preparing to conduct primary source textual document research through United States national government archives may not know what to expect during the investigation process. Preliminary research may provide some clues to navigating the archival research process, but researchers may find difficulties encountering articles or books that successfully convey a detailed national archival research experience in the U.S. This article was written to offer a detailed perspective of what researchers might expect while performing primary source, textual document research in a U.S. national archive. In addition, this article provides an overview of decisions related to textual documents as artifacts.

The following discussion addresses the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating textual documents as evidence in qualitative students and includes comments on study trustworthiness. This article also provides a brief overview of the role of government archives and a detailed description of a U.S. national archive research experience. The section on national archives presents information about security procedures, requesting archive records, and working with archived documents. Details and recommendations also include discussion on declassification numbers, archival document review and selection, and navigating the issue of inaccessible collections. Additionally, the author provides suggestions regarding document preparation and evidence of authenticity and credibility to finalize document selection for a study.

### **Advantages of Textual Documents as Evidence**

One notable advantage to relying on textual documents is their sheer abundance. Documents are everywhere, used for multiple purposes in our lives (McCulloch, 2004; Rury, 2006). Additionally, document sources may be found in a variety of formats. Originally, documents were represented by only physical writing on paper. Now documents are electronically stored, for example, as e-mail, Internet articles and blogs, digital online database catalogues, and electronic storage clouds (McCulloch, 2004). Many written records today are easily photocopied from originals, photographed, downloaded, or copied and pasted from digital sources (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). As well, document sources may be found at institutions where artifacts are intentionally preserved (Rury, 2006). Digital formats are available through university libraries or online archive depositories. Official government documents, specifically, provide a great advantage to the document research process, for they tend to be the most readily accessible of document sources (Scott, 2014).

In addition, the collection process of document evidence is efficient compared to other qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews or observations. Schedules do not need to be coordinated with other human beings, and recordings do not need to be transcribed. Words on a page or screen are readily available for review. Moreover, many documents are easy to track and organize as they often embed identifiers, such as the author, title or purpose, and date (Bowen, 2009).

Textual documents as artifacts have the ability to bolster the credibility of studies. Many textual documents are preserved records. They are written at a prior time in history, containing fixed evidence that cannot be influenced by researchers. Therefore, researchers' biases do not have potential to impact the content of written documents (Bowen, 2009; Platt, 1981a, 1981b; Scott, 2014).

Finally, reliance on textual documents as evidence may reduce the burden of ethical considerations in a study. Most documents, including government texts, 50 years old or greater, are accessible to the public as they no longer endanger U.S. security. Hence, privacy of document authors is not a consideration, and researchers need not fear that they are crossing ethical boundaries by using authors' statements without their permission or divulging information that at one time was considered harmful for public or community knowledge (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Wellington, 2016). As such, there is no need to protect individuals' identities or documents' contents in a way that requires approval by an Internal Review Board (IRB) (Brook, 1969). However, this situation does not alleviate the responsibility of presenting document contents accurately based on the researchers' reasonable interpretations (Wellington, 2016).

### **Disadvantages of Textual Documents as Evidence**

Although a focus on document evidence has many advantages, it is not without disadvantages (Gottschalk, 1964; Rury, 2006). Unlike other types of qualitative data, documents are artifacts that have survived over time (Gottschalk, 1964; Rury, 2006). Researchers are not capable of generating new or additional text. They must rely on documents that have been previously produced. It is not possible to increase the level of textual document data beyond what already exists or is available (Platt, 1981a, 1981b; Scott, 2014). Any documents that have been lost or destroyed will never be available to researchers (Gall et al., 2010; Gottschalk, 1964; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016; Platt, 1981a; Rury, 2006).

Researchers may also find themselves at a disadvantage if their study period is more than 50 years in the past. Periods of study that are far removed from the present may force researchers to rely exclusively on primary source documents as the only reasonable source of evidence available for their study. Additional potential evidence resources, such as interviews or surveys, may not prove a reasonable alternate source of data: authors of documents to be studied may likely be deceased or inaccessible. Consequently, researchers may be forced to utilize only primary source documents to gather data for their study (Gottschalk, 1964). Relying exclusively on primary source historical documents creates challenges for study trustworthiness. In these cases, it is not possible to probe deeper to unanswered questions in documents (Bowen, 2009).

Finally, there is no prescribed method for collecting documents, only best practice recommendations. Because of this, researchers must be cognizant of their biases during the document selection process. Otherwise, their biases may inadvertently influence which documents are selected (Bowen, 2009; Platt, 1981a, 1981b).

## **Trustworthiness Strategies**

Textual document analysis is recommended as a complementary data source to other qualitative types, such as interviews, surveys, etc. However, some studies must rely exclusively on textual document evidence (Bowen, 2009). Exclusion of other data sources presents challenges for triangulating data or crystallizing findings (Gall et al., 2010; Gottschalk, 1964; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016; Platt, 1981a; Rury, 2006). If researchers must rely on only textual documents for their study, they will have to strategically incorporate a wide variety of document genre in order to collect convincing study evidence (Gottschalk, 1964; Rury, 2006). The selected documents for the study must reflect a wide breadth of representation of those available, and additionally include varied topics or themes (Bhattacharya, 2017; Brooks, 1969; Kridel, 2017; Scott, 2014).

Studies that incorporate government-generated documents yield a greater level of confidence to data results compared to other sources. Official government documents are formal public and private written texts found in various genres and formats—such as memoranda, circulars, reports, or guidance manuals—as would have been typically produced by government agencies, such as the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), for example (Herzog, 2003; Hoskins, 1960). Many official documents are produced within predetermined specifications. As a result, official government documents tend to direct little concern to authenticity or credibility, compared to other types of sources, such as diaries, personal letters, or memoirs. Their perceived truthfulness and accuracy strengthen their value as reliable and valid evidence (Scott, 2014). More about authenticity and credibility is discussed later in the article as it relates to the document selection process.

## **Government Archives**

If researchers determine that textual documents may add value to their study, they may find themselves seeking historical documents through government archives. Without having knowledge of the volume or availability of documents of interest, it can be difficult to predict how much time to allot for a visit to an archival facility. Researchers may not be aware of how well-guarded archived documents are, either. Documents that are intentionally stored in an archive facility are held under tight security. These safety practices are in place to protect the documents from damage or theft. Those documents that represent official status, such as government documents, are typically stored at a national archive to make them accessible yet keep them protected (McCulloch, 2004).

Government archives make up the majority of repositories. Official government documents tend to have a high dimension of access, since most are now open to the public (Scott, 2014). U.S. Government agencies have been required to keep records since the enactment of the Federal Records Act of 1950. As such, government records are generally more readily available than private records. The Library of Congress is a leader in document collections and has been keeping archived records since 1876 (Brooks, 1969). However, many U.S. government archived documents are found only at designated U.S. national archive centers. For example, documents written by FSI agents are archived at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland where all Department of State records are stored (U.S. NARA, n.d.). A list of United States Government Archives locations can be found in Appendix A. Although procedures at all U.S. NARAs is similar, the described experience in this article is specific to the NARA – College Park facility.

The NARA College Park facility holdings include civilian and modern military textual records. These documents are derived from civilian agencies of the Executive Branch of

Government. Most records were created after 1900 and represent “departments of State, Justice, Treasury, Interior, Labor, Commerce, Energy, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, Education, Health and Human Services, and Transportation” (U.S. NARA, n.d.).

### **National Archives and Records Administration – College Park, MD**

Researchers who are new to archival research may find many of the aspects of the experience unique. One such aspect is the level of security enforced at NARAs.



*Figure 1.* National Archives – College Park

### **Security Procedures**

All U.S. NARAs follow procedures to retain the security of their archived documents. Researchers should be prepared to comply with especially strict security procedures at NARA – College Park. NARA College Park is one of the strictest of all U.S. NARAs regarding security procedures (Archive specialist, personal communication, July 24, 2018; U.S. NARA, n.d.). Upon arriving at the facility, security personnel will request to see a photo identification card (ID) to enter the parking area, and again to gain access to the NARA building. Once inside the building, a guard will direct researchers to place their belongings on a small conveyor belt that is passed through an X-ray machine. Researchers then will pass through a metal detector. The experience is similar to passing through airport security.

After completing the initial security review, researchers will be directed to an office where they will acquire a NARA Research Card. Researchers should be prepared to produce their photo ID once again. Attendants will then direct researchers to complete a form requesting the researcher’s name, birthdate, social security number, permanent and temporary addresses, and the purpose for their visit. After submitting the completed form, researchers will have their photo taken. The attendants will then award researchers a NARA Photo Research Card with a

user identification number, valid for one year from the date of issuance. There is no fee associated with the application or issuance of the Research Card. After receiving their Research Card, researchers will then be required to view a 20-minute presentation on a computer about Archive rules and use.

The first time going through the security procedures can be intimidating. There are multiple uniformed security guards in view at each of the numerous stations inside the building. However, by the third day or so, researchers will likely feel more comfortable passing through security stations and requesting document files. In fact, guards make a point of exchanging polite greetings when they begin to recognize returning researchers after a few days.

Each day that researchers return to the NARA, they will be required to produce their Research Card to the security check station located on the first floor of the facility. Researchers must also reproduce their Research Card to enter the textual research room, located on the second floor. Researchers are permitted to bring in approved devices and cords into the research room, such as personal laptops, tablets, cameras, flatbed scanners, and SmartPhones. Ideally, researchers will review the list of approved devices before visiting their chosen NARA. A complete list of approved people, devices, materials, and clothing can be found in Appendix B: What is Allowed in Research Rooms (U.S. NARA, n.d.). Any approved devices that researchers choose to bring into the research room with them will be inspected before entering and leaving the research room each day. Researchers may bring in eyeglasses in a small case, but they should expect that the case will be also inspected each day. Pens, notebooks, purses, perceived outerwear (coats, jackets, etc.), food, and drinks are not permitted in the research room. Non-permissible items in researchers' possession are required to be kept in a storage locker in the basement of the facility. Only after placing non-permissible items in a storage locker will researchers be allowed to enter the first security checkpoint on the first floor.

At the end of each day, researchers will need to produce their Research Card in order to exit the research room and pass the security check stations. Any documents, including discarded papers or "garbage," that researchers wish to take out of the research room will be reviewed and placed into a security pouch. There are not even any garbage cans in the research room. The security guard of the research room will lock the reviewed documents in the pouch before researchers will be permitted to exit the research room. Upon exiting the building, researchers will be required to present their Research Card and have their security pouch unlocked and contents reviewed at the last security checkout point.

### **The First Day of Research**

Researchers new to the archival research process will be directed to an office in the research room to consult with archive specialists. After explaining their research interest, researchers will be encouraged to use the NARA online catalog to perform a query using simple terms. The NARA online search engine is a simple one. Therefore, archive specialists recommend against adding modifiers, like dates or additional words to a keyword search. Researchers will have the greatest success using simple terms. For example, a query for "Foreign Service Institute" produces more desirable matches than a qualified search such as "Foreign Service Institute Language" or "Foreign Service Institute 1947-1968." Depending on availability, an archive specialist may demonstrate how to perform a query as a model for researchers and even explain the location of the documents of interest. For example, all Department of State records are identified as Record Group (RG) 59. RG 59 specifically references the Department of State files which encompass Foreign Service Institute documents (NARA archive specialist, personal communication, July 24, 2018).

Researchers may use their own computers or the facility's computers to conduct their keyword queries. NARA does offer free wi-fi service to researchers. However, researchers

must agree to and submit to the terms of use which includes the monitoring of their wi-fi usage. Once beginning the query search process, researchers should be prepared to have a large number of matches returned. For example, performing a query in the NARA database using the suggested simple term “Foreign Service Institute,” the search will return 146 individual items, 1135 units, and 38 series. As researchers review the list of query results, they will want to focus on textual documents identified in the appropriate Record Group related to their study, such as RG 59. Researchers can strategically narrow their search and target documents of interest by reviewing the title, tag, or descriptor of each of the returned query entries. Another helpful strategy as researchers make decisions about collections to investigate is to copy and paste all entries of interest into a saved document to be referenced as necessary at a later time.

Once researchers have decided which documents to view, they will be required to complete a triplicate Reference Service Slip (RSS) for each item that they want to request access to. The RSS requires the following fields of information: Date, Last name, First name, Research card number, Series or collection name (including year), Record group, Entry number, National Archives identifier, Boxes or nos. requested, Stack, Entry, Row, Compartment, and Shelf. (See Figure 2. Reference Service Slip Sample). Information for the stack and row of the documents’ location are not provided in the online query results information. Researchers will have to look up the specific locations of the desired materials in a printed paper catalog organized by Entry Number.

REFERENCE SERVICE SLIP *SHADED BOXES FOR NARA USE ONLY*		DATE (MM/DD/YYYY)	TRACKING NUMBER
LAST NAME (PRINT)		FIRST NAME (PRINT)	RESEARCHER CARD NUMBER
SERIES OR COLLECTION NAME			
RECORD GROUP NUMBER/COLLECTION DESIGNATION	ENTRY NUMBER	NATIONAL ARCHIVES IDENTIFIER (OPTIONAL)	BOX/ITEM NOS. REQUESTED
STACK	ROW	COMPARTMENT	SHELF
NUMBER OF BOXES/ITEMS PULLED			
OTHER RECORD IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION (SPECIFY FOLDER TITLE(S) AND FILE NUMBER(S))			
REQUEST REVIEWED BY		REQUEST PULLED BY	
RECEIVED BY	DATE (MM/DD/YYYY)	REPLIED BY	DATE (MM/DD/YYYY)
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION		DO NOT REMOVE FROM RECORDS	
		NA 34001 (08-16) Replaced by NARA 1472	

Figure 2. Reference Service Slip Sample

### Requesting Records

Researchers are permitted to submit two RSSs simultaneously at specified times. Requested records are pulled only during the following time periods: 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 1:00 p.m., 2:00 p.m., and 3:00 p.m. (U.S. NARA, n.d.). Records requests must be submitted to an archive specialist who will review the RSSs for completion before queuing them for the following record “pull time.” Once the series of requested records are pulled from the shelves, researchers are able to check them out and review them at an open workstation in the research room. However, researchers will be restricted to check-out and review only one

set of records at a time. The second set of requested records will remain held up to three days in the anterior room of the checkout desk. Researchers will not be able to access the second request until they return the first series and indicate that it can be returned to the shelves. At no time are researchers permitted to request additional records while two remain “pulled out from the shelves” in their name. The check-out and check-in process requires researchers to sign for receipt of documents and their return. Researchers must also initial to indicate that collections may be returned to the stacks if they are finished working with them. Researchers may request records to be pulled in advance of their anticipated visit to have collections ready and waiting for them when they arrive. However, arrangements must be made to receive a Research Card beforehand (Archive specialist, personal communication, July 24, 2018; U.S. NARA, n.d.).

### Working with Archived Documents

Researchers who have not previously accessed archived documents may find NARAs’ method of document storage inconsistent. Many series and units of document files are contained in vertical file boxes, arranged on a cart for transport to and from the check-out desk. Physically accessing the historical documents can be a memorable experience. Researchers may sense the historical value and fragility of the documents more than 50 years age. Some may contain handwritten notes; some may be tattered and barely holding together; some may have been previously classified top secret or confidential; it is surprising that researchers are permitted to handle such delicate artifacts. Figure 3 represents an actual textual document available at NARA – College Park.

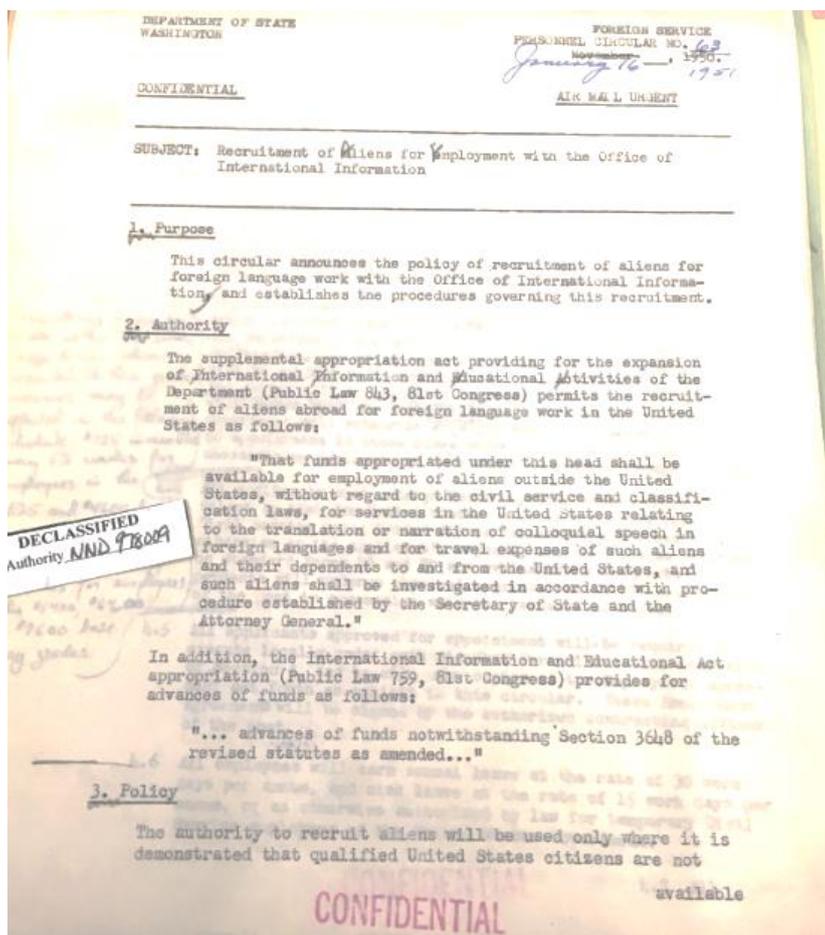


Figure 3. Sample document from the Foreign Service Institute

To begin the document review process, researchers may wheel the cart loaded with boxes of a single collection to an open work station. Researchers may view documents at their leisure but must follow very specific rules in doing so. They are not permitted to remove more than one box from the cart at a time. Only one box at a time is permitted in the work station. Nor may researchers leave any box stacked on top of the cart. Boxes must remain on the lower shelf compartments of the cart. Once a box is selected to begin the review process, researchers are permitted to take out no more than one file at a time from a single box at the work station. Researchers are permitted to take photos or make photocopies of the documents of interest. However, researchers may want to seriously consider bringing their own copying or photo-taking device, such as a SmartPhone, flatbed scanner, or camera with a mounting stand. At the time of this writing, the photocopy rate at NARA College Park was 80 cents per page (NARA, n.d.). If researchers would like to capture images of several documents, using the NARA copy machine can quickly become costly. Using a SmartPhone may be sufficient for capturing document images, depending on the quality needed for reviewing the images later. Strategic researchers who use a device such as a tablet or SmartPhone will also direct captured images to automatically upload to a storage cloud server for back up. Since researchers will be capturing images of original documents, they should not have concern about document origins in reference to their study evidence. Photographic and scanned images of original documents do not discredit their authenticity or credibility (Gottschalk, 1964).

**Declassification number.** Before researchers duplicate documents with any kind of device, they must bring their cart collection to a copy services desk where they will be issued a declassification number for each series to be copied. The declassification number is written on a document which must appear in each image taken. Figure 4 provides an example of a declassification number slip.

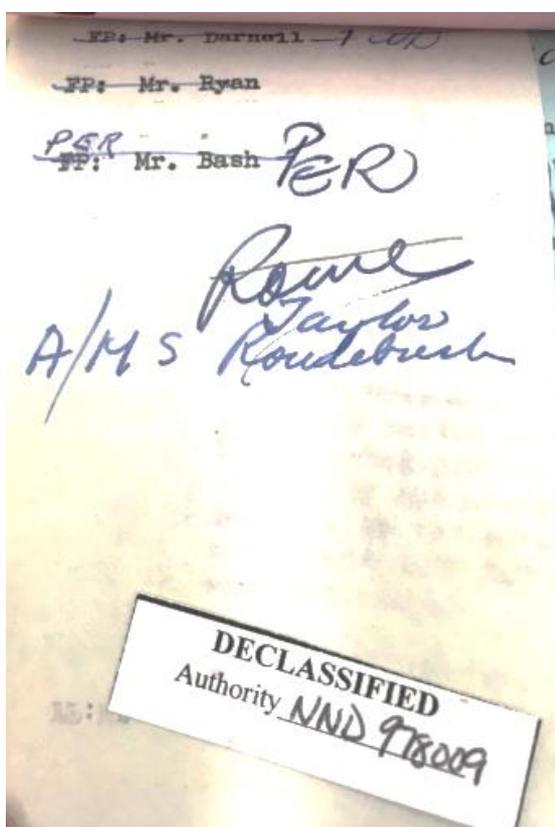


Figure 4. Sample declassification number.

Researchers will have to log the checkout and return times of assigned declassification numbers. The document with the declassification number written on it must be returned after researchers finish taking images for the corresponding document collection. If researchers opt to use their own device to capture document images at their workstation, they must post their daily permission to record images on a fixture that overhangs the work station. The printed permission document must be visible to security personnel who circulate the floor. The printed copying permission is also acquired from the copy services desk.

**Archive document review and selection.** Depending on their study focus, researchers should be prepared to review thousands of documents. Individual box collections may contain five to approximately 25 folders. The contents of each folder within a box may vary from one individual document to more than 100 separate documents of multiple pages. Potentially, a three or four-day visit at NARA is sufficient time to handle and superficially scan as many as 35,000 pages of documents.

Sifting through such an astronomical volume of documents can become overwhelming. Researchers who have limited time at the NARA, for example, just a few days, should find strategies to quickly and efficiently review a high volume of documents each day. By the end of the first day of reviewing documents, researchers may find that they need to adjust their document review pacing.

As may be apparent by now, it will be impossible to capture an image of each document reviewed. Therefore, researchers should select a variety of document types and production dates within the period of their study (Bowen, 2009; Brooks, 1969). For instance, researchers should consciously and strategically take into consideration overall representation of collections, genre variety, saturation of topics, and document quality when selecting documents in order to strengthen the study's trustworthiness or crystallization of findings (Brook, 1964; Gottschalk, 1964; Platt, 1981a; Rury, 2006; Scott, 2014).

The selection process forces researchers to make decisions about which and how many documents to copy. Because of the sheer volume of documents, researchers may want to consider using a *sampling* approach for selecting documents to copy. *Sampling* is a method of representing retrieved documents without having to exhaust every available document potentially related to the topic of study (Platt, 1981b). For most research studies, it is not realistic or desirable to collect and review every related document produced in relation to the study topic. (Scott, 2014). The *sampling* method attempts to incorporate different genre of texts to achieve adequate representation from a variety of document types. Sufficient sampling is reached when the document collection process no longer generates new information or insights (Platt, 1981a). This makes it critically important for researchers to remain cognizant of repeating themes or duplicated documents in multiple locations.

One tip that may benefit researchers in the selection process is to remain astute to the organization of collections. Researchers may find that each set of series or files uses a unique organization system. For example, some series might be organized by themes, some by date in order from newest to oldest, some by date in order from oldest to newest, and some by author. Sometimes collections may appear to overlap, with repeating themes or duplicate documents filed in multiple locations. This repetition can be used to researchers' advantage. In cases where researchers find duplication of themes and documents, they may realize no significant disadvantage in not being able to view all the documents of interest. In fact, they may find sufficient saturation of similar documents or repeated themes through the collections available to them (Bhattacharya, 2017; Kridel, 2017; Platt, 1981a; Scott, 2014).

## Inaccessible Documents or Collections

Unseasoned researchers might realize that not all archived U.S. documents will be accessible. Most documents more than 50 years old are made available to researchers and the public (Brooks, 1964). For that reason, researchers would not expect to be denied access to desired documents beyond 50 years of age (Brooks, 1964). However, it was not until the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act of 1966 (FOIA) that government archived records were made readily available to the public. The FOIA now makes many, but not all, government held records accessible to researchers. For example, classified records are often restricted from full access. Such limitations are supported by legislation, such as the Espionage Act of 1917. Along this vein, some documents may be viewed but not copied, depending on their level of security-related content and age (Brooks, 1964).

Nonetheless, researchers cannot assume that all documents of interest will be available to them during their NARA visit (Platt, 1981a; Scott, 2014). Government-generated documents in particular may be classified for longer periods than other documents. For example, researchers will likely be denied access to most files identified in Stack 631 at NARA – College Park, as these files have not yet been de-classified. Documents produced after 1950 are likely connected with multiple government agencies, some of whom still have equity in them. Public access to the documents is denied in order to preserve U.S. National Security (Jennifer Dryer, personal communication, July 24, 2018). To support researchers, some government agencies have streamlined their accessibility process by making documents available through regular publications, such as the *Foreign Affairs Journal*, produced by the Department of State (Brooks, 1964).

Another barrier for researchers is incomplete files (Platt, 1981a). Researchers may find some folders in collections contain letter size cards indicating that some contents has been removed due to its continued classification status. As pertinent, researchers should take note of known omissions during the interpretation phase of data analysis (Scott, 2014). Lack of document availability may in-and-of-itself provide insight into the meaning of those documents that are accessible (Gottschalk, 1964; Platt, 1981a; Scott, 2014). In other instances, it is impossible for researchers to be fully aware of the potential existence of documents they have no access to. Thus, they may choose to approach documents collection with a *reverse perspective* method. This method assumes that accessible documents are authentic, credible, and representative unless there is reason to suspect otherwise (Kridel, 2017; Scott, 2014).

**Index on Demand.** Researchers who are denied access to documents for which they have strong interest, may have other recourse. They may make a FOIA request for the files they were denied access to due to their classification status. NARA FOIA requests of classified documents may be honored between six months and six years, if at all. To expedite the FOIA request, a FOIA specialist at NARA recommends that researchers initiate an Index on Demand (IOD) review. Once receiving an IOD request, the FOIA specialist will personally review the denied files to determine how heavily tabbed the documents are. Series not heavily tabbed could be partially released for review in as little as a few weeks or months; however, the process could also be delayed up to two years, or even denied completely (Jennifer Dyer, personal communication, July 25, 2018).

Although it is unlikely that denied files would be released during the initial visit period, it is worth researchers making the request, nonetheless. Sometimes files that are not heavily tabbed are released within a few weeks of the IOD requests. However, knowing that FOIA fulfillment requests are unpredictable, it is best for researchers to focus on documents available to them during their planned visit at the facility. If need be, researchers may return to the NARA if document requests are later released and prove valuable to the study's completeness.

## **Data Review Preparation**

After reviewing the documents of interest, researchers may find that they have photos or copies that number in the thousands. A useful strategy for ease of detailed document review later on is to print the captured images. It is most cost and time efficient to have the images printed professionally after returning home from the NARA visit. Typical home printers cannot handle large volumes of printing. They will overheat and pause. In addition, the cost of replacing one toner cartridge for a small batch print is nearly equivalent to the cost of professional printing for the entire batch. Print jobs of thousands of images will require several toner cartridges on the home printer. Also, professional printing can complete large print jobs in a matter of minutes, so selecting professional services makes the most sense for printing high volume jobs. Before taking the images to the professional printer, researchers may want to edit images for optimum printing and viewing quality. For example, some images may have rotated to horizontal position rather than a desired vertical position. Savvy researchers will also assure their images are backed up in some way, such as on a network drive, external hard drive, or storage cloud before bringing them to the professional printer. Finally, researchers should explicitly request of the printer that the image file order be retained for ease of collating multi-part documents later on.

After the completion of printing, researchers may then collate multi-page documents and fasten or staple them together as a single document. Next, researchers may want to organize the documents by an appropriate factor, such as date, author, or genre for ease of retrieval or reference during the document review process of the study. If researchers opt to organize their documents by date, they will want to assign an estimated date or year to undated documents, based on their contextual contents and position between previous and following documents in the printing batch order. For example, researchers may assign a date of c.a. 1947 or c.a. June 1947 to an undated document that falls between documents dated June 12, 1947, and June 20, 1947, depending on the document's topical contents.

Once the documents are sorted, researchers may then perform a second sampling to select documents for the study. At this point, researchers will be able to read the documents for more detail at their leisure to determine their quality and potential value to the study. Researchers should select documents based on quality and rich context, keeping in mind document genre variety (Platt, 1981a, 1981b). If researchers decide to include government documents in their study, they will want to select variety based on the previous level of document classification, such as "unclassified," "partially classified," "classified" or "secret." In reference to government documents, it is best to select lengthier and higher-level security documents over brief documents with little context.

## **Authenticity and Credibility**

In addition to document quality, genre, and classification, authenticity and credibility are other potential factors of consideration in selecting documents for a study (Bhattacharya, 2017; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). It is fairly safe to assume, for example, that government military documents were written with accuracy and truthful intentions. These types of documents tend to prove authentic and trustworthy due to the nature of their source and purpose (Scott, 2014).

Original documents tend to be easier to authenticate as they may provide detail and description that can offer clues regarding authenticity and credibility (Bowen, 2009, Brooks, 1969). External evidence is used to confirm a document's authenticity. Authenticity is typically assumed when a convincing correspondence appears between a document's perceived origin and its actual origin. External analysis may include questioning authorship, location, timing,

providence, and contexts of documents (Bhattacharya, 2017; Brooks, 1969; Gottschalk, 1964; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Other clues to authenticity reference document condition itself, such as the presence of seals or letterheads (Gottschalk, 1964; Scott, 2014). Government-produced documents represent a higher yield of authenticity than other sources, as authorship and purpose are more easily verified (Kridel, 2017). Although the likelihood of government military documents being inauthentic is smaller than with other documents, researchers should remain cognizant of authenticity during the document selection process. Generally, researchers are safe to assume authenticity when they detect no evidence to suspect otherwise (Platt, 1981a, Scott, 2014).

In contrast to authenticity, document credibility is examined through internal criticism. An internal evidence review weighs the likely accuracy of actions and words expressed in the document as compared with the context in which it was written. As such, internal document evidence considers the author's credibility, intention, literary style, trustworthiness, or bias (Bhattacharya, 2017; Brooks, 1969; Gottschalk, 1964; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Internal criticism may additionally consider the correlation between document genre, the language register, and conformity of writing conventions (Platt, 1981b; Schleiermacher, 1998; Scott, 2014). This type of analysis requires making assumptions about people's thoughts and motives for writing the documents (Platt, 1981b; Schleiermacher, 1998).

Primary source historical artifacts are considered the most truthful or credible as they are usually written from firsthand experience, are the first account of an event, or are written during or shortly after an experience (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016; Scott, 2014). Many government documents are written in alignment with a required or expected format, and thus maintain an elevated likelihood of credibility. By their nature, such documents are produced for specific communication purposes (Angell & Freedman, 1953; Bhattacharya, 2017; Brooks, 1969; Kridel, 2017; Scott, 2014). However, administrative records, such as government documents, are not merely reports of events or directives without influence of bias. As such, researchers should remain aware of any cause for concern regarding credibility (Scott, 2014).

## Conclusion

In performing a preliminary investigation about textual documents as artifacts, researchers may not know quite what to expect if their study leads them to a U.S. national archive. Those new to archival research may find the initial experience, daunting. This article is intended to build background knowledge about textual documents and collection methods. In addition, the article provides researchers guidance in making decisions through the archival research process in order to bolster their confidence in navigating the strict usage requirements within a U.S. national archive. By having detailed background knowledge of the archival research process, researchers will experience success in gathering documents for their study by understanding how to prepare for the process and use their time at the archive in an efficient manner. The suggestions for selecting and preparing documents for review will also prepare researchers for decisions that they will have to make before they dive into the document collection and analysis process.

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## **APPENDIX A: LIST OF UNITED STATES NATIONAL ARCHIVES LOCATIONS**

### **National Archives in Washington, DC**

700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20408

Available services: Archival Research Room, Microfilm Research Room, “National Archives Experience” - The Rotunda, The Public Vaults, The William McGowan Theater, The Lawrence F. O’Brien Gallery Visit the National Archives Museum

### **Atlanta Federal Records Center**

4712 Southpark Blvd, Ellenwood, GA 30294

Available services: Records Center, Records Management

### **National Archives at Atlanta, GA**

5780 Jonesboro Road, Morrow, GA 30260

Available services: Archival Research Room, Microfilm Research Room

### **Boston Federal Records Center**

Frederick C. Murphy Federal Center, Waltham, MA 02452-6399

Available services: Records Center, Records Management

### **National Archives at Boston, MA**

Frederick C. Murphy Federal Center, Waltham, MA 02452-6399

Available services: Reference Room, Research Room

### **Chicago Federal Records Center**

7358 South Pulaski Road, Chicago, IL 60629-5898

Available services: Records Center, Records Management

### **National Archives at Chicago, IL**

7358 South Pulaski Road, Chicago, IL 60629-5898

Available services: Archival Research Room, Microfilm Research Room

### **National Archives at College Park, MD**

8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001

Available services: Archival Research Room, Microfilm Research Room

### **Dayton Federal Records Center**

3150 Springboro Road, Moraine, OH 45439

Available services: Records Center, Records Management

### **Denver Federal Records Center**

17101 Huron Street, Broomfield, CO 80023-8909

Available services: Records Center, Records Management

### **National Archives at Denver, CO**

17101 Huron Street, Broomfield, CO 80023-8909

Available services: Archival Research Room, Microfilm Research Room

### **Fort Worth Federal Records Center**

1400 John Burgess Drive, Fort Worth, TX 76140

Available services: Records Center, Records Management

National Archives at Fort Worth, TX  
1400 John Burgess Drive, Fort Worth, TX 76140  
Available services: Archival Research Room, Microfilm Research Room

Kansas City Federal Records Center  
8600 NE Underground Drive, Pillar 300-G, Kansas City, MO 64161  
Available services: Records Center, Records Management

National Archives at Kansas City, MO  
400 West Pershing Road, Kansas City, MO 64108  
Available services: Archival Research Room, Microfilm Research Room

Kingsridge Federal Records Center  
8801 Kingsridge Drive, Miamisburg, OH 45458  
Available services: Records Center

Lee's Summit Federal Records Center  
200 Space Center Drive, Lee's Summit, MO 64064-1182  
Available services: Records Center, Research Room

Lenexa Federal Records Center  
17501 W. 98th, Lenexa, KS 66219  
Available services: Records Center, Research Room

National Archives at New York City, NY  
Alexander Hamilton US Customs House, New York, NY 10004-1415  
Available services: Archival Research Room, Microfilm Research Room

Philadelphia Federal Records Center  
14700 Townsend Road, Philadelphia, PA 19154-1096  
Available services: Records Center, Records Management

National Archives at Philadelphia, PA  
14700 Townsend Road, Philadelphia, PA 19154-1096  
Available services: Archival Research Room, Microfilm Research Room

Pittsfield Federal Records Center  
10 Conte Drive, Pittsfield, MA 01201-8230  
Available services: Records Center, Records Management

Riverside Federal Records Center  
23123 Cajalco Road, Perris, CA 92570-7298  
Available services: Records Center, Records Management

National Archives at Riverside, CA  
23123 Cajalco Road, Perris, CA 92570  
Available services: Archival Research Room, Microfilm Research Room

San Bruno Federal Records Center  
Leo J. Ryan Building, San Bruno, CA 94066-2350

Available services: Records Center, Records Management

National Archives at San Francisco, CA

Leo J. Ryan Building, San Bruno, CA 94066-2350

Available services: Archival Research Room, Microfilm Research Room

Seattle Federal Records Center

6125 Sand Point Way, NE, Seattle, WA 98115-7999

Available services: Records Center, Records Management

National Archives at Seattle, WA

6125 Sand Point Way, NE, Seattle, WA 98115-7999

Available services: Archival Research Room, Microfilm Research Room

National Archives at St. Louis, MO

1 Archives Drive, St. Louis, MO 63138

Available services: Archival Research Room, Microfilm Research Room

National Personnel Records Center (Military)

1 Archives Drive, Spanish Lake, MO 63138

Available services: Records Center, Research Room, National Personnel Records Center

National Personnel Records Center (Civilian)

1411 Boulder Boulevard , Valmeyer, IL 62295

Available services: Records Center, National Personnel Records Center

Washington National Records Center

4205 Suitland Road, Suitland, MD 20746-8001

Available services: Archival Research Room, Records Center

The Federal Register

7 G Street, NW, Suite A-734, Washington, DC 20401

Available services: Review Public Inspection Documents

Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum

210 Parkside Drive, West Branch, IA 52358

Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum

4079 Albany Post Road, Hyde Park, NY 12538-1999

Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum

500 W. U.S. Hwy 24, Independence, MO 64050-1798

Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum

200 SE. Fourth Street, Abilene, KS 67410-2900

Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum  
Columbia Point, Boston, MA 02125-3398  
Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum  
2313 Red River Street, Austin, TX 78705-5702  
Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum  
18001 Yorba Linda Boulevard, Yorba Linda, CA 92886-3903  
Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library  
1000 Beal Avenue, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2114  
Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum  
303 Pearl Street, Grand Rapids, MI 49504-5353  
Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum  
441 Freedom Parkway, Atlanta, GA 30307-1498  
Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum  
40 Presidential Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065-0699  
Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

George Bush Presidential Library and Museum  
1000 George Bush Drive West, College Station, TX 77845  
Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum  
1200 President Clinton Avenue, Little Rock, AR 72201  
Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum  
2943 SMU Blvd., Dallas, TX 75205  
Available services: Presidential Library and Museum

Barack Obama Presidential Library  
2500 W. Golf Road, Hoffman Estates, IL 60169  
Available services: Presidential Library  
Not Open to the Public

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**APPENDIX B: WHAT IS ALLOWED IN RESEARCH ROOMS****People**

<b>Allowed</b>	<b>Not Allowed</b>
All persons with a valid researcher card or a NARA issued photo ID	Persons without a valid pass, or children under 14 years old
Equipment repairmen escorted by NARA staff are the only people allowed through with a red visitor's badge.	Food, drink (including water) candy, gum, cigarettes, E-Cigarettes, or any other tobacco products
	Hand Sanitizer, Lotion

**Notes and Related Materials**

<b>Allowed</b>	<b>Not Allowed</b>
Stamped research notes on loose paper, NARA issued paper and note cards, handouts, and NARA publications	Envelopes, notebooks, pads, binders, folders, pens, markers "Post-it" notes (unless stapled to pre-existing notes)
One approved book at a time	
Pencils and mechanical pencils	

**Special Equipment**

<b>Allowed*</b>	<b>Not Allowed***</b>
Video and audio recording decks	Flash bulbs
Cameras, camcorders and tripods	Personal copiers
Photographic copy stands (with approval)	Scanners with auto-feed attachments whether the attachment is disabled or not
Video tapes, audio tapes, and film	Hand wand scanners
Scanners (only flatbed without autofeed)	
Personal computers	
CDs/DVDs	

Please Note:

\* All equipment must be removed from cases and the cases stored in lockers

\*\*\*Any non government owned equipment is prohibited in from the classified research rooms

**Clothing and Personal Effects**

<b>Allowed</b>	<b>Not Allowed</b>
Sweaters and sweatshirts, with or without hoods, short (waist length), indoor business attire (such as suit jackets, sports coats, blazers, or waist-length indoor jackets with or without zippers)	Outerwear: Garments worn over indoor clothing primarily as protection against the elements such as, overcoats, coat-type sweaters, wind breakers and jackets (other than indoor business attire)**
Scarves, no more than four inches wide and four feet in length	Hats, caps, or scarves (wider than four inches wide or four feet in length)
Vests (with small pockets & no inner pockets)	

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Religious headwear and garments	Purses, fanny packs, briefcases, suitcases, handbags, backpacks, boxes, bags, equipment bags, or containers of any kind
Small silk or similar indoor- type kerchiefs	Clear plastic bags if larger than 10"x10"
Coin purses or small pocket sized wallets	Camera Vests
Small Eye Glass Cases	
Clear plastic "sandwich/food storage type" bags for holding small items no larger than 10" x 10"	

**\*\* Please Note:**

You may also be asked to remove any outer clothing that is wet or contains outdoor debris. NARA reserves the right to determine whether a garment is considered to be outerwear.

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### Author Note

Dr. Theresa Ulrich currently serves as the Director of Language Programs in a public-school district in Illinois. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Education, and a Master of Arts degree in Literature and Linguistics from Northern Illinois University. She also holds a Doctorate in Educational Leadership in Administration from Aurora University. In addition, to her standard teaching licenses she possesses endorsements in Language Arts, French, Bilingual Spanish, and English as a Second Language. She has accrued more than 20 years of experience in the field of education and has presented at local, state, and national conferences dedicated to language acquisition education. Additionally, she is the co-author of *Free Voluntary Reading: A Neglected Strategy for Language Acquisition*. She also anticipates the publication of a book in 2020 under the working title of *The Influence of the Foreign Service Institute on US Language Education: Critical Analysis of Historical Documentation*. The author declares no conflict of interest. Correspondence can be addressed directly to: [TheresaAUlrich@gmail.com](mailto:TheresaAUlrich@gmail.com).

I would like to express gratitude to Dr. Jessica Heybach for her guidance and James Ulrich for his patience and support during the research and writing process.

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### Article Citation

Ulrich, T. A. (2020). Qualitative studies and textual document research in the United States: Conducting research in national archives. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(2), 359-378. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol25/iss2/6>

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