

Carleton University
Winter 2026 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

ENGL 4115E/ENGL 5120W: Culture and the Text/Book Arts Workshop
Prerequisites: fourth-year standing or permission of the department

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***** This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change. A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. *****

Course description

This experiential learning course immerses students in the practical arts and histories of book production, with its roots in the early Middle Ages. Students will engage in a range of activities representative of the pillars of the book arts, including bookbinding, calligraphy, papermaking, decoration, and typesetting/printing. Activities may include transcription of manuscript texts, reproduction of medieval bookhand, creating and printing linocuts, papermaking, typesetting and letterpress printing, hand sewing of paper gatherings to create pamphlets or multiple section books, and exploration of manuscripts and early printed books from Carleton's Archives and Special Collections. The class will be held in the MacOdrum Library Book Arts Lab, where students will work collaboratively with the Master Printer, lab staff, the professor, and their classmates.

Learning outcomes

While gaining historical knowledge about the evolution of the codex, students will think about the book/text as object, question the impacts of antiquarianism, and appreciate the multiple parties involved in the creation of text/meaning. Students will also learn to differentiate between analytical and holistic approaches to understanding; to articulate initial assumptions, curiosity, and questions; to grow more comfortable with experimentation; and to reflect on their learning processes.

Texts

MacOdrum Library will provide most of the materials needed to complete the course free of charge. Students should budget \$50 for additional costs. Brightspace will house required readings, websites, and videos, as well as additional resources. There are also a number of books on reserve through ARES. For students who desire a textbook, I recommend *The Broadview Introduction to Book History* by Michelle Levy and Tom Mole (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2017, \$42.95). Includes timeline, glossary, and bibliography.

Evaluation: I am currently working with Teaching and Learning Services to develop an alternative assessment approach to this course. Graded aspects of coursework may include class participation, reflective writing, and a final project. Students are unlikely to be assigned a grade of A+ in this course.