The next steps?

From idea to production

Overview

It all starts with an idea, followed by a plan and then its implementation in three steps:

- **Step 1:** Research
- **Step 2:** Documentation
- **Step 3:** Publication

This may sound simple and is probably familiar to everyone. Nevertheless, it is not always easy for everyone to follow these steps!

It all starts with research ...

For us, this means:

- Investigating what already exists on a topic,
- asking others about something in order to gain a better understanding,
- systematically tapping into sources,
- getting to know the background and circumstances
- and thus perhaps a new or different perspective on the topic
- and thus perhaps gain a new or more complete picture.

It all starts with research ...

A 180-degree panoramic view of the interior of the British Museum's reading room (Feb. 2006). Photo: Diliff / Wikipedia

The first step is research...

I usually proceed as follows:

• I look through indexes and directories of libraries, known as library catalogs, which is easier to do digitally today than it used to be.

• I visit well-stocked libraries if there are any nearby (here in London, it's quite easy to visit the RPSL Library and/or the British Library).

• If necessary, I borrow relevant titles from a library by mail (in Germany, the Phil. libraries in Hamburg and Munich offer this service).

• I search for suitable titles at antiquarian bookshops.

• I may purchase a series of publications and find further references there.

It all starts with research ...

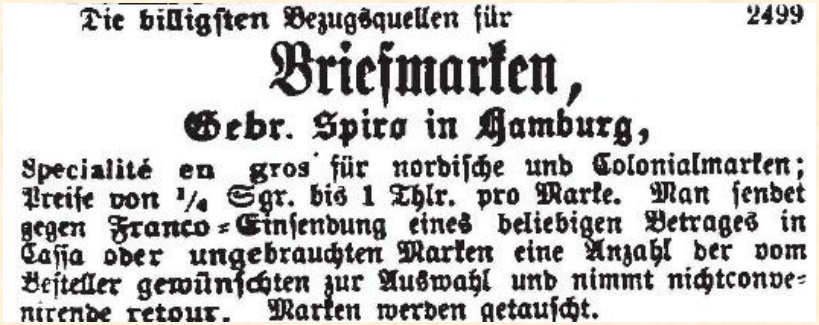
Results?

• If you're lucky, you'll have a large number of sources. That's what happened to me — to name just two examples — with the imitations/fakes attributed to the Spiro brothers in Hamburg since the publication of "Spud Paper," but also years ago with my book about the life of Philipp von Ferrari.

• However, it was always striking that the sources were similar!

• One had copied from the other — that was the explanation!

It all starts with research ...



Die billigſten Bezugsquellen für 2499

Briefmarken,

Gebr. Spiro in Hamburg,

Specialité en gros für nordiſche und Colonialmarken; Preiſe von ¼ Sgr. bis 1 Thlr. pro Marke. Man ſendet gegen Franco-Einſendung eines beliebigen Betrages in Caſſa oder ungebrauchten Marken eine Anzahl der vom Beſteller gewünſchten zur Auswahl und nimmt nichtconvenirende retour. Marken werden getauſcht.

The picture makes it clear: the Spiro brothers' company was an art dealer, selling drawing utensils.

So I searched for **primary sources**. And lo and behold: on June 27, 1863, there was an advertisement by Gebr. Spiro in the Leipzig “Illustrirte Zeitung” offering stamps for selection and exchange! But no imitations!

It all starts with research ...

Primary sources are also the be-all and end-all in postal history! – THE EXAMPLE ...:

- Letters

These can come from postal workers, but also from private individuals, and provide insights into the process of letter delivery, rates, the use of postmarks, and the social significance of postal traffic.
This refers to the "contents of letters," not envelopes!

It all starts with research ...

Primary sources are also the be-all and end-all in postal history! – THE EXAMPLE ...:

- Postal regulations and service regulations

These documents regulate the operation of the postal service and provide information about the tasks, powers, and responsibilities of postal officials, as well as the technical processes, standards, and rules in the postal service.

It all starts with research ...

Primary sources are also the be-all and end-all in postal history! – THE EXAMPLE ...:

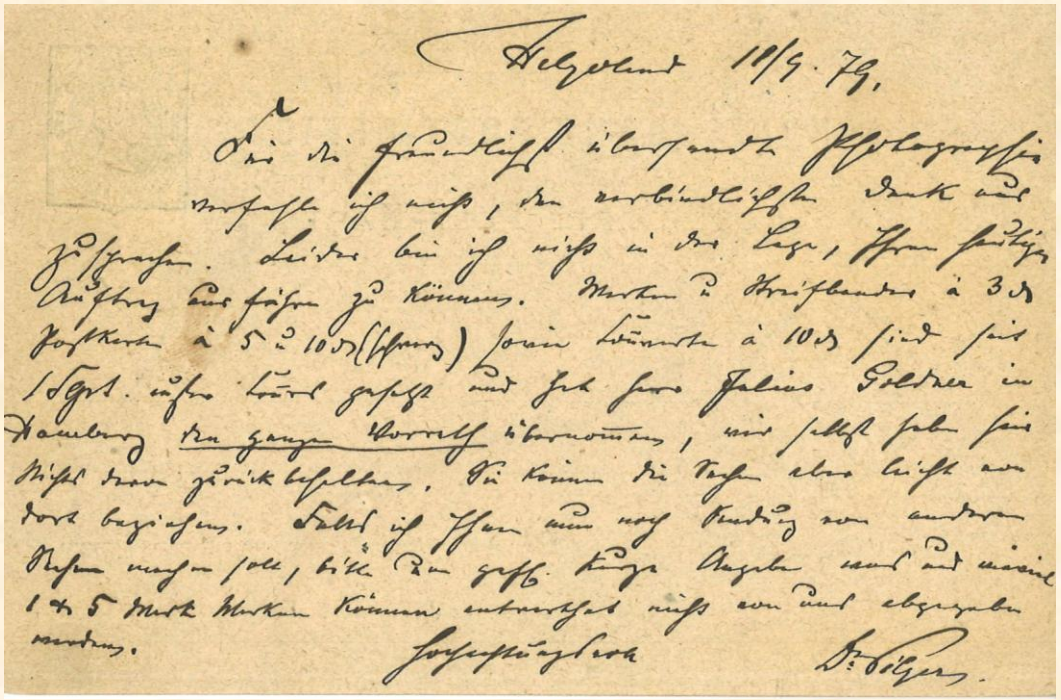
- Postcards

As a form of fast and inexpensive communication, such cards provide insights into people's everyday lives, travel destinations, and social relationships. They have the advantage that their information is often still intact and legible.
>>>> *Here is an example for postal historians!*

It all starts with research ...

At first glance, this appears to be a completely normal postcard from Heligoland – right? 1 ½ P / 10 Pfg. on 3 F / 5 Pfg. postcard, UPU imprint with 35 mm long line, HELIGOLAND SP 11 1879. The name Ernst Petritz is well known in German History of Philately; he was a renowned stamp dealer.

It all starts with research ...



Helgoland 10/9. 79.

Für die freundlichst übersandte Photographie verfehle ich nicht, den verbindlichsten Dank auszusprechen. Leider bin ich nicht in der Lage, Ihren [illegible] Auftrag ausführen zu können. Marken u. Streifbänder à 3 ₰ Postkarten à 5 u. 10 ₰ (schwarz) sowie Couverte à 10 ₰ sind seit 1 Sept. außer Cours gesetzt und hat Herr Julius Goldner in Hamburg den ganzen Vorrath übernommen, wir selbst haben kein Stück davon zurückbehalten. Sie können die Sachen aber leicht von dort beziehen. Falls ich Ihnen nun noch Sendung von anderen Sachen machen soll, bitte um gefl. kurze Angabe, und auch meine 1 & 5 Mark Marken können [illegible] nicht von uns abgegeben werden.

Hochachtungsvoll

Dr. Pilgrim.

In terms of philatelic history, this postcard is a unique piece of evidence, as Dr. Friedrich Wilhelm Robert Pilgrim (his full name) was a pharmacist in Berlin and the British government had appointed him to set up a state pharmacy in Heligoland in 1869.

In 1873, Pilgrim replaced the then postmaster Paul Volkers and remained his successor until September 30, 1879. Prior to this, he had sold all remaining stocks of postage stamps (stamps, postal stationery) issued by Heligoland since April 1867 to the Hamburg stamp wholesaler Julius Goldner, about which Pilgrim informed Petritz with this card.

It all starts with research ...

Primary sources are also the be-all and end-all in postal history! – MORE EXAMPLES ...:

- Timetables and route lists
- Postmarks
- Postal buildings and facilities
- Invoices and statements
- Photos and films

Primary sources are therefore invaluable for historical research, as they provide first-hand insights and enable objective analysis of the past.

It all starts with research ...

But where can you find such primary sources relevant to postal history?

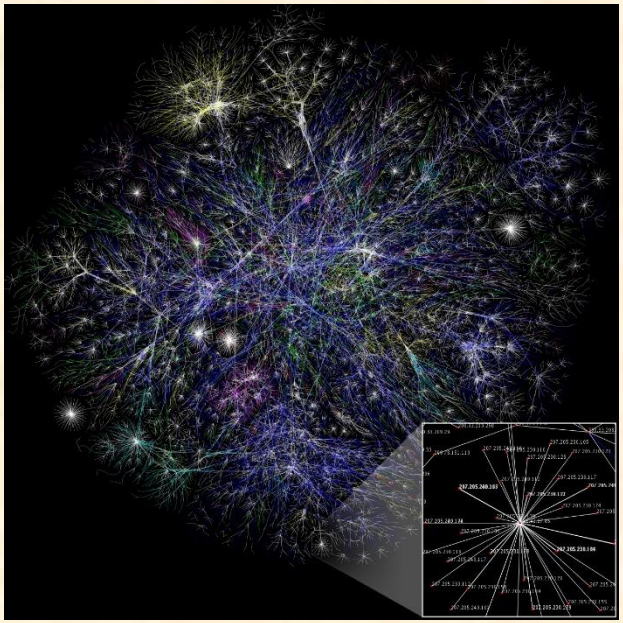
- City and state archives
- Postal archives
- In historical collections of local museums
- In church archives
- In private collections/archives

- Daily/monthly newspapers from the respective period
- Resident directories
- Company registries/company archives
- Sometimes even in cemetery archives!

It all starts with research...

What about researching on the internet?

• There are primary sources there too, e.g., from state or municipal authorities.



Otherwise, the internet, including Wikipedia and other sources, is an opaque jungle of secondary sources and unsubstantiated claims. Artificial intelligence only makes it worse!

Photo: The Opte project, 2005 / Wikipedia

Step 2: Documentation

A photo from the old days, right? Many of us used to work with slips of paper or index cards.

The photo by Dr. Marcus Gossler (Wikipedia) shows the former keyword catalog of the University of Graz from 2006.

Step 2: Documentation

Knowledge must be documented, i.e., recorded, so that it can be used either immediately or at a later date. For my purposes as a journalist and author, I used existing ...

• Article archives from A to Z (paper archive, mainly with copies of good articles)

• Corresponding supporting document archives: letters, postcards, photos, flyers, brochures, original lists, etc., supporting documents of which I still have tens of thousands today.

This saved me time-consuming trips, but it also cost money and took up a lot of space.

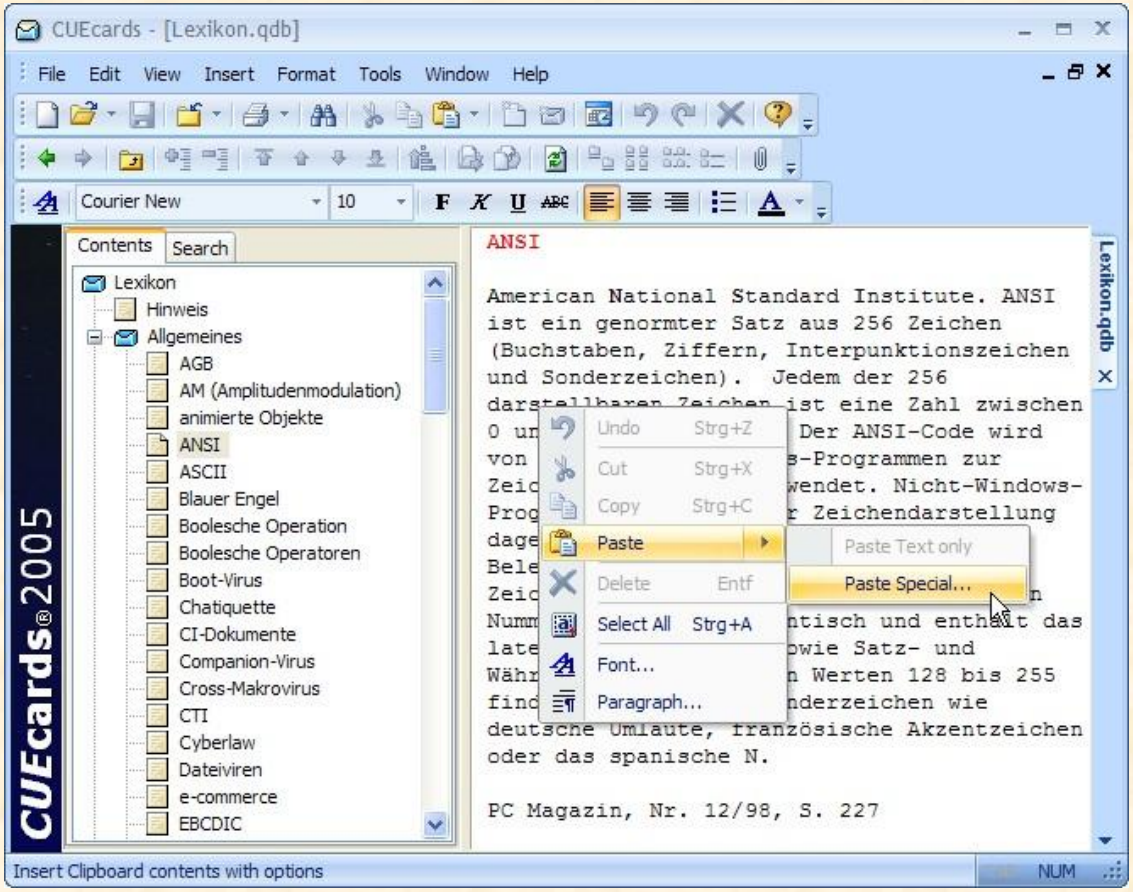
Step 2: Documentation

Any newly acquired knowledge must also be documented, otherwise it will quickly be forgotten.

• The simplest method in the past was the so-called "slip file," which had the disadvantage that such collections of slips eventually became completely disordered and it was impossible to find anything.

What a relief it was when home computers came onto the scene in the early 1980s. My first one was a Commodore 8296, which I got around 1983, followed three years later by a PC with MS-DOS operating system. (Photo: Wikipedia)

Step 2: Documentation



The first software programs were still very limited, similar to storage media. It only got better over the years. Then, starting in 2000, there were even special database-supported applications, such as CUEcards, that could be used to organize, sort, and store knowledge lexically.

Step 2: Documentation

Alternatives?

Important texts were saved individually as .doc or later as .pdf files. However, file names were a problem in the MS-DOS era!

In earlier years, file or folder names had to be limited to a maximum of 8 characters and, in accordance with international standards, could not contain umlauts, special characters, or diacritical marks, as not all programs tolerated violations of this rule. Renaming photos taken with a digital camera only became possible with Windows XP. Instead of IMG_2721, for example, it was now possible to select all these files and rename them in batches, e.g., with „London(01)“ ff. The storage date provided an indication of when they were created. Windows allows more freedom today!

3. The crowning glory = publication

Before publication, the task is to create a readable manuscript from all the accumulated sources, notes, and partial texts that is worthy of publication.

There are rules for this too, which every author should follow!

3. The crowning glory = Publication

Important rules for a readable writing style:

- Simple, rather shorter and non-nested sentences (always a problem for me!)

- Lots of paragraphs, possibly also additional subheadings

- Use punctuation to make connections clear.

- Don't leave out technical terms, but use them in an understandable way. No *apocryphal gibberish*!

Remember: No one is born a best-selling author, no one is a Shakespeare or a J. K. Rowling, but good language is enjoyable and makes friends!

3. The crowning glory = Publication

What is suitable for publication?

- Specialist articles
- Monographs
- Catalogs
- Bibliographies

... primarily if they offer something new, i.e., something that has not been published before. “New” can mean, for example, previously unknown research results, but also previously unpublished summaries and overviews.

... “Entertaining” or simply “informative” specialist articles are also suitable for the general press.

3. The crowning glory = Publication

Problems?

- Fewer and fewer readers
- Fewer and fewer buyers
- Ever-decreasing print runs
- Fewer and fewer interested publishers

Good monographs only exist because there are ...

- Foundations that support them
- institutions such as the Stuart Rossiter Trust exist finance and produce them,
- because there are associations or societies that sometimes provide certain funds, and
- because there are authors who bring their own money.

3. The crowning glory = publication

Despite all the problems, good monographs etc. still exist because ...

- ... today, any author who is reasonably familiar with a PC can design their work themselves using inexpensive programs, even with MS Word!
- ... digital printing enables much cheaper publications, even in small or very small print runs!
- ... Book covers can also be produced inexpensively, as even hardcover bindings are machine-made!
- ... And all this in color, which used to be almost unimaginable and affordable.

3. The crowning glory = publication

An inexpensive alternative: **OPEN ACCESS**

"Open access means that this literature should be freely and publicly available on the Internet so that interested parties can read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, reference, and otherwise use the full texts in any conceivable legal manner without financial, legal, or technical barriers beyond those associated with Internet access itself.
In all matters of reprinting and distribution, and in all matters of copyright in general, the only restriction should be to allow the respective authors to retain control over their work and to secure their right to have their work appropriately acknowledged and cited."

(from the Budapest Declaration 2002)

3. The crowning glory = publication

The advantage of **open access** is much wider distribution and visibility.

There are also publishers/companies that offer authors all steps from manuscript review (editing) to digital publication.

I publish a free digital PDF journal that appears four times a year (since 2013) and has an annual volume of around 1,000 pages. Anyone can download it from the website www.philahistorica.de.

And for “freaks” of printed hardcover books, there are so-called annual volumes with a print run of 25–30 copies. However, these cost around 80 euros and are in black and white instead of color.

A note

These 27 slides were an excerpt from a longer manuscript that I wrote in both German and English. Both versions will be published in Phila Historica No. 4/2025 and will be available to read at the end of the year.

Thank you for your attention!