

# Internet as a research tool (source criticism) assignment

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Type: Short assignment

## Learning objectives

- Students learn to engage with the web in an academic way. This includes: contextualizing online objects, relating them to academic research and publications, developing critical understanding of metadata formats, and engaging in digital source criticism.

## Assignment suggestion

This exercise is to help you think about the use of online searches and objects as *sources* for doing research. Watch the talk by Alec Badenoch on the contextualization of objects. For more background, see also Andreas Fickers “Towards a New Digital Historicism? Doing History in the Age of Abundance”.

Select a story from *Inventing Europe* that relates to a topic of your interest and formulate a research question for further investigation. You might want to expand on one of the social contexts, for example, or explore similar processes in other countries. Scroll down to the ‘What’s like this?’ section – feel free to adjust the keywords to fit your question. Once you have what seems like a relevant set of results, evaluate them as sources toward answering your research question.

Choose the 3 most relevant results, and explore them in their original contexts.

Critique each of your three results as sources for your research.

- Is it clear who created the item?
- Are the date and place of the object specific enough to allow you to use the item in answering your research question?
- What is the relationship of the hosting organization (collector) to the source? Do they hold the original (physical) object? How reliable is the information they provide, and how likely are they to have more? Do they also have related content that would help you to answer your question?

Bearing your answers in mind, turn back to your results as a whole. What role could your results play in the data corpus for your research? What other sources would you need, if any? How would you go about completing your corpus from here? - Alec Badenoch, Utrecht University, the Netherlands.

## Approach

This assignment takes place online at *Inventing Europe* by making use of the “What’s like this?” section that can be found below each of the stories in f the tours.

1. Start with introducing the assignment within the framework of your course.
2. Let your students watch the video by Alec Badenoch and let them read the article by Andreas Fickers (see the below “Reading suggestions”).
3. Have your students explore *Inventing Europe* and let them select a tour that relates to a topic of their interest. Let your students formulate a research question for further investigation (see the above “Assignment suggestion” for research question ideas).
4. Let your students scroll down to the ‘What’s like this?’ section, where they can adjust the keywords to have results that fit their research question (see “Tips for use”, tip 3).
5. Once they have a relevant set of results, they need to evaluate the results and establish whether they can be used to answering their research question. After that, your students should pick their three most relevant results and evaluate these in their original context. The students perform source criticism by posing critical questions to the objects. (For evaluation in original context see “Tips for use”, tip 4. For sample source criticism questions see the above “Assignment suggestion”).
6. The students turn back to the “What’s like this?” results as a whole, and reflect on the usefulness of their findings for answering their research questions (see above “Assignment suggestion” for types of questions).
7. The students take action accordingly (see “Tips for use”, tip 6).

## Tips for use

1. The assignment can be done in class, for instance during a two-hour working group provided an internet connection is available, or at home, as part of homework.
2. If your course deals with a specific topic, such as “food” or “history of informatics”, you have the option to preselect tours from *Inventing Europe* that you want your students to work with during the assignment.
3. The “What’s like this?” section below the stories in the tours, show the keywords the *Inventing Europe* development team has used to create the related content results. The filters that have been used to draw the results from Europeana onto the *Inventing Europe* website can be found below, after having clicked on “Adapt search”. As soon as you have opened “Adapt search”, you can start adapting the original keywords to your own preferences.
4. The “What’s like this?” section contains the option to view the objects on different locations on the web. How do you do this? By clicking on an object, a pop-up opens. The pop-up shows a large image and a considerable part of its metadata. When you explore the metadata you will find that you can “View item at” *Europeana* and “View item at” [*name of the original data provider*]. Click the link if available, and explore the object on this different web location.

5. If you want to teach your students to work with a more extensive filter system in the area of digital cultural heritage that has no relation to *Inventing Europe*, you can direct your students to <http://www.europeana.eu/portal>. In this case, you will need to adapt the complete assignment as the “What’s like this?” section is then not used, and the link with *Inventing Europe* is loosened.
6. Two options for possible evaluation are a one-page essay or a short presentation in class.

### Fellow teacher tips

- This exercise can also be used in conjunction with more general units on source use and criticism. - Tip by Alec Badenoch, Utrecht University, Netherlands.
- This assignment can also be easily adapted to a classroom exercise, where students develop a research corpus in small groups and then discuss their findings with the whole class. - Tip by Alec Badenoch, Utrecht University, Netherlands.

### Reading suggestions

- Video: Lecture Alec Badenoch “How to Contextualize Museum Collections in an European and Transnational Context”.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZKQwbKFOAE>
- Take a look at: Andreas Fickers “Towards a New Digital Historicism? Doing History in The Age Of Abundance”, *View Journal of European Television History & Culture* 1, no. 1 (2012) <http://www.viewjournal.eu/index.php/view/article/view/jethc004/4>

Are you planning on using this suggestion and teach with *Inventing Europe*? Then we invite you to join our teaching community. You then keep up-to-date on activities, have ample opportunity to share your materials and experiences, and can easily be in touch with other teachers.

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