Transcribe Bentham is a new eLearning resource hosted by the Bentham Project in the Faculty of Laws, UCL, in collaboration with UCL’s Centre for Digital Humanities, UCL Library Services and the University of London Computer Centre. It is funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council.

The website (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/transcribe-bentham/) offers a number of new opportunities to academic staff to engage their students with the works of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and to develop skills in primary research and palaeography. Moreover, users are able to actively participate in a modern digitisation effort regardless of their current geographic location or initial digital acumen. The site itself provides educators and students with helpful guidance on integrating Transcribe Bentham in secondary education as well as examples of its current use by teachers.

The project, at its core, is a wiki-based effort to transcribe the voluminous papers left by Bentham. According to the researchers: “There are 60,000 papers written by Bentham in UCL’s library but several thousands of these papers, potentially of immense historical and philosophical importance, have yet to be transcribed and studied. By transcribing this material for the first time, you will be making Bentham’s thought accessible to the world at large, as well as helping UCL’s Bentham Project in its task of producing a new authoritative edition of the Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham.”

“By participating in Transcribe Bentham you will be helping to preserve national heritage. Your contributions will be stored and will eventually form part of a fully searchable online database. You will be helping to widen access to Bentham manuscripts and to encourage engagement with his works. You will also help to sustain the study of palaeography and manuscripts. Your contributions will form the basis of future scholarship including printed editions of the Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham. You may discover profound ideas which will help shape modern thinking.”

In terms of usability, the website provides accessible text and video tutorials, as well as regular updates from researchers. When you first enter the site, you are presented with the project blog, which brings you up-to-date with any recent changes to the site as well as updates on participant use. Venturing over to the left hand menu, About Us will provide you with a rounded view of the project, collection and opportunities for involvement. The top option, however, is Transcription Desk.
Here is where the participatory aspect of the project really takes off.

Having decided to take part in the project, either as an individual or as part of a module, users begin by creating an individual account. After creation, this account can be personalised to provide additional information about participants in much the same way as other Web 2.0 sites.
Once the individual has registered, they are directed to the **Getting Started** page, which offers a simple video tutorial of the transcribing process, alongside a text-based one.

Before delving directly into the transcription process, however, the reviewer suggests you view the additional guidance that researchers have provided on **palaeography**, especially Bentham’s individual handwriting, and the more advanced features of the transcription wiki.

### Neologisms
Bentham also coined many new words. Some of these, like ‘international’, we still use today, but many words are unusual and particular to Bentham. Try to represent the word as faithfully as possible. See a list of Bentham’s [neologisms](#).

### Flourishes
Letters were often represented with certain flourishes we do not use today. For example, Bentham usually wrote the letter ‘v’ with a swirl to the left:

![Flourish Example](image)

A double ‘v’, as in the word ‘necessary’, was represented as follows:

![Flourish Example](image)
Once comfortable with the basic functions of the transcription wiki and the peculiarities of Bentham’s handwriting, participants can get into the middle of action and start transcribing. First, visit the Manuscripts page under Transcription Desk. Then, choose a subject, date range or difficulty level. If working with undergraduates, the reviewer highly suggests easy, as these will certainly be challenging enough for most first-time transcribers.

Once you choose a subsection, pick a document and begin work! Don’t let your students be discouraged if the first few they choose already have part or full transcriptions. In fact, reading partially completed entries is a good way for them to familiarise themselves with the handwriting and transcription conventions of the project.

Once the transcription is completed (by one or more individuals) it can be submitted to the project team for final approval.
Despite some minor technical issues, your browser must have an up-to-date version of Flash or JavaScript to properly view the collection, the Transcribe Bentham project offers lecturers and tutors of early modern history an incredible opportunity to offer their students hands-on research experience as well as developing greater technical competencies.

Use of the project website could easily be integrated into modules on British or intellectual history, as well as skills-based modules on research, palaeography or digital humanities. As the project is available world-wide without subscription, it offers undergraduates a new and exciting way to connect with fellow students around the world, as well as seeing the value of their efforts in “real” historical research.

Suggestions for integration with undergraduate modules:

- Link to a relevant image / transcription of Bentham’s writings as preparation for a seminar discussion [Content]

- Project an image of one of Bentham’s writings to students within a seminar, allowing them to transcribe it as a group – remember to upload their transcription afterwards! [Palaeography skills]

- Hold a seminar within a computer-lab environment and have students work in small groups to transcribe select passages [Palaeography skills / Digital literacy]

- Having students use the Bentham archive to answer specific questions about a historical period or theme [Content / Palaeography skills / Digital literacy]

- Use Transcribe Bentham in a seminar environment to assist students in developing palaeography skills. Then, have students integrate manuscript material (within or beyond the Transcribe Bentham Project) into a written research assignment. [Palaeography skills / Research Skills]

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