

Selecting an Object for Research

While every object in the Museum has a story and can provide scholars with important information, not every object is best suited for an object assignment. Objects that make good candidates for student research have enough known information about them that give students the basic information about the piece as well as at least two to three different potential avenues for research.

Essential Information:

1. Time and Culture: the time period and culture that created the object is known - e.g., Roman Republic or Han Dynasty China - so that students can place the object within its cultural context
2. General Type: the object is a recognizable type - e.g., a lamp, a bowl, a brick, etc. - so that students can compare their example with others from the same cultural context

At least 2-3 of the following:

1. Material and Technique: the material and technique for creating the object is known - e.g., blown glass or knitted wool - so that students can look at how the object was made
2. Iconography: the decoration includes imagery or designs that can be researched - e.g., identifiable decorative patterns or figural representation - so that students can write about what messages the object is conveying through its design
3. Provenance or Provenience: information about its original context or how the object travelled from its original owner to the Museum - e.g., excavated in Iraq or purchased from 1893 Columbia Exposition - so that students can investigate an object's history
4. Inscriptions: text added by the maker or the owner - e.g., legends on coins or an owner's name - so that students can incorporate any information that was important enough to be added to an object
5. Use or wear marks: physical indicators on the object that tell how an object was used, made, or stored - e.g., burn marks on a cooking vessel, wear patterns on clothing, or damage from deposition - so that students can consider the ways in which objects show how they were used or disposed of
6. Artist or Patron: names of those who created the object or the name of the person on whose behalf the object was created - e.g., Tarporley Painter or cylinder seal of Puabi - so that students might be able to connect it with an individual artisan or purchaser
7. Prior Research: information published by scholars about the object - e.g., scientific testing or larger typological studies - so that students can incorporate information gained from long-term or larger-scale studies (too big for a class paper) into their research

Notes:

- The quantity and quality of information known about each of the objects in the collection can range widely. Some objects will have almost all of these options as avenues for investigation while others may have none of them.
- When assessing the potential routes for investigation for an object, please know that **all of the information known about the object is posted in its digital record on the online database, so if any of those fields are missing or blank, that information is not known** about the object.

Academic Engagement is happy to help students and instructors select objects that would be suitable for an object-based assignment or answer any questions about the process of selecting a good candidate.