

Word Count: 800 (both essays)**Prompt One: Please give a short statement that describes your academic interests, purpose, objectives and motivation in undertaking this postgraduate study. (max 3500 chars – approx. 500 words)**

Since I was a child, my favorite thing has always been a book. Not just for the stories and information they contain, although that is a large part of it. Mostly, I have been fascinated by the concept of book as object—a tangible item whose purpose is to relate intangible ideas and images. Bookbindings and jackets, different editions, the marginalia in a used book—all of these things become part of the individual book and its significance, and are worth study and consideration. Books and their equivalent forms—perfect bound, scrolled, stone tablets, papyrus—have long been an essential part of material culture and are also one of our most significant sources of information about the human historical past. Through both the literal object of the book, the words contained thereon, and its relationship to other books—forms of context, text and intertext—we are able to learn and hopefully manage layers of information with which we would otherwise have no familiarity.

Furthermore, blogs, webcomics, digital archives, e-readers, and even social media sites like tumblr and Facebook have revolutionized the concept of the book by changing how we share and transmit ideas and information, just as the Gutenberg printing press revolutionized the book all those years ago in the fifteenth century. Once again there has been an explosion both in who can send out information and who can receive it.

I am deeply interested in the preservation of the physical book, as I think it is an important part of human history (not to mention a satisfying sensory experience for the reader). However I am also very concerned with the digitization and organization of information for the modern world such that the book, in all of its forms, stays relevant and easy to access and use. Collections of books, archives, and information as stored in the world's servers, libraries and museums are essential resources that need to be properly organized and administered to be fully taken advantage of by their audiences. My purpose in applying to the University of Edinburgh's Material Culture and History of the Book is to gain the skills necessary to keep all forms of the book relevant and functional in an age when information can move more radically than ever before.

Additionally, I intend on pursuing a PhD in Library and Information Sciences upon completion of my master's and I feel that this program will make me uniquely suited to approach library science from a highly academic and interdisciplinary perspective.

Prompt Two: Relevant Knowledge/Training/Skills

As a folklore and mythology student, I have gained a robust understanding of material culture and how it relates to culture as a whole. I have also learned about the transmission of ideas, information, stories and pieces of lore among and between populations, which is an important component of book history. Folklore is also deeply concerned with questions of the literary vs. oral lore and the tendency for text to “canonize” folklore, and yet text can also question or invert canonized versions; along with this my studies in my focus field of religion and storytelling have been deeply concerned with intertextuality. One of my courses was specifically concerned with the Heian-period Japanese novel *The Tale of Genji* and questions of translation and representation in post-Heian picture scrolls and also modern translations and manga. In addition to broader cultural questions concerned with gender and spirituality both in historical Japan and now, we considered the relationships between different Genji texts and images.

I also have work experience that lends itself to the study of the book. After my freshman year of college I interned at the Chicago History Museum. Though I was in the visitor services department I was exposed to the preservation and archival departments of the museum and worked closely with the education department, which sparked my interest in archival collections and how museums present collection information to the public. After my sophomore year of college and into my junior year, I worked at Harvard’s rare books library, Houghton. At Houghton I prepared curated collections for archival storage. These collections were mostly comprised of the personal papers of noteworthy individuals, categorized into alphabetical folders. This experience made me very process-oriented and helped me to understand how collections come together on a holistic basis.

Finally, in my current capacity as an education mentor in Allston, a suburb of Boston, I have learned the value of book history and material culture from an educational perspective. As a mentor who designs curriculum for individual students and small groups, I have learned to highly value clearly organized and useful educational resources such as websites, iPad apps, and books as tools for learning. By managing and organizing collections in a way that makes sense we are making information accessible to those who need it.