

Call for Papers: Learning by the Book: Manuals and Handbooks in the History of Knowledge, Conference, Princeton University, 7–10 June 2018

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Often overlooked, handbooks, protocols, and manuals are key tools in the making, preserving, and sharing of knowledge. Across editorial offices, artisanal workshops, religious schools, culinary institutes, and biomedical laboratories, instructional and reference texts codify the knowledge of a working community, with an eye to communicating what a new practitioner needs to know. This conference will address how handbooks, protocols, manuals, catalogues and related instructional or reference media have contributed to the standardization, codification, transmission, and revision of knowledge in diverse fields. How are practices and protocols written down, distributed or preserved, and how are objects or processes named, registered or classified? What kind of credit accompanies the development or compilation of methods or reference literature? When and why do certain books become commercially successful or canonical, and others obsolete? How does their circulation relate to the commodification of required materials, or to more informal forms of exchange? Possible fields and sites of scrutiny will range from the alchemical workshop to the 20th century laboratory, or from the maintenance of technologies to medical diagnosis, language acquisition, government regulation, natural history writing or museum inventories, but is by no means restricted to these examples.

We invite proposals from the history of science and knowledge broadly construed as well as from science and technology studies, the history of arts and crafts, the history of the book and media or related fields. Contributions will cover a wide geographical and temporal range – from antiquity to the 20th century – in order to sound out, put simply, how knowledge relates to texts, and writing, reading and learning to doing. To broaden the scope of an existing core group of scholars, we are particularly interested in case studies from humanities, technologies, applied sciences or manufacture and industry, as well as in those with a scope reaching beyond North America and Europe. Abstracts of max. 400 words should be sent to creager@princeton.edu and mathias.grote@hu-berlin.de by July 15th, 2017. We expect to be able to cover transportation and accommodation costs of conference participants.

