

## Describing a manuscript

1. **Shelfmark** and Repository: so you can find it again when you need it
2. **Binding**: describe front and back covers, flap, inside covers, pastedowns, spine, endbands, anything about the other edges (titles, gilding); include all decoration and colors of binding elements
3. **Support** (what it is written on): Look for and describe: watermarks, laid/chain lines, texture, burnishing, decorative elements (inset leaves, gold sprinkling, tints). Is all the paper the same? If parchment, describe the texture, color, quality. Also note the condition/damage that you see.
4. **Extent**: Number of leaves + flyleaves (are the flyleaves newer additions)
5. **Measurements**:
  - a. of page,
  - b. of written area on page,
  - c. of bound size
6. **Collation/Foliation**: If possible, describe the collation; if not, then list any foliation schemes you see and whether they seem to be contemporaneous or modern additions and what numbering system they are in; if the foliation is inconsistent or wrong, then note how; note whether there are catchwords; collation marks.
7. **Layout**: How many lines per page; how are they distributed (long lines, two columns, four, angled lines in the margins). Is the page ruled (in dry point, in lead, with a *mistarrah*, are there border rules)
8. **Script**: Identify script and color, pointing, vocalization, etc.; if the script seems to be a variation on a standard script then describe it first with the standard word and then ‘with elements of’
9. **Decoration**: Include all illuminations, illustrations, diagrams, tables, charts you see with their folio numbers; be as specific *as you need to be* for your purposes.
  - a. consider listing the decorative elements by function
10. **Author**: if a name appears in the work, record it as it appears—supply also the standardized name and dates, if you know.
11. **Title as it appears** in the work; list also any other titles by which the work is known. If no title appears, supply a descriptive title (i.e. [Collection of Persian poetry]; [Commentary on...])
12. **Origin**:
  - a. Scribe,
  - b. Place of copy,
  - c. Date of copy.
    - i. If none of this information appears in the ms, you can make guesses based on the paper (sometimes); events reported in the book (sometimes); hand (sometimes); style of illustrations or writing (sometimes); or leave it blank until you know more.
13. **Provenance information**:
  - a. Immediate acquisition (i.e. where did the repository get this copy?)
  - b. Previous owners (Stamps, signatures, sale records, catalog clippings, notations—these will often be difficult to read and to track down)
14. **Manuscript Notes**:
  - a. Any other notes you see—transcribe/describe as completely as possible with folio numbers; may include: reading notes, copying notes, collation notes, waqf notes, birth/death notes, historical notes, notes of sale or borrowing. A way to categorize the notes:
    - i. Legal notes (regarding the item as a material object)
    - ii. Textual notes (notes that relate to the text)

Refer also to Gacek’s Appendix V from *Arabic Manuscripts* for a more detailed description prompt.