The digital Helen Keller Archive

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

What is the Helen Keller Archive?

The Helen Keller Archive at the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) is the world's largest repository of materials about and by Helen Keller. Materials include correspondence, speeches, press clippings, scrapbooks, photographs, photograph albums, architectural drawings, audio recordings, audio-visual materials and artifacts.

Do I have to make an account to use the archive?

No, you are welcome to search or browse the archive without creating an account or logging in. However, creating an account and logging in will enable you to review your recent searches and save archive objects to a private list.

Technical Requirements

In general, you only need a common web browser like Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer, Safari, Opera or Microsoft Edge to search and browse this collection. To view or print PDFs, you will also need a PDF viewer like Adobe Reader.

Where do I go for help with the lessons provided?

If you have questions about the lesson plans provided by the archive, or need assistance learning how to use - or teaching how to use - the Helen Keller Archive, contact Helen Selsdon at hselsdon@afb.net.

How do I begin my research?

Start by using the "Browse" function to understand what the collection contains. Here are listed the types of materials in the collection e.g. correspondence, photographs etc., as well as the box and folder list for the collection. The Browse function also includes a comprehensive list of the subjects in the digital archive, providing a rapid and easy way of discovering the collection's scope and content.

AFB American Foundation®
for the Blind

Expanding possibilities for people with vision loss

For archivists and historians, please know that the collection adheres to best archival practices for arrangement and description of historical collections. A traditional hierarchical structure for series and subseries underpins both the physical archive and intellectual arrangement of the collection.

This collection contains 58,724 items comprising 184,700 images.

How do I use Simple Search?

You can perform a Simple Search by typing keywords in the search box and clicking "Search". The search engine will return results that include all of your search terms.

You can also search using a string of words. They do not require quotation marks unless you wish to search for an exact phrase. For instance: searching for blue dress (no quotation marks) will return any items that include the word "blue" and "dress." By contrast, if you search on "blue dress" (using quotation marks) the results page will only show you items that include that exact phrase.

You can then refine your results using the filters in the left column. For instance, if you wish to find materials about a blue dress in the 1950s, you can select "Refine search by" from the left hand column and choose "Decade: 1950 – 1959."

How do I use Advanced search?

The "Advanced" search tab allows you to limit your search results by a specific date range. You can input the day/month/year and retrieve results.

How do I make a List?

To create Lists, you need to create a user account with the archive. Log in and perform a search. From your search results, click "Add to private list".

Next, select "Create a new list" and name your list. Or, if you are adding to an existing list, click "Select an existing list" and add your selection to this list.

You can also attach a note to your private list. A note allows you to save more information about the item saved to your list.

Click "Return to previous page" to return to your search results.

How do I see my searches?

To view your recent search results, login to your account on the Helen Keller Archive in by clicking "Login" in the upper right corner of the screen.

Next, click the "My Account" button in the upper right corner (to the left of the Login button). Click "Recent Activity".

This page displays your Recently Viewed Items and all Recent Searches. You can click on the search links to revisit your searches.

Why can't I just use Google?

The Google search engine is a great way to find a lot of information from a number of different sources quickly. For research and focused searching on specific topics - like Helen Keller - archive and special topic websites are built to locate information and resources specific to what you are looking for. Digital libraries and archives are built with the goal of performing deep research and information gathering. They are much better resources for learning how to perform research, how to cite and evaluate information, and are curated by professionals who are skilled in making sure that the information provided on the site is valid.

Transcription

Why is transcription necessary?
People who are blind or visually impaired rely on screen readers to decipher electronic text and make it readable through speech or braille.

The program responsible for generating automated text is called "Optical Character Recognition "OCR". OCR is a process by which software reads a page image and translates it into a text file by recognizing the shapes of the letters. OCR software breaks the image down into recognized letters, numbers, and punctuation marks. Letters become words, words become paragraphs, and in the end the printed page has been translated into machine-readable text that you can read, edit, save, and have voiced by a screen reader or other device.

OCR allows you to search large quantities of full-text data, but it is never 100% accurate. Many items in the Helen Keller Archive are old, faded, handwritten, or contain elaborate fonts–in these cases OCR inevitably contains errors.

Most items in the Helen Keller Archive have been processed using OCR to ensure that screen readers can make full use of the archive. We are also working with volunteers in an ongoing effort to correct OCR errors.

Who is transcribing the contents of each digital item?
AFB is delighted to have volunteers working diligently to manually transcribe each handwritten document that is uploaded, and correct any mistakes that have occurred during OCR of typewritten documents, by comparing the output to the original image. Do you wish to be a volunteer transcriber for this groundbreaking project? If you do, please contact Helen Selsdon at hselsdon@afb.net to join the "Captains of Transcription"!

Tagging

"Tagging" allows administrators to add a new subject as an additional way of browsing the Helen Keller collection. For example, one could create a "National History Day 2017" tag for materials that relate to that year's theme, "Taking a Stand." This option allows administrators to create interesting collections that may not correspond easily to Library of Congress subjects.

Tags are available to the public, but only approved administrators may create them. This exciting feature gives visitors another way to explore primary sources.