REMIND YOURSELF:

- What draws you to this object? Be specific!
- What ‘moments’ in or specific aspects of its life history most intrigue you, and why?
- What general and specific questions do you about the object?
- What sources do you know about that would be helpful in exploring the above?

DIGGING IN: ASSESSING YOUR PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

Contextual sources:

- What general background/historical information do you need to understand where your object came from (origins, maker) and its intended function(s)?
- What additional knowledge would help you to situate your object in a given time and place—e.g., to understand its use/modes of consumption and/or its social significance?
- Moving beyond general informational sources: what kinds of primary sources would give you insight into the way the object has been experienced, perceived, represented, etc. at different stages of its life? [For ideas: see “Objects” > “Preliminary Research” in the online research guide whose URL appears below.]

Scholarly + other ‘expert’ perspectives:

- What types of ‘expert’ or scholarly perspectives do you think would be useful?
- What ‘keywords’ / concepts come to mind as you think about your object? Into which categories would you place it? (Collectible? Heirloom? Celebrity object? Tool?) Whose expert views would illuminate the object’s relationship to that key word/concept/category?
- Which scholarly sources (articles or books) have you found that will give you critical perspectives that might be useful as you develop your own analysis of the object?

Owners + ‘personal’ perspectives:

- Which of the object’s owners—individual or group or institutional—interest you most?
- ‘Zooming in’: how might you access these perspectives—in an effort to understand, for example, the appeal/attachment to/valuation of your object at a given time?
  - These could come in the form of existing stories/accounts (say, an historical interview with the maker, or a collector or curator). But where else might you find these? Who are the people who have been most invested in your object, and how might you access their views?
  - OR, you could seek out new stories / perspectives (e.g. conduct an interview).
- What are some other ways of ‘knowing’ this object, gaining a perspective beyond your own, that don’t involve talking to actual owners?
  - For ideas: see “Preliminary Research” in the “Objects!” in the research guide.

Cultural perspectives / representations:

- What are some of the ‘cultural’ dimensions of the object you have identified? In other words, to which aspects of culture—trends, ideas, narratives, rituals, practices, etc.—does the object ‘belong’?
- What sources will allow you to explore these dimensions more fully?
- What are some of the places where your object is represented in the cultural world?
When you’re reading your sources:

- **Step one** is to build your bibliography.
  - create a citation for each source which includes author/date of publication/source, etc.
  - document the URL / date of access so you can find your way back if need be.

- **Take notes** about the main arguments/ideas presented in the source, and especially its relevance to your project. Don’t just write down quotes you like; process what the source is saying, how it’s situated in a given time and place. Whose point of view does this source represent? What contextual factors shaped the source? Who is its intended audience?

- **Review and update your list of research questions** as you gain new knowledge from your sources. Consider making lists of your sources that help you to think about how each grouping relates to specific questions.

- **Synthesize**: how do the sources’ arguments/ideas talk to one another? What general trends can you identify? **Which additional sources** would help you deepen your knowledge in key areas, or more confidently generalize about the contexts in which the object was given meaning?

**DON’T FORGET!**

You can consult Heidi Kolk ([hkolk@wustl.edu](mailto:hkolk@wustl.edu)) or Jenny Akins ([jakins@wustl.edu](mailto:jakins@wustl.edu)) if you are struggling to find sources using the online research guide for the Cultural Biography assignment ([https://libguides.wustl.edu/culturalobject](https://libguides.wustl.edu/culturalobject)).

And: there are a couple sample projects on the research guide under **CB Assignment + Other Documents** that will give you ideas about how to draw effectively on sources to develop original readings of your object.