A recipe for teaching undergraduates how to transcribe early modern handwriting

Take three researchers from the Departments of English and History at the University of York.

Add recipe books used for making food and medicine, handwritten in the 17th century and digitised for public use by the Wellcome Collection and Royal College of Physicians.

Stir in generous support from CREMS at York and the international Early Modern Recipes Online Collective.

Use these ingredients to make a glossary of common terms found in recipe books, and a video explaining their format and uses, to ensure accessibility for newcomers to early modern manuscripts.

This recipe has been tried and tested with success. At a Zoom event, undergraduate students at York used our resources to start transcribing recipes from 1680, via free software FromThePage.

NB: Recipes are for sharing, and our resources are designed to be reused! The collaborative worksheets we used in our event allow transcribers to add new terms as they learn. We’re also considering applying for a Creative Commons Licence to encourage more institutions globally to host similar events. We’ll be re-running our Zoom session for a public audience of all ages at the Centre for Lifelong Learning in York later this year!