When preparing for a research trip to the Briscoe Center for American History, the best place to start is on our website with our Research page.
We’ve created some subject guides to help you find archival collections related to your research topic.
Here’s the subject guide that lists Briscoe Center collections related to foreign policy.
Each collection title is hyperlinked to an online finding aid. Let’s take a look at a typical finding aid.
The abstract is a very brief description of the collection – we’ve usually used the abstract in the subject guide to give you a rough idea of what’s in the collection.
The extent tells you the size of collection. Archival institutions measure collections in linear feet (the amount of shelf space that a collection takes). In this case, the Walter Cronkite Papers take up 294 feet of shelf space.
The Biographical Note or Historical Sketch tells you about the person or group that created the records in the archival collection – in this case, Walter Cronkite. This biographical note describes who he was, what he accomplished, and people and institutions he was associated with. It puts Walter Cronkite and his papers into a historical context so you know whether the collection contains material helpful to your research.

Walter Leland Cronkite Jr. (1916-2009) was born to Walter Leland Cronkite and Helena Fritsche in St. Joseph, Missouri. When Cronkite was ten years old, his family moved to Houston, where his father, a dentist, took a teaching position at a dental college and went into dental practice there. As a student at San Jacinto High School in Houston, Cronkite came under the strong influence of Fred Birney, a journalism teacher, who whetted Cronkite’s early love for reporting. The budding journalist garnered a job with the Houston Post, where, as he recalled in his autobiography, A Reporter’s Life, the staff, perhaps due to their “benevolence,” allowed him to serve as a cub reporter rather than merely as a copy boy. He delighted in the opportunity to cover “luncheon clubs and civic affairs,” and was happy to be rewarded by occasionally seeing his work in print.
The Scope and Contents section describes the records themselves – the types of records, the time period that the documents cover (1934-2014) and the subjects that they pertain to (day-to-day functioning, individual projects, etc.).
The Restrictions Section can be crucial when planning a research trip to the Briscoe Center. Here's why: “Portions of the collection are restricted” means that some parts of the collection are not open for research for a certain period of time. The finding aid shows which materials are unavailable with the word “Restricted” in front of those boxes or files. The phrase “stored remotely” means that this collection is not housed on the premises of the Briscoe Center's Research and Collection Division in Sid Richardson Hall on the U. T. Austin campus. It is stored in a facility not accessible by the public and must be delivered to the Briscoe Center.
Some online finding aids do not show the box numbers and contents, but rather instruct users to contact the Briscoe Center for more information. To get more information and a full length version of a finding aid, contact the reference staff via our online form.
Our reference staff will respond to requests in one to two business days. With the full finding aid for the Walter Cronkite Papers, you can select the materials you want to use.
Dig in!