

# UC Berkeley

## Then Dig

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The Seventy Percent Solution

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## The Seventy Percent Solution

*Seventy percent of all archaeology is done in the library. Research. Reading.*

*– Indiana Jones in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*

I have a confession to make. I don't dig as much as I used to. The particular whims of my professional path have seen to that. As my duties have changed, the types of tools necessary to fulfill those tasks have also changed. I can think back to the tools and toys of my personal fieldwork era and wax all nostalgic about the various shovels and trowels that I've used, but I

must admit that the tool that excites me the most is the one that I still use the most –my privately-owned professional library.

If, at the Principal Investigator level, our roles have become “not to dig but to think great thoughts,” then our most important tool must be that which provides us the necessary background information to think those thoughts. An oracle of sorts, I consult my library to help inform my attempts to plan for an excavation, address issues that arise during that investigation, and interpret what we’ve found.

Consulting this library, and indeed any professional library, is an archaeology in itself. I need to dig in the right places to find the necessary data. What it shows me is the historical progression of ideas, the changing body of data, and the perceptions and interpretations associated with them. I am by necessity forced to discern the subtle changes in the seriation of understanding as types and definitions shift, are split, reunited, and remade into something wholly new or again into something very old.

My library, unlike any other professional library, is also an archaeology of me. The volumes were selected by me for myriad reasons. Some are remnants of classes I took in school. Some were gifts from friends who were leaving archaeology and had no need of their books. Still others were purchased for a specific end, focusing on a project-specific topic.

There are those books that I purchased on the off-chance that they could prove helpful with some unseen future project. My favorites were obtained for the best reason of all. These are the ones that touch on topics that interest me. Ironically, these are the books that are rarely completely read. Personal interest must take a backseat to professional need, it seems.

I must confess, I love books. The look, feel, and smell of a physical library is something incomparable to digital files, though I have plenty of the latter as well. Each book is a treasure in its own right and finding the book I want, or even need, can be a challenge. Even with the Internet, tracking down a specific volume can take a large amount of searching. For certain long out of print volumes, that searching requires a large amount of patience. Setting up notifications



Each one of these has two stories, the one it tells and the one I can tell about it.

on bookselling websites. Tracking down the original publisher. Searching through stacks of books in the book room at various conferences that I attend. Not all of these attempts have been successful; I still have a list of books that I want. Some finds were successful years after I needed them.

I'm starting to get more selective about additions these days, though. I've already collected, and hopefully read, the absolute must-haves of archaeological literature for my needs and interests. Some of what remains on my want list are a little less urgent. I'm also beginning to come to grips with the idea that I can't possibly read everything that I want, let alone what I already own. Still, as new projects come my way and new interests are developed, my library will expand in directions I probably can't predict. However my library changes in the future, whether I cull or add works to it, it will continue to reflect my interests and career. It will continue to be my favorite tool.

