# RESEARCH ACTIVITY: CHECKING YOUR MANUSCRIPT FOR ANACHRONISMS

An anachronism is a chronological inconsistency: an entity, idea or expression that exists outside of the time in which it belongs. Often, a carelessly deployed idiom can derail an otherwise immersive read. Building up historical precision in smaller details does more than just maintain historical authenticity, it can often help support a writer's overarching story, by inspiring a new theme or plot point rooted in a forgotten aspect of the past.

From ahistorical hairstyles to curiously present-day parlance, anachronisms have the power to "jar" the reader and shake their suspension of disbelief. You can use anachronisms intentionally to create specific effects (you might be writing a story about time travel!). It's the unintentional ones that you want to avoid.

In storytelling, "suspension of disbelief" is the act of willingly accepting that which one knows to be imagined. It is an essential step on the path to enjoying any work of fiction.

As a genre, historical fiction must balance exactitude with clarity. Readers are liable to disengage if they feel as though you have been careless with historical facts or if they struggle to comprehend the world your characters inhabit.



Girl with a Pearl Earring and a Silver Camera. Digital mashup after Johannes Vermeer, by Mitchell Grafton. c. 2012.

**TIP:** *An anachronism could be a turn of phrase, a custom, a material, a piece of technology, a cultural debate, or a philosophical idea. When it comes to checking historical facts, leave no stone unturned.*

**TIP:** *Sometimes, writers deliberately use anachronisms to help their audience engage more readily with a historical period. While intentional anachronisms can create powerful textual effects too many can prevent readers from immersing themselves in your work.*

## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Scan through your manuscript so far, and make a note of every phrase, descriptor or figure of speech that might be anachronistic. **CLiC** is particularly useful when it comes to detecting behavioural cultural, or linguistic anachronisms.
2. Armed with your potential anachronisms, you can employ the **CLiC Web App** as a cross-referencing tool by going to clic.bham.ac.uk.
3. Click '*concordance*', and select your texts from the drop-down menu under '*search the corpora*' (according to the time period in which your novel takes place).

4. Select *'all text'* under the subsets option. If your anachronism is likely to occur in dialogue, you can select *'quotes'*. All texts in CLiC have been marked up so that it is possible to focus searches on the direct speech of the fictional characters, we refer to such text as *'quotes'*.
5. Type your potential anachronism under *'search for terms'* and hit enter. An asterisk can be used as a wildcard – so *mum\** would also find *mums,* and *best friend\** would also find *best friends*. Make sure you have *'whole phrase'* selected.

What anachronisms did you detect in your manuscript? Alternately, what phrases or expressions — perhaps surprisingly — proved entirely in keeping with your chosen time period?

You can note down your findings in the boxes below, and, if you'd like, post them on Twitter under the hashtag **#CLiCCreative**, or by tagging us **@CLiC_fiction.**

**POTENTIAL ANACHRONISM**

**CLIC RESEARCH FINDINGS**