Advice for Museums with Archival Collections

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http://www.hsp.org/hcipsar
Find the whole presentation here:
hsp.org/hcipsar/resources
Overview

1. Key archival concepts
2. Preservation
3. Description (cataloging)
4. Further resources and community
Key Archival Concepts

1. Collections
2. Provenance and Original Order
3. Hierarchical Arrangement and Description

Image rights: African American Museum in Philadelphia, Anna Russell Jones papers
Archivists think about the materials they manage primarily in terms of *collections* rather than individual items. Understanding archival holdings in larger groupings makes it easier to summarize the entirety of the materials, and also helps maintain the connections between interrelated items.
The principle of provenance dictates that documents created by different entities should be kept in distinct collections according to creator. Do not divide or disperse collections based on other factors, do not add materials from other creators into collections, and do not co-mingle materials from various creators. A corollary to the principle of provenance is that of original order, which dictates that, to the extent possible, materials be kept in the order in which their creator kept them. However, the archivist’s principal duty is to render archives accessible and useable. In cases where there is no discernible original order, or if the original order is impractical, it is necessary to impose an order on materials in order to facilitate their use. Archivists must use their judgment in determining when and how to impose an order on a collection.
If a collection is complex, archivists identify logical groupings of materials within the whole: series, subseries, and files into which individual items are organized. Archival description should summarize the entire body of a collection, and it may also (but need not) exist at lower levels in the organizational hierarchy. This is called multilevel description. Descriptions given at higher levels are assumed to be valid at lower levels unless otherwise specified. For example, unless the date range of a series is indicated, it is assumed that the date range of that series is the same as the range for the whole collection.
How to Parse Series

Follow the existing organizational scheme if it makes sense

- Document type
  - Series: Correspondence, Scrapbooks, Financial records
- Topic or phase
  - Personal papers series: Education, Military, Career
  - Business records series: Miller Co., Miller & Sons, Ark & Miller
- Department or person
  - Business records series: CEO, Sales department, Finance office
  - Family papers series: Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa
Preservation

1. Environment
2. Supplies
Keep temperature and relative humidity stable!

Temperature: 65-70°F. Humidity: 30-50%.

All day, every day. Avoid extreme fluctuations and UV light.

Mention tracking environment with data loggers and how showing temp and RH inconsistencies can help you get funding.
Supplies

• Use archival grade, acid-free folders and boxes from an established supplier

Document boxes
(aka Hollinger boxes, flip-top boxes)

• Large papers should be stored flat, not folded or rolled
• Papers should be properly supported, neither bulging nor slumping. Use spacers as needed.

Oversized materials can be stored in acid-free oversized boxes and folders or in oversized folders placed into flat files. Archival suppliers include Gaylord, Hollinger Metal Edge, and Light Impressions. Tip: Check Craigslist for architecture firms that are getting rid of flat files and restaurant supply stores for lower-priced metal shelving.
Top Recommendations to Repositories

- Use *foil-backed* labels for labeling boxes
- Remove rubber bands, paper clips from collections
- Store boxes at least 6” off floor
- Choose metal shelving – avoid wood
- Oversize rolled items – roll around OUTSIDE of tube

Description (Cataloging)

1. Reviewing key concepts
2. Metadata
3. Computer programs
4. HCI-PSAR finding aid worksheets

Image rights: Fireman's Hall Museum
Reviewing Key Concepts

1. Collections are the organizing units of archives
2. Collections should be provenance-based
3. Organize and describe materials within each collection according to a hierarchy
Reviewing Key Concepts

1. Collections are the organizing units of archives
2. Collections should be provenance-based
3. Organize and describe materials within each collection according to a hierarchy

⇒ When cataloging, start by creating a record for each COLLECTION as a whole!
⇒ Adding lower-level description is optional depending on the complexity and importance of the collection
Metadata is “data about data”

It just means the descriptions of your collections / documents / objects

(Title? Creator? Date? etc.)
Using **standardized and structured** metadata is a must if you want to ensure your materials are **findable** by researchers and that your descriptions are **shareable** with other computer systems.

Two of Homer’s photographs, 1990s

vs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Creator</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photograph of Bart</td>
<td>Simpson, Homer</td>
<td>1995 August 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph of Lisa</td>
<td>Simpson, Homer</td>
<td>circa 1997</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Metadata Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metadata Standards</th>
<th>Used to</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Standards</td>
<td>Determine kinds of information you use in the description</td>
<td>Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value Standards</td>
<td>Determine terms used to name people and subjects represented</td>
<td>Library of Congress Subject Headings and Name Authority Files (LCSH, NAF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format Standards</td>
<td>Determine how the metadata should be structured/encoded</td>
<td>Dublin Core Metadata Initiative (DCMI), Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Content Standards: Important for Collection Description


- Collection number/ID
- Name of repository
- Title of collection
- Dates of collection
- Extent (size) of collection
- Name of creator
- Scope and contents note (What types of material are included in the collection? What topics are covered?)
- Conditions governing access
- Language of materials
Content Standards: Recommended for Collection Description


- Source of acquisition
- Biographical/historical note
- Subjects ("access points" or keywords and names)
- Shelf location
- Related archival materials
- Other finding aids
- Cataloger
Value Standards

- Robert G. Chennell's nomenclature – lexicon of object names common in museum cataloging
- Library of Congress – Subject Headings and Name Authority File, http://id.loc.gov
Format Standards

Common format standards make it possible to share records in different computer catalogs and use advanced search capabilities (like faceted searching and filters)

- Librarians use MARC (MAchine Readable Cataloging)
- Archivists use EAD (Encoded Archival Description), an XML schema
- PastPerfect exports Dublin Core in XML

If your metadata is structured, i.e. in a spreadsheet, you can plug the same metadata into different formats depending on your need
Common Computer Programs

- Word Processor (Microsoft Word)
- PastPerfect
- Archivists’ Toolkit and ArchivesSpace
# What Program to Use?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Ease of Use</th>
<th>Hierarchical description</th>
<th>Structured format</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tr>
<td>Word processor</td>
<td>Very easy</td>
<td>Unlimited</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PastPerfect</td>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>+1 level: easy</td>
<td>Yes, but not</td>
<td>$870</td>
<td>Integrated catalog and other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2+ levels: hard</td>
<td>archival</td>
<td></td>
<td>features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archivists’ Toolkit &amp; Archives Space</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Unlimited</td>
<td>Yes, standard</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Integrated catalog only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>archival format</td>
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<td>Free</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>+1 level (container list): easy 2+ levels (linked records): hard</td>
<td>Yes, but not archival</td>
<td>$870</td>
<td>Integrated archives, photo, object catalogs; volunteer, donor database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archivists’ Toolkit &amp; Archives Space</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
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# What Program to Use? (AT/AT)

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<td>Integrated catalog and other features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archivists Toolkit &amp; Archives Space</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Unlimited</td>
<td>Yes, standard archival format (EAD)</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Integrated archives catalog, accessions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HCI-PSAR Finding Aid Worksheets

http://hsp.org/hcipsar/resources:
• Word version (DOC)
• Excel version (XLS)
**Worksheet: Creating a Basic Finding Aid for an Archival Collection**

- **Repository:**
- **Collection title:**
- **Creator:** Type: Source:
- **Dates:**
- **Collection No.:**
- **Extent:** Linear feet or Cubic feet
  - Note:
- **Provenance:**
- **Access:** Contact the repository for information about accessing this collection.

**Related archival collections:**

- **Languages:** English
- **Biographical / Historical Background:**

**Bibliography:**

**Scope and Content note:**

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**Microsoft Word (DOC) worksheet**

- ✔ Inventory list option
- ✗ EAD output
Worksheet: Creating a Basic Finding Aid for an Archival Collection

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Dates</th>
<th>Provenance</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Creator</td>
<td></td>
<td>Type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dates</td>
<td></td>
<td>Data expression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection No.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Linear feet</td>
<td>Note</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent</td>
<td></td>
<td>or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provenance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Linear feet</td>
<td>Note</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related collections</td>
<td></td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Note</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Languages: English

Biographical / Historical Background:

Inventory list option

EAD output

Page 1
Further Resources and Community
Highlighted Resources

- American Association for State & Local History online webinar, “Basics of Archives”: resource.aaslh.org/view/basics-of-archives/
  - Complete the 15-20 hour course at your own pace over 4 weeks
- Connecting to Collections Care online community: connectingtocollections.org/
  - Free resources for cultural institutions provided by the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services.
- Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (ccaha.org) and Northeast Document Conservation Center (nedcc.org)
  - Resources for collections care, preservation, disaster planning, and other topics
Highlighted Resources

- Books to consider purchasing:
  - Zamon, Christina. *The Lone Arranger: Succeeding in a Small Repository*.
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