

GLOSSARY OF ARCHIVAL TERMS

Accession

Noun: Materials physically and legally transferred to a repository as a unit at a single time.

Verb: To take legal and physical custody of a group of records or other materials and to formally document their receipt. Also refers to the process of documenting the transfer of records or materials in a register, database, or other log.

Acquisition

A body of materials from the same donor taken into archival custody at the same time. Does not necessarily imply legal transfer.

Accession number

A unique identifier (can be numerical or alphanumeric) given to a collection of materials in order to separate it from other collections and to track the collection.

Administrative Value

The usefulness of records/archives for the conduct of current and/or future administrative business.

Appraisal

The process of determining if materials have sufficient value to be accessioned into a repository. This does not refer to placing a monetary value on the materials.

Archival

A commercial term used to describe materials suitable for long-term collections storage but has such a broad definition that the word has become nearly meaningless. The Society of American Archivists states that one should, "avoid the term 'archival' and use specific requirements such as 'lignin free' or 'acid free with a three percent calcium carbonate reserve'."

Archives

- (1) An institution responsible for the appraisal, acquisition, preservation, and access to archival documents.
- (2) A building or part of a building in which archival materials are preserved and made available for use.
- (3) Materials created or received by a person, family, or organization, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of their informational value or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator.

Arrangement

The process of organizing materials with respect to their provenance and original order, to protect their context and to achieve physical or intellectual control over the materials.

Artificial Collection

A collection of materials with unrelated provenance assembled and organized to facilitate its management or use. The materials frequently are in the same format or related to the same topic. Sometimes called "assembled collections."

Collection

- (1) A group of materials with some unifying characteristic, usually a shared history of creation and ownership.
- (2) **Collections** (*pl.*): The holdings of a repository.

Creator

The individual, group, or organization that is responsible for something's production, accumulation, or formation.

Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)

A standard for creating access tools for all forms of archival materials, including their archival creators and the forms of creator names.

Deaccession

A formal act which allows an institution to remove permanently from its holdings items deemed no longer to be of archival value, or within the repository's collection policy or responsibilities. Sometimes called "permanent withdrawal."

Description

The process of compiling and organizing information into a format (catalog record, finding aid) that allows users to locate and retrieve specific documents.

Encoded Archival Description (EAD)

A standard used to mark up (encode) finding aids that reflects the hierarchical structure of archival collections and that provides a structure for describing the whole of a collection, as well as its components. A nonproprietary document type definition (DTD), EAD is compatible with both Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML) and extensible markup language (XML).

Evidential Value (Primary Value)

The quality of records that provides information about the origins, functions, and activities of their creator.

File Unit

A group of documents related by use or topic, typically housed in a folder (or a group of folders for a large file).

Finding Aid

Any access tool (paper-based or electronic) that consolidates information about a collection in one cohesive format that allows for the easy retrieval and use of materials within a collection. A finding aid can refer to a guide, inventory, indexes, etc.

Format

The document type or form, such as the document's size and shape or the configuration of the media and support.

Holdings

The whole of a repository's collections.

Informational Value (Secondary Value)

The usefulness or significance of materials, based on their content, for reference and research or the value of the record to others than the creator. This value is derived from the information they contain on persons, places, subjects, etc., as distinct from their evidential value. Also referred to as "reference value" and "research value."

Intrinsic Value

The inherent worth of a document based upon factors such as age, content, usage, ownership, circumstances of creation, signature, or attached seals. Also described as "artifactual value."

Intellectual Control

The mastery or command established over the informational, evidential, and contextual content of archival and manuscript collections resulting from discovering and describing their provenance and original order and from the processes of arrangement and description.

The creation of tools such as catalogs, finding aids, or other guides that enable researchers to locate particular materials.

Inventory

(1) A guide to an archival or manuscript collection that often includes only a list of the series in the collection. Much more concise than a complete finding aid.

(2) A physical count of a collection conducted for accountability purposes.

Item

An individual document or manuscript. A thing that can be distinguished from a group and that is complete in itself. An item may consist of several pieces but is treated as a whole. The smallest archival unit.

Manuscript

(1) A handwritten document.

(2) An unpublished document.

(3) An author's draft of a book, article, or other work submitted for publication.

More Product, Less Process (MPLP)

The viewpoint, argued by Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner in the article *More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing*, that the traditional archival process is too slow. MPLP advocates for the use of minimal processing in order to reduce backlogs and provide access to archival collections as quickly as possible.

Original Order

The archival principle asserting the importance of retaining the order and arrangement of materials in the collection as they were originally organized, in order to preserve evidence about how they were created.

Personal Papers

The private documents of an individual or family (versus "records").

Processing

The arrangement, description, and housing of archival materials for storage and use by patrons.

Provenance (also Respect des fonds)

The person(s), family(ies), or corporate body(ies) that created and/or accumulated and used records in the conduct of personal or business life.

Records

Items generated as the result of routine activities or a transactions, especially those of an organization (versus “papers” or “personal papers”).

Record Group

A body of organizationally related materials based on provenance. Can include sub-groups.

Records Management

The systematic and administrative control of records throughout their life cycle to ensure efficiency and economy in their creation, use, handling, control, maintenance, and disposition.

Repository

Any type of organization that holds documents, including business, institutional, and government archives, manuscript collections, libraries, museums, and historical societies, and in any form, including manuscripts, photographs, moving image and sound materials, and their electronic equivalents. A University Archives and Special Collections could have several repository levels: rare books, manuscripts, university archives, artifact collection, photograph collection.

SAA (Society of American Archivists)

An organization of professional archivists based in the United States, with members from around the world.

Series

A group of similar records that are arranged according to a filing system and that are related as the result of being created, received, or used in the same activity; a file group; a record series. Examples could include: incoming correspondence, photographs, minutes.

Special collections

Usually used within a library, it contains collections of unusual or scarce materials such as rare books, manuscripts, personal papers, historical maps, drawings, paintings, photographs, etc., and often the institution’s own archives.

Standards

A benchmark or reference used to measure some quality or practice. Archivists follow a wide variety of standards created by many associations and organizations, such as SAA, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), etc.

Survey

A comprehensive and systematic review of a collection conducted either to obtain a brief overview of a repository’s holdings or to gain knowledge on a particular point, such as the amount of cellulose nitrate-based negatives and film in a repository, or the physical condition of a collection or group of collections. Surveys may be conducted on any level (item to repository) and on any topic.

Definitions taken from the following resources:

- <http://www.archivists.org/glossary/list.asp>
- http://aabc.bc.ca/aabc/ASA_Archives_terminology_2006.pdf
 - <http://crm.cr.nps.gov/archive/22-2/22-02-19.pdf>
 - <http://www.lib.vt.edu/help/instruct/glossary.html>
- <http://www.archivists.org/prof-education/pre-readings/IMPLP/AA68.2.MeissnerGreene.pdf>
 - Vogt-O’Connor, Diane. “An Archival Glossary for the Millennium.” *Cultural Resource Management (CRM)* 22, no.2. (1999): 46-52.