

ARCHIVE TOOLKIT



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Archive Toolkit

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What are Archives and why are they important?

- An Archive is an accumulation of records and documents from one organisation or individual.

Why are archives significant?

- They are unique – they will generally be the only record of an event, activity or decision.
- They have been selected for preservation due to their value as primary source documentation recording the history of a person or organisation.

Original Order?

- Original order is incredibly important as it gives information to the researcher about the links between records and therefore reflecting the way the records were used by the last user. Archives are arranged and described according to the way they were organically created – unlike books which tend to be described according to title, subject or author.

Managing Archives

The main function areas of archive management include:

Solid collecting policies, acquisition/deposit agreements and accessioning procedures (*which inform and support clear ownership*).

Arrangement and description ensure that archival finding aids are created aiding researchers to identify and locate records.

Access to any archive collections should bear in mind the preservation needs of the materials, while also complying with any legal obligations

Preservation of collections ensure that there is an environment that protects the records physically, ensuring their long term preservation and longevity. Good handling is fundamental to good preservation practices.

Collecting Policies

What is a Collecting Policy and why should we have it?

It is a document that clearly lays out the function and point of the archive – laying out clearly what types of items the archive is collecting (e.g. subject based, geographical area, historical era etc.) This then makes it clear to depositors they types of records an archive is willing to accept, it also enables the archivist to make clear decisions when offered items and collections.

Why have a collecting policy?

- Enables clear consistent decision making about new collections
- Removes any subjectivity from decision making
- Avoids any conflict over acquisition of archives by stating clearly what items the archive is willing to accept
- To help donors to identify the best archive for their items.
- Enables archivist to make clear decisions when refusing materials by referring back to the items that the archive is willing to accept.
- Provides clear continuity over long periods of time or when there is organisational/staffing changes within the archive.

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Acquisitions and accessions

An archive needs clear procedures in place for acquiring new records. In particular there needs to be an archive acquisition agreement to cover the main types of archival accessions.

Acquisitions

The archivist needs to make sure:

- The items being offered fit within the collecting policy.
- The items that are being offered are owned by the individual or organisation offering them – they are the clear legal owners.

Archive Gift/Acquisition Agreement?

Is an agreement that lays out the conditions of the acquisition of the items to the archive, it acts as a transfer of title between the depositor and the archive.

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Accessioning

Once the transfer of items has been completed, an acknowledgement receipt should be sent to the Donor and the new acquisition should be entered into the Accession Register.

Initial accessioning is the first step in processing any new material and it is vital to establish this control as soon as the material is received.

Accessions Register

The Accessions Register is where a brief summary of the materials recently deposited to the archive are recorded – this happens before the items are fully catalogued. It can act as a basic inventory of the archive materials while the items are awaiting cataloguing. The information collected can also inform future cataloguing of materials especially if it is some time after acquisition that the items are being catalogued.

Appraisal

Appraisal is the archival function of selecting which records should be kept permanently to provide evidence, and information, on the history, functions and development of the record-producing body. Archivists appraise records based primarily on their evidential and informational value.

The types of records that should be selected are:

- Records that are created by the organisation/individual
- Records that provide evidence of an individual or organisational activity
- Records documenting the origins of the organisation, its missions/goals etc.
- Records documenting the mission and goals of the organisation.
- Publications of the organisation

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Description

Aims

The aim is for the archivist to describe records in the most accurate and precise way that correctly reflects the items that are within the collection. This can then enable researchers to effectively search the archive collections leading them to the records that match their research aims and enable them to decide if they are useful to them or not.

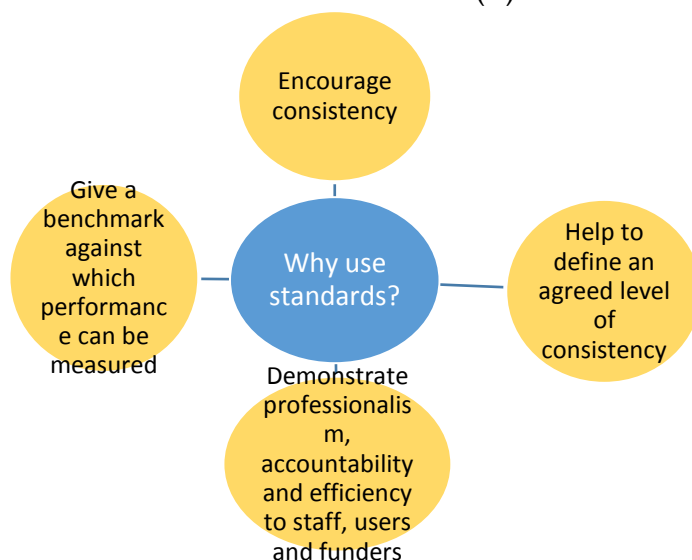
Archival Description is based on an international standard – ISAD(G) which informs all descriptive work in all archive.

Key components:

There are several different elements of description which should be considered in archival description:

1. Reference*
2. Series or item title*
3. Series or item description
4. Covering dates*
5. Amount of material*
6. Media format
7. Organisational unit which created records*
8. Access status
9. Related material
10. How the series relates to other records in the record group
11. Appraisal status
12. Other finding aids
13. Where its and accrual or accruals are expected
14. Level of description*
15. Who wrote the description

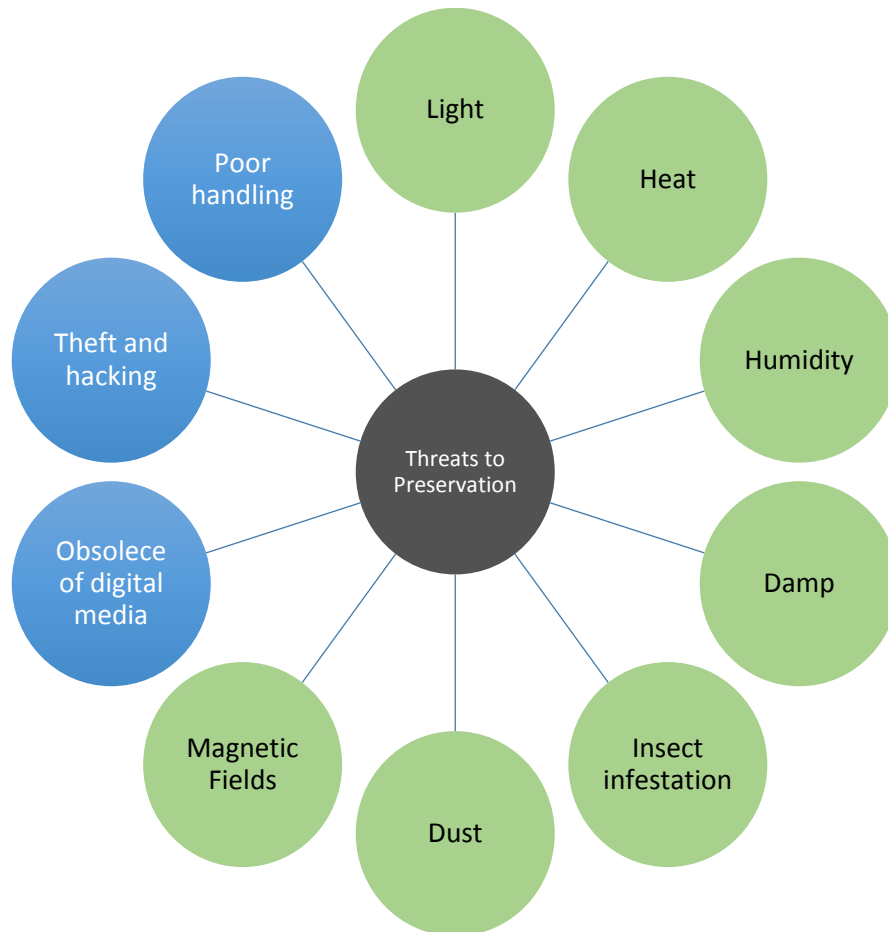
*these are the essential data elements based on ISAD(G)



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Preservation

Basic preservation of archives means providing as much protection as possible from the main threats to them:



Storage

The main means of preventing infestation by pests of all sorts is to keep the storage area clean. This can be done through regularly cleaning. Also shelving can be damp-dusted if necessary, making sure the shelves are dry before items are returned to them.

Food should never be consumed in the storage area and surrounding areas should also be kept clear of waste of food.

If insect infestation occurs, isolate and remove the affected records to be treated in the appropriate way by specialists.

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Packaging

Archives can be given additional protection against the threats by being packed in suitable containers, stored on shelves and never on the floor.

Item	Preservation Process
Documents	Put into acid-free folders, before storing in boxes made of acid-free card
Photographs	Place in clear inert polyester envelopes
Textiles	Wrap with acid-free tissue, padding any folds in the fabric with the tissue to soften the fold and store in acid-free boxes
Sculpture	Wrapped in acid-free tissue and stored in acid-free boxes