**Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center**

**Collections Management Guide: Accessioning**

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**Introduction to Accessioning**

The Archives Center regards accessioning as one of the foundations of ethical archival stewardship. Accessioning is the first step in establishing a sustainable life cycle for the maintenance of materials acquired by the archives. We define accessioning as all of the labor required for an archivist to properly prepare new acquisitions for long-term storage and maintenance in the archive. An accessioning archivist:

* analyzes new acquisitions to determine their contents and conditions;
* stabilizes materials to address immediate threats to their preservation;
* documents the materials by creating a baseline *accession record* to allow other archivists and researchers access to materials;
* and oversees the materials in a controlled preservation environment in order to ensure and expand their accessibility over time.

The labor entailed by each of these processes is continuously redefined in response to the changing climate of records creation and use. As the methods by which records are created shift, user expectations increasingly grow to anticipate changes in the way historical documentation is stored and delivered. Accessioning archivists reciprocate by adapting accessioning workflows to support more immediate and in-depth access for archival acquisitions.

These guidelines document the development of these workflows and make this labor transparent for future archival workers and users.[[1]](#footnote-0)

**Required Tools and Access Points**

The Archives Center makes use of specialized software and databases to support and streamline the accessioning process. Accessioning archivists require access to the following:

* **ArchivesSpace** (required): This software is a digital collection management system that can be accessed via website at [www.archives.ias.edu/staff](http://www.archives.ias.edu/staff). First-time users will require a log-in and password.
* **ArchiveIT** (optional, required for web-based content): This software is used to capture web-based acquisitions. Access is required for key information required to accession web-based acquisitions. The system can be accessed via website, but first-time users will require a log-in and password.
* **Preservica** (optional, required for born-digital content): This software is used to ingest born-digital content acquisitions. Access is required for key information required to accession born-digital materials. The system can be accessed via website, but first-time users will require a log-in and password.

In addition to digital tools for creating accession records, accessioning archivists will require access to key resources for identifying archival materials, stabilizing preservation needs, and creating extensible records that conform to local and national standards for best practice. Additional resources include:

* **Authorized Linked Data Service** (required): The Library of Congress Linked Data Service is the preferred online database to support the creation of *authorized*, linkable agent and subject data for archival records. This database can be accessed online at: [www.id.loc.gov](http://www.id.loc.gov). Where no suitable Library of Congress authorities exist, archivists may additionally create authorities using the Virtual International Authority Files (VIAF) database at: [www.viaf.org](http://www.viaf.org). Alternately, Archvists may consult archives specific authority database like Social Networks and Archival Context (SNAC) at: [www.snaccooperative.org](http://www.snaccooperative.org).
* **Wikidata Linked Data Service** (optional): This online database supports the creation of linkable agent and subject data for archival records. Note that while wikidata is not considered an “authorized” source by national best practices, its vast controlled vocabulary can be linked to authorized sources and to wiki-content to significantly expand accessibility of archival records. This database can be accessed online at: [www.wikidata.org](http://www.wikidata.org).
* **Collection Identification Guide**: This guide created by the Preservation Self-Assessment Program allows archivist a variety of tools to identify and preserve analog and audiovisual media types. This guide can be accessed at: <https://psap.library.illinois.edu/collection-id-guide>.
* **PREMIS Data Dictionary for Preservation Metadata**: The PREMIS Data Dictionary is the international standard to support the preservation of digital archival materials. This guide can be accessed at: <https://www.loc.gov/standards/premis/v3/premis-3-0-final.pdf>.
* **Housing and Material Specifications Guide**: This guidance from the National Archives provides guidance for archivists on how to stabilize and address preservation storage needs for archival materials. The guidelines can be accessed at: <https://www.archives.gov/preservation/storage/specs-housing-exhibition-2015-current.html>.
* **Archival Supplies and Containers**: Archival supplies are available in the HS-LIB 0005 and in the Archives Center Reading Room for general use. Specialized supplies can also be ordered on demand.

**Accessioning Workflows: Analyzing New Acquisitions**

Acquisition and accession are likely the only points in the lifecycle of archival documents that archivists have easy and direct access to the creators, donors, and/or sources of the materials. Access to collection creators is an important tool for archivists: access allows archivists to ask critical questions concerning the contents, condition, and context of the materials that may otherwise require hours of labor-intensive (and expensive) research later in the process. In order to take advantage of this unique time, archivists should accession and document newly acquired materials as quickly as possible following acquisition.

To do so, archivists must begin the workflow by surveying and analyzing the newly acquired materials to determine what information is known about the collection and what information needs to be discovered in order to move forward. During the survey, an accessioning archivist is expected to establish *intellectual*, *legal*, and *physical* *control* of the materials. This process will require that archivists survey both administration documentation created during the acquisition of materials and the materials themselves.

In order to facilitate a thorough survey, archivists should ensure that they can answer the following questions about a new acquisition:

1. (Legal Control) Did the archivist that acquired this material create adequate legal documentation to establish how it was acquired, the legal terms of the acquisition, and the terms under which the material may be accessed or used?   
     
   *Is there a vendor invoice, deed of gift, or a transfer receipt that documents that the creator legally sold, donated, or transferred this material to archive? If so, on what date did this occur and what office or individual gave permission for this transaction? Did the office or creator provide any terms governing this transaction? Did the office or creator include any restrictions on use or access to the materials?*
2. (Intellectual Control) Is there any existing information that documents the contents and condition of this collection?   
     
   *Does the invoice/deed of gift/transfer receipt include a collection or record group title that explains if this is a new collection or an addition to an existing collection? Does the acquisition documentation include an inventory or listing of the contents of the collection? If so, does the inventory include key information about the formats or types of material in the collection and/or the important people, events, and/or dates documented by the collection? If so, are there any materials or subjects that might include sensitive or restricted contents and/or damaged materials?*
3. (Physical Control) Is there any existing information that helps document the physical requirements of the collection?

*Can you determine the collection’s size in preferred units of measure (i.e., linear feet, items, and/or GB)? Does the physical collection have any existing conditions which would compromise its long-term preservation (i.e., pest, water damage, or active mold)? Is the collection stored in appropriate housing (i.e., archival quality storage containers and acid-free folders)? Does the archive have the appropriate amount of climate-controlled storage space to properly steward this material?*

**Accessioning Workflows: Stabilizing Archival Materials**

After an initial survey of materials, archivists should address the conservation needs of the incoming materials. Accessioning archivists often refer to this process as “stabilization” rather than “preservation” or “conservation” in order to express that the objective is not to fully restore material to the perceived “ideal” condition but rather to address any immediate issues and prepare the materials to be stored until a professional conservator can make an appraisal.

The accessioning archivist is often looking for three very specific preservation conditions which may compromise materials in the short-term: pests, active molds, and/or water damage. Either of these three conditions can not only compromise a new acquisition but all of the surrounding collections within a library. In these cases, an archivist should immediately segregate the affected materials by placing them in air tight containers (or wrapping boxed materials in plastic bags) to be isolated and reviewed away from the rest of holdings. The materials should remain segregated until a professional preservation specialist or a senior archivist can appraise the materials to determine whether they should be maintained as a part of the collection and/or send them for treatment off-site.

Outside of these three immediate needs, accessioning archivist will establish complete routine “holdings maintenance” activities that prepare materials for storage in the controlled preservation environment of the Archives Center. This includes storing all materials in archival quality containers, including acid-free boxes and folders using archival supplies found in the Archives Center.

**Accession Workflows: Documenting the Acquisition of Materials**

After analyzing the collection and stabilizing any immediate preservation needs, archivists have enough information to create an *accession record*. The accession record is a critical tool for the long-term maintenance of collection. As a group, the archives accession records provide all of the relevant information about how the archives obtained its collections, the legal terms of those acquisitions, the contents of those acquisitions, and the locations of those materials for long-term storage and retrieval.

The Archives Center maintains these accession records in a “collection management system” which stores the information as a dataset. By storing these records as data, archivists can create aggregate reports on the collection as a whole and effectively maintain all of the collections at scale. The Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center uses ArchivesSpace collection management software to create, access, and work with our local accession records.

In order to ensure that individual accession records consistently conform to the same standards as the larger dataset (and in turn to ensure accurate reporting and aggregation of the data itself), accessioning archivists follow strict guidance on how to consistently create the individual datapoints that comprise each accession record.

The following rules ensure the consistency and usability of this data as a whole so it is crucial for archivists accessioning to use the below charts to ensure the accession record data for each sub-record or part of the record conforms to this guidance.

| **Accession Record: Basic Information Sub-record** | |
| --- | --- |
| **Field** | **Local Rules for Data Entry** |
| **Title\*** | Create a DACS-compliant title for the newly acquired collection. All titles should include a name segment and unit type as described in DACS 2.3. If the acquisition is an addition or accrual to an existing collection, the accession title should be the existing collection title and the word addition (e.g., “School of Natural Sciences records addition”). |
| **Identifier\*** | Assign a unique identifier to this accession and its records that conforms to local standards. All accession identifiers should consist of two separate fields: 1) the year materials were acquired and 2) the sequential number of the acquisition (e.g., 2022-0001). |
| **Accession Date\*** | Enter the date material was legally transferred to the archive’s custody. Accession date is derived from the signatory date on the deed of gift, invoice, or transfer receipt accompanying materials and should be formatted as YYYY-MM-DD. |
| **Content Description\*** | Enter a brief scope and contents of the materials. Include the following key details: the creator/source of the contents; significant individuals, subjects, or events documented in the record; material formats (e.g., born digital files, audiocassettes, etc.); and dates of the materials included in the accession. |
| **Condition Description** | Optionally record generalized information about any preservation/conservation needs of materials. The majority of this information should be recorded in the collections assessment record rather than in this open text field. However, brief notes are welcome at the discretion of the accessioning archivist. |
| **Disposition** | If applicable, document where acquisitions that are additions to existing collections have been incorporated into larger collections (i.e., “Accession incorporated into School of Social Science records), added as a series (i.e., “Accession added as Series 3 of School of Social Science records), reformatted (i.e., “Digital media removed from physical carriers and stored on born-digital server.), and/or separated/removed (i.e., “Publications identified as duplicates and removed from collection.”) |
| **Inventory** | Optionally record the network location of the inventory if it cannot be linked as an External Document. |
| **Retention Rule** | If applicable, noteretention schedules or disposal policies apply for these materials, identify what those rules are and where the retention rules or schedule may be found (i.e., “Accession to be retained for 5 years per the transfer agreement and then disposed.”) |
| **General Note** | Optionally record any relevant information about the record that cannot be recorded in any other data field. |
| **Provenance\*** | Create a single sentence to document the material’s source using the standard formatting that follows: “Creator/Office of Origin/Source donated/transferred/deposited this material to the Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center on date.” |
| **Acquisition Type\*** | Use the drop down to select information about how archivists acquired these materials. Options include: Gift, Purchase, Transfer, Deposit, Loan, Web Capture, or Unknown. |
| **Resource Type\*** | The resource type field is a drop-down menu where users can record the *DACS* compliant title unit for the collection. Materials can either be part of a collection, papers, records, or group of publications. Note that collections, records, and papers unit types can include publications. Therefore, the designation for publications should only be used if a given acquisition consists solely of published materials. |
| **Restrictions Apply?\*** | Check box to indicate that any of the materials in this accession will be restricted. |
| **Publish** | Leave un-checked. |
| **Access Restrictions?\*** | Check this box to indicate that these materials have a known access restriction. |
| **Access Restrictions Note** | If applicable, write a brief sentence explaining what the access restriction is and where it derives from (i.e., “This accession includes administrative records of the Institute. These records have been restricted for 30 years with the Archival Policy.”) |
| **Use restrictions?** | Check this box to indicate that these materials have a known use restriction. |
| **Use Restrictions Note** | If applicable, explain what the use restriction is and how it was determined (i.e., “This accession contains audiocassettes which may need to be reformatted prior to use.”) |

| **Accession Record: Dates Sub-record** | |
| --- | --- |
| **Field** | **Local Rules for Data Entry** |
| **Label\*** | Select “Creation” to record *inclusive dates* for the materials. |
| **Expression\*** | Record the natural expression of the dates, spelling out any dates along with any additional descriptive information (i.e., “circa April 1950 - August 1960,” etc.). Alternately, if no dates are available document that the material is “undated.” |
| **Type\*** | Select the type of dates being recorded from the following list of options: inclusive, bulk, or single.  Note: *DACS* requires records to include inclusive dates, but bulk dates are optional. |
| **Begin\*** | Note the beginning date using the following any of the formats: YYYY, YYYY-MM, YYYY-MM-DD. |
| **End\*** | Note the ending date using the following any of the formats: YYYY, YYYY-MM, YYYY-MM-DD. |
| **Certainty, Era, and Calendar** | Optional. Unless applicable, leave blank. |

| **Accession Record: Extents Sub-record** | |
| --- | --- |
| **Field** | **Local Rules for Data Entry** |
| **Portion\*** | Specify whether the recorded measures document the “whole” accession or “part” of the accession. Note: a measurement of the whole is required for each accession. Measurements of specific parts are only required when mixed media collections contain audiovisual or born-digital contents. |
| **Number\*** | Note the “number” of materials for the measurement (e.g., the quantity of either linear feet, folders, items (audiovisual) or gigabytes (digital). For a collection that measures 1.5 linear feet, enter “1.5.” For a collection containing 6 GB, enter “6” |
| **Type\*** | Record the unit of measure for the collection. Generally, whole acquisitions containing a significant amount of mixed media should be measured in linear feet. Digital files should be measured in either gigabytes, megabytes or terabytes. Audiovisual collections should be measured in items. |
| **Container Summary\*** | Note the type of containers used to house this collection (e.g., “Housed in 50 record storage containers.”) |
| **Physical Details\*** | Born digital and audiovisual extent types will optionally require additional information. Any of the following extent types require the archivist to include more specific information in the physical details: For **Audiotapes**, specify if open reel. For **Audiocassettes**, specify the cartridge format (i.e., 8-Track, DAT or Digital Audio Tape, Digital Compact Cassette, or Microcassette). For **Cylinders**, specify if wax or plastic. For **Films**, specify the element type (i.e., acetate, nitrate, or polyester). For **Microform**, specify if microfilm or microfiche. For **Optical Media**, specify if Compact Disk (CD), DVD, LaserDisc, or MiniDisc. For **Sound Discs**, specify if aluminum, lacquer, shellac, or vinyl disc. For **Photographic Negatives,** specify if glass or plastic. For **Photographic Slides**, specify if glass or plastic. For **Photographic Prints**, specify if cased prints exist (i.e., daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and/or tintypes) and whether monochrome, color, or black and white. For **Photomechanic Prints**, specify mechanical process if known (i.e., lithograph, gravure, collotype, etc.).For **Videocassettes**, specify the cartridge format (i.e., Betacam, Betamax, D-2, D03, DVCAM, DVCPRO, MiniDV, U-Matic, VHS, or Video8). For **Videotapes**, specify if open reel. |
| **Dimensions** | For certain formats, still more information will be required about the physical dimensions of a given format. Specialized formats like film reels, open reels, and floppy disks will require dimensions in order to distinguish specific formats apart from one another. Whenever possible archivists should record the following dimensions for the following formats: For **Audiotapes**, specify if ¼”, ½”, 1”, or 2” reel.For **Films**, specify the gauge of the film or soundtrack in millimeters (i.e., 8mm, 9.5mm, 16mm, or 35mm). For 8mm film reels, specify whether single, standard, super, or Maurer. For **Floppy Disks**, specify whether 3.5”, 5.25”, or 8”. For **Sound Discs**, specify diameter in inches. For **Videotapes**, specify if ½”, 1”, or 2” reel. |

| **Accession Record: Agents Sub-record** | |
| --- | --- |
| **Field** | **Local Rules for Data Entry** |
| **Role\*** | Note the individual who is the creator, source of subject of the materials. All accessions will require a creator. Some accessions, especially transfers from either within the university or within large organizations, may additionally require information about a “source” to be included in a second entry to this sub-record. This added information helps track of individuals that often serve as the point of contact for materials created by the Institute. |
| **Relator\*** | Use the drop down to describe the relation of the agent they are describing to the materials. When recording the collection creator or collection source, use the default value “Donor.” |
| **Agents\*** | Begin typing the name of the agent or click browse to see if a local record already exists. If a record does exist for that creator, verify the agent name does in fact describe the same individual/organization and click the record to link the agent. If the agent does not exist, the archivist must create a new agent record. |

| **Accession Record: Related Resources Sub-record** | |
| --- | --- |
| **Field** | **Local Rules for Data Entry** |
| **Related Resource Record\*** | This repository regularly receives additions (or “accruals”) to existing archival record groups. If a new accession is an addition to an existing record group or collection, the accessioning archivists should type the title of the collection or the collection identifier to help find the Resource Record and relate the accession to the resource. Otherwise, this field should be left blank. |

**Accession Workflows: Store Materials for Long-Term Preservation and Maintenance**

After the accession record is complete, the last remaining task is to label all containers for long-term storage and assign materials a location. During the stabilization process, archivists should have placed all materials into acid-free containers. The last step in this process is to assign these containers a location in the Archives Center’ storage areas.

Once a location is assigned, containers should receive a label with the following details:

* **Collection Title**
* **Collection Identifier**
* **(Optional) Accession Identifier**
* **Box Number**
* **Assigned Location**
* **Barcode**

After the containers are labeled, the materials can be placed in storage, completing the accessioning process.

**Appendices [TK]**

**A. Measuring Archival Extents  
B. ArchivesSpace Help Guide  
C. Pre-formatted Template for Container Labels**

**D. Archival Storage Locations**

**Additional Resources**

* [**https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/2021/oclcresearch-total-cost-of-stewardship.pdf**](https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/2021/oclcresearch-total-cost-of-stewardship.pdf)
* [**https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yQlNajNxEEXDtej7qUUazgmca2WpRYWXu7FRihrvhbo/edit**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yQlNajNxEEXDtej7qUUazgmca2WpRYWXu7FRihrvhbo/edit)
* [**https://guides.nyu.edu/archival-collections-management/accessioning**](https://guides.nyu.edu/archival-collections-management/accessioning)
* [**https://rose-cs-processing-manual.readthedocs.io/en/latest/**](https://rose-cs-processing-manual.readthedocs.io/en/latest/)
* [**https://docs.rockarch.org/processing-manual/**](https://docs.rockarch.org/processing-manual/)

1. In order to ensure their relevancy, these guidelines are reviewed and revised bi-annually. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)