

# Archival Principles and Practices in the United States

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# First Archives in the US

- 1791: First Historical Society in the US: Massachusetts Historical Society (<https://www.masshist.org>)
- 1901: First state archive – Alabama Dept of Archives and History (<http://www.archives.state.al.us/>)
- 1934: Establishment of National Archives and Records Administration (<https://www.archives.gov/>)



# The Society of American Archivists

- Established in 1936
- Professional society with members from all types of archival institutions



# Archival Principles

- **Principle 1: Records in archives possess unique characteristics.**
- **Principle 2: The principle of *respect des fonds* is the basis of archival arrangement and description.**
- **Principle 3: Arrangement involves the identification of groupings within the material.**
- **Principle 4: Description reflects arrangement.**
- **Principle 5: The rules of description apply to all archival materials, regardless of form or medium.**
- **Principle 6: The principles of archival description apply equally to records created by corporate bodies, individuals, or families.**
- **Principle 7: Archival descriptions may be presented at varying levels of detail to produce a variety of outputs.**
- **Principle 8: The creators of archival materials, as well as the materials themselves, must be described.**

Derived from: [https://www2.archivists.org/standards/DACS/statement\\_of\\_principles](https://www2.archivists.org/standards/DACS/statement_of_principles)



# Records in archives possess unique characteristics.

- This is what primarily separates archives and libraries. Libraries across a country hold multiple copies of a single book, while archives each possess unique materials, unless they have been copied via microfilm or preserved in digital form



# The principle of *respect des fonds* is the basis of archival arrangement and description.

- To the extent possible and practical, archivists should seek to preserve records in the original order they were created.



# Arrangement involves the identification of groupings within the material.

- Archivists make sense of records in their care and seek out ways to organize them for a variety of purposes.
- Keeping original order and *respect des fonds* in mind, archivists still have a role to play in arranging records in meaningful ways.



# Description reflects arrangement.

- Archival description is distilled into finding aids, documents which provide information about records and help users identify which materials they want to consult.
- These Finding Aids should reflect the organization of archival collections as identified by archivists when they gain control of a set of records.



# **The rules of description apply to all archival materials, regardless of form or medium.**

- Whether records are accounting books, reports, meeting minutes, photographs, electronic records, or any other type of material, the same standards of archival work apply.



# **The principles of archival description apply equally to records created by corporate bodies, individuals, or families.**

- All records in archival institutions should be held to the same standard, whether they are from the public or private sector, created by the government or individuals.



# Archival descriptions may be presented at varying levels of detail to produce a variety of outputs.

- Some records catalogs may only require a short description of a collection/records group, while other access environments may need more detailed information. Similarly, high school students and professional historians have different needs in terms of what context (metadata) they want to see around records.



# **The creators of archival materials, as well as the materials themselves, must be described.**

- Knowing who or what organization created a set of records is very important for users seeking to understand their contents.



# National Archives Building



Historic animated GIF of National Archives building, Washington, DC <http://gph.is/2bxKw6c>



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# Archival Workflow



# Appraisal

- 1. The process of identifying materials offered to an archives that have sufficient value to be accessioned.*
- 2. The process of determining the length of time records should be retained, based on legal requirements and on their current and potential usefulness.*
- 3. The process of determining the market value of an item; monetary appraisal.*

Source:

<https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/a/appraisal>



# Accession

- 1. Materials physically and legally transferred to a repository as a unit at a single time; an acquisition.*
- 2. To take legal and physical custody of a group of records or other materials and to formally document their receipt.*
- 3. To document the transfer of records or materials in a register, database, or other log of the repository's holdings.*

Source:

<https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/a/accession>



# Arrangement

1. 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.
2. The organization and sequence of items within a collection.

Source:

<https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/a/arrangement>



# Description

- 1. The process of analyzing, organizing, and recording details about the formal elements of a record or collection of records, such as creator, title, dates, extent, and contents, to facilitate the work's identification, management, and understanding.*
- 2. The product of such a process.*

Source:

<https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/a/archival-description>



# Preservation

1. *The professional discipline of protecting materials by minimizing chemical and physical deterioration and damage to minimize the loss of information and to extend the life of cultural property.*
2. *The act of keeping from harm, injury, decay, or destruction, especially through noninvasive treatment.*
3. *The obligation to protect records and other materials potentially relevant to litigation and subject to discovery.*

Source:

<https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/p/preservation>



# Access

1. The ability to locate relevant information through the use of catalogs, indexes, finding aids, or other tools.
2. The permission to locate and retrieve information for use (consultation or reference) within legally established restrictions of privacy, confidentiality, and security clearance.

Source:

<https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/a/access>



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