

Select List of Archival Terminology

ACCESS

1. The right or opportunity of finding, consulting, or approaching documents and/or information.
See also: ACCESSIBILITY; INTELLECTUAL ACCESS; RESTRICTED ACCESS
2. The method of placing data into and retrieving it from computer memory.

ACCESSIBILITY

The availability of archival material for consultation as a result of legal authorization and the existence of finding aids. See also: ACCESS; INTELLECTUAL ACCESS; RESTRICTED ACCESS

ACCESS POINT

A name, term, or code under which a descriptive record may be searched and identified.

ACCESSION

1. The formal acceptance into custody and recording of an acquisition.
2. An acquisition so recorded. See also: ACCRUAL

ACCRUAL

An acquisition which is additional to a series already held.

ACCUMULATION

The natural process by which archives are made and received in the course of affairs of any kind.
See also: COLLECTION

ACQUISITION An addition to the holdings of an archival repository or records centre.

ACQUISITION POLICY An official statement issued by an archival institution identifying the kinds of materials it will acquire and the conditions or terms which affect their acquisition.

ACTIVE RECORDS See CURRENT ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL

1. The exercise of authority over maintenance, use, disposition, and accessibility of current archives to carry on the function for which they were created. See also: CONTROLLING AGENCY; CREATOR; CUSTODY
2. The means of physically locating the holdings of records centres and archival institutions through numbering and listing. See also: INTELLECTUAL CONTROL

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY

That part of a finding aid which illustrates the structure, functions, and activities of the creator of the material described therein. See also: CREATOR

ADMINISTRATIVE VALUE

The capacity of archival materials (1) to serve the continuing needs or activities of the organization which created them. See also: FISCAL VALUE; LEGAL VALUE

AGENCY

An administrative body having the delegated authority to act competently as an agent of a higher body. See also: CORPORATE BODY; INSTITUTION; ORGANIZATION

ALIENATION

The transfer of ownership of archival material.

APPRAISAL

The process of evaluating documents for the purpose of continuing preservation. See also: VALUATION

ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT(S)

Any document(s) made or received in the course of a practical activity. See also: ARCHIVES

ARCHIVAL NATURE

The whole of the characteristics with which archival documents are endowed by the circumstances of their creation and which are therefore natural to them. Those characteristics are authenticity, impartiality, interrelatedness, naturalness, and uniqueness. See also: AUTHENTICITY (1); IMPARTIALITY; INTERRELATEDNESS; NATURALNESS; and UNIQUENESS

ARCHIVAL QUALITY

1. The material properties inherent in any documentary medium permitting its preservation under controlled conditions.
2. The whole of the characteristics of archival nature acquired by non-archival material when it becomes an integral part of an archival fonds.

ARCHIVAL SCIENCE

The concepts, principles, and methodologies governing the treatment of archives.

ARCHIVES

1. The whole of the documents made and received by a juridical or physical person or organization in the conduct of affairs, and preserved. Synonymous with the term fonds. See also: JURIDICAL PERSON; PHYSICAL PERSON; ORGANIZATION
2. An agency or institution responsible for the acquisition, preservation, and communication of archives selected for permanent preservation.
3. A place in which archives selected for permanent preservation are kept.

ARRANGEMENT

The process of identifying archival documents as they belong to groupings within a fonds.

ARTIFICIAL COLLECTION

See: COLLECTION

AUTHENTICATION

The act of giving authority or legal authenticity to a document to attest that it is what it purports to be. See also: CERTIFICATION; CERTIFIED COPY

AUTHENTICITY

1. The quality of archival documents to bear authentic testimony of the actions, processes, and procedures which brought them into being.
2. The quality of a document of having the character and authority of an original.
3. In Jenkinson's formulation, the quality of archives deriving from their being preserved in the continuous custody and for the information of their creator and its legitimate successors.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

That part of a finding aid which illustrates the life and activities of the person creating the archival material described therein.

CALENDAR

A finding aid describing in chronological order individual documents of a fonds, series, collection, or other grouping.

CASE FILE

A file containing documents relating to a specific action, event, project, person, place, or subject. See also: FILE; PARTICULAR INSTANCE PAPERS/FILES.

CERTIFICATION

The formal assertion in writing of some fact.

CERTIFIED COPY

A copy of an original document, signed and declared to conform to the original by the person or officer entrusted with that function.

CLASSIFICATION

The systematic organization of documents in groups or categories according to methods, procedures, or conventions represented in a plan or scheme. See also: CLASSIFICATION PLAN/SCHEME

CLASSIFICATION PLAN/SCHEME

A diagram, table, or other representation categorizing the documents of an organization or agency by class and according to a coding system expressed in alphabetical, numerical, or alphanumerical symbols.

CLOSED FONDS

A fonds to which no further accruals are expected.

COLLECTION

A body of documents of any provenance organized by some criteria to make them accessible for their informational value, for example, by author, subject, language, medium, or documentary form. Also referred to as an artificial collection. See also: ACCUMULATION; ARCHIVES (1); HOLDINGS

COMPETENCE

The sphere of functional responsibility entrusted to an office or officer. See also FUNCTION; MANDATE

CONFIDENTIALITY

The quality or property of privacy and secrecy possessed by certain information and/or documents. See also: PRIVACY

CONSERVATION

The science and practice of physical treatment of documents for preservation purposes. See also: PRESERVATION

CONTROLLING AGENCY

The agency exercising administrative control (1) over archival documents. See also: CREATOR; CUSTODY

COPY

A duplication of an original document.

COPYRIGHT

An intangible, incorporeal right granted by statute to the creators of literary works and artistic productions, whereby the creators are invested, for specified period, with sole and exclusive privilege of multiplying copies or authorizing performance of the same and publishing, communicating, and profiting from the sale of them.

CORPORATE BODY

An organizational entity created by statute and capable of acting as a legal entity. See also: AGENCY; ORGANIZATION

CREATOR

The person or administrative body accumulating documents by reason of its function. See also: CONTROLLING AGENCY; CUSTODY

CURRENT ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

Archival documents regularly maintained and used by their creator. See also: ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT(S); NON-CURRENT ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS; RECORD; SEMI-CURRENT ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

CURRENT RECORDS

See: CURRENT ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

CUSTODIAL HISTORY

That part of a finding aid illustrating the chain of agencies, officers, or persons exercising custody over the archival material described therein.

CUSTODY

The responsibility for care of archival material based on its physical possession.

DEACCESSIONING

The process by which an archives removes material from its own legal custody.

DEPOSIT

The placing of documents in the custody of archives without transfer of legal title.

DEPTH OF DESCRIPTION

The amount of information or detail provided in a finding aid about the material described in an entry. Also referred to as fullness. In RAD, referred to as level of detail of description. See also: LEVEL OF DESCRIPTION

DESCRIPTION

1. The process of recording information about the nature and makeup of archives to achieve administrative and/or intellectual control. See also: ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL; INTELLECTUAL CONTROL
2. A written representation of archival material. See also: FINDING AID

DIPLOMATICS

The discipline which studies the genesis, forms, and transmission of archival documents, and their relationship with the facts represented in them and with their creator, in order to identify, evaluate, and communicate their true nature.

DISPOSAL

See: DISPOSITION

DISPOSITION

The destination of archival documents as determined by their appraisal.

DOCUMENT

Recorded information. See also: ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT(S)

DOSSIER

The aggregation of all the documents related to the same affair.

EVIDENTIAL VALUE

The capacity of archival documents to provide information about their creator's activities. See also: INFORMATIONAL VALUE

FAIR USE

A legal concept which invests a privilege in others than the copyright owner to use the copyrighted material without the owner's consent under certain conditions.

FILE

The smallest organic form of aggregation of archival documents.

FINDING AID

A descriptive document created to allow retrieval of archival material. see also: DESCRIPTION; GUIDE; INVENTORY; LIST

FISCAL VALUE

The capacity of archival documents to serve the continuing needs of financial and fiscal business. See also: ADMINISTRATIVE VALUE

FONDS

The whole of the documents that every organization or physical or juridical person accumulates by reason of its function or activity.

FORM

1. The mode in which a document exists or manifests itself, its outward appearance, configuration, shape, and structure, as opposed to its significance or content. Also referred to as documentary form. See also: FORMAT; MEDIUM
2. In diplomatics, all the characteristics of a document which can be separated from the determination of the particular subjects, persons, or places it is about.
3. A formulary document with blanks for the insertion of particulars or variables. Also referred to as a record form.

FORMAT

1. Any particular physical representation of a document. See also: FORM; MEDIUM
2. In information storage and retrieval, the arrangement of data in an input, output, or storage medium and the code or aggregate of instructions governing that arrangement.
3. In reprography, the dimensions of the material accepted by reprographic equipment, the size of copy material, the nature of the microform, or the arrangement of the images on a material.

FUNCTION

All of the activities aimed to accomplish one purpose, considered abstractly.

FUNCTIONAL PERTINENCE

The direct or indirect relationship of a group of documents to one function.

FUNCTIONAL PROVENANCE

The origin of a group of documents with respect to the function which produced them rather than with respect to the creator.

GENERAL RECORDS SCHEDULE

A records schedule governing specified series common to several agencies of an organization.
See also: RECORDS SCHEDULE

GUIDE

A finding aid, usually published, giving a general account of all or part of the holdings of one or more archives (2). See also: FINDING AID; INTERINSTITUTIONAL GUIDE; THEMATIC GUIDE

HOLDINGS

The totality of the documents in the custody of an archival repository.

HOUSEKEEPING RECORDS

Records relating to the activities of an agency which facilitate its carrying out of its substantive functions.

IMPARTIALITY

The quality of archives deriving from the fact or circumstance of their creation as means of carrying out activities and not as ends in themselves, and therefore of inherently being capable of revealing the truth about those activities.

IMPREScriptIBILITY

The quality of public archives or archival documents of remaining rightfully public property despite any interruption in their custody, and therefore remaining continually subject to replevin. See also: INALIENABILITY; REPLEVIN

INALIENABILITY

The quality of public archives or archival documents of being incapable of being alienated or surrendered to a person or organization which is not entitled by law to their ownership.

INCLUSIVE DATES

In description, the time period during which the entirety of the documents being described was created.

INFORMATICS

The study of the structure and properties of information, and the application of technology to the organization, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of information.

INFORMATION

1. Intelligence given. (Samuel Johnson)
2. Knowledge communicated or received concerning a particular fact or circumstance. (Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary, 1989, as an example of the substance of many dictionary definitions)
3. All ideas, facts, and imaginative works of the mind which have been communicated, recorded, published and or distributed formally or informally in any format. (The ALA Glossary of Library and Information Science)

4. A message or knowledge which has been voluntarily or involuntarily conveyed. (Luciana Duranti)
5. An accusation exhibited against a person for some criminal offense, without an indictment. (Black's Law Dictionary)

INFORMATIONAL VALUE

The capacity of archival documents to provide information about the persons, places, and subjects of which they speak.

INSTITUTION

A firmly established organization devoted to the promotion of a particular object, especially one of a public, educational, or charitable character.

INTELLECTUAL CONTROL

The control established over archival material by documenting in finding aids its provenance, arrangement, composition, scope, informational content, and internal and external relationships. See also ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL

INTELLECTUAL FORM

See: FORM (2)

INTERINSTITUTIONAL GUIDE

A finding aid generally describing all or a part of the holdings of a number of archival institutions.

INTERRELATEDNESS

The quality of each document in an archives of being dependent on its functional relations to other documents in that archives. Also referred to as organic quality or organicity.

INTRINSIC VALUE

The value residing in the artifactual or documentary characteristics of a document.

INVENTORY

1. A finding aid which describes the documents of a fonds according to their arrangement, and illustrates their administrative and documentary context.
2. A descriptive list of current archives developed to facilitate records classification and scheduling.

ITEM

1. The smallest indivisible unit of archival material.
2. The unit that represents the smallest intellectual entity within a fonds no longer usefully subdivisible for descriptive purposes.

JURIDICAL PERSON

An entity having the capacity or potential to act legally and constituted either by a collection or succession of natural or physical persons or a collection of real properties. See also: PHYSICAL PERSON

LEGAL RECORD

1. An archival document having the legally recognized and judicially enforceable quality of establishing some fact.
2. An archival document that executes or constitutes written evidence of facts which affect legal rights and duties.

LEGAL VALUE

The capacity of archival documents to serve the current and future needs of legal business and/or as evidence of it.

LEVEL OF DESCRIPTION

The level of arrangement chosen as the unit of description in a finding aid. Called "detail of description" by Michael Cook.

LEVELS OF ARRANGEMENT

The hierarchical breakdown of holdings of the repository (level 1), into fonds (2), sous fonds (3), series (4), files (5), and items (6).

LIFE CONTINUUM

The unified pattern of a record's life comprised of four integrated stages: creation or receipt; classification; scheduling and its implementation; maintenance and use.

LIFE CYCLE

The life span of a record comprised of eight sequential stages: creation or receipt; classification; maintenance and use; disposition through destruction or transfer to an archival institution or agency; description in archival finding aids; preservation; reference and use.

LIST

An enumeration of archival documents at a determined level of arrangement compiled for the purpose of administrative control. See also: FINDING AID

MANDATE

The authority given to an agency to administer a matter.

MANUSCRIPT(S)

1. Handwritten or typescript document(s).
2. Handwritten or typescript document(s) of literary or discursive nature.

MEDIUM

The physical material or substance upon which information can be or is recorded or stored. See also: FORMAT

MONETARY APPRAISAL

See VALUATION

NATURALNESS

The spontaneous accumulation of archival documents by their creator. See also: ACCUMULATION

NON-CURRENT ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

Archival documents no longer needed by the creator for current business.

OFFICIAL RECORD

An archival document created by, sanctioned by, or proceeding from an officer acting under color and by virtue of his office. See also: PUBLIC ARCHIVES/RECORDS

OPEN FONDS

A fonds to which further accruals are expected.

OPERATIONAL RECORDS

Archival documents relating to the substantive functions of an agency. See also: HOUSEKEEPING RECORDS

ORGANICITY

See: INTERRELATEDNESS

ORGANIZATION

1. A system of interrelated social relations.
2. A social system that has an unequivocal collective identity, and exact roster of members, a program of activity, and procedures for replacing members. See also: AGENCY; CORPORATE BODY

ORIGINAL

1. In law, the first copy or archetype; that from which another instrument is transcribed, copied, or initiated.
2. In diplomatics and archival science, a perfect document that is a complete and finished document which is able to produce the consequences wanted by its author, and the first to be issued in that form.

ORIGINAL ORDER

See: RESPECT FOR ORIGINAL ORDER, PRINCIPLE OF

PALEOGRAPHY

The science which studies the historical-chronological development of scripts and their territorial diffusion by examining individual graphic phenomena in relationship with texts, individual and collective activities, and cultures, for the purpose of identifying manuscripts and the cultural context in which they were created and explaining their societal and human circumstances.

PARTICULAR INSTANCE PAPERS/FILES

A series of case files all related to the same one time event or circumstance.

PERSON

See: JURIDICAL PERSON; PHYSICAL PERSON

PERTINENCE, PRINCIPLE OF

The concept, now rejected, of arranging archives in terms of their subject content regardless of their provenance and original order.

PHYSICAL PERSON

A human being, as opposed to a juridical person, acting in his or her own right in relations with other persons. See also: JURIDICAL PERSON

PIECE

The smallest indivisible physical unit of archival material. See also: ITEM

POLICY

The general principles or rules by which an organization is guided in management of affairs, hence access policy, acquisition policy, etc.

PRESERVATION

The storing and protecting of archives against damage and deterioration.

PRIMARY VALUE

The capacity of archival documents to serve the purposes of their creator. See also: SECONDARY VALUE

PRIVACY

1. The condition or ability of controlling how one is known.
2. The right to be let alone or free from unwarranted publicity.
3. The statutory right to be secure from unauthorized disclosure of information contained in archives/ records relating to personal and private matters. See also: CONFIDENTIALITY

PRIVATE ARCHIVES

Archives of non-governmental provenance.

PROCEDURE

In general, the body of written and unwritten rules governing the conduct of a transaction, or the formal steps undertaken in carrying out a transaction. In particular, the legislative machinery set up to carry out a given transaction. See: PROCESS

PROCESS

A series of motions or activities in general carried out to set oneself to work to accomplish the formal steps of a procedure. See: PROCEDURE

PROCESSING

The activities of accessioning, arranging, describing, and properly storing archival materials.

PROVENANCE

The organization or person creating a fonds. See also: CREATOR; FUNCTIONAL PROVENANCE; PROVENANCE, PRINCIPLE OF; RESPECT FOR ORIGINAL ORDER

PROVENANCE, PRINCIPLE OF

See: RESPECT DES FONDS

PUBLIC ARCHIVES/RECORDS

1. In archival science, documents created or received by public authorities in the course of carrying out their public functions; "documents made or received and preserved by the sovereign or its agents in the legitimate conduct of governance" (Livelton).
2. In diplomatics, documents issued by public authorities in carrying out public functions and therefore having public forms.
3. In law, documents of public provenance (issued by a public authority), pertinence (related to matters of the sovereign power regulated by law), effects (making full faith), ownership (by a public authority), or destination (accessible to or open to the inspection of the public).

RANDOM SAMPLING

See: SAMPLING

REAPPRAISAL

The process of reevaluation of holdings of historical archives to determine what should be retained and what should be deaccessioned.

RECORD(S)

See ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT(S)

RECORD GROUP

A body of organizationally related records established on the basis of provenance with particular regard for the administrative history, the complexity, and the volume of the records or archives of the organization concerned. Collective and general record groups represent modifications of this concept for convenience in arrangement, description, and reference service. See also: COLLECTIVE RECORD GROUP; GENERAL RECORD GROUP

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

The application of systematic and scientific control to the creation, use, maintenance, storage, retrieval, disposition, and preservation of all forms of recorded information produced by an organization in the conduct of its operations.

RECORDS SCHEDULE

A document providing the description of a records series and specifying its authorized disposition.

REFERENCE

The range of activities involved in assisting the public to use archives.

REMOVED ARCHIVES

Archives that have been removed from official custody or from the country in which they were accumulated. Also called fugitive or captured archives.

REPLEVIN

An action brought by an original and lawful owner to recover possession of documents unlawfully taken, distrained, or detained.

REPROGRAPHY

The science, technology, and practice of document reproduction.

RESPECT DES FONDS

The principle of the arrangement of archival material that fonds of different provenance should not be intermingled.

RESPECT FOR ORIGINAL ORDER, PRINCIPLE OF

The principle that archival documents should be maintained in the same order or arrangement given to it by the creator so that the relationships among its components and the evidential significance of documents are preserved. See also: PROVENANCE

RESTRICTED ACCESS

A limitation on access to archival documents imposed by the controlling agency or agency or officer having custody of the document or documents in question.

SAMPLING

The selection of items from a series in such a way that, taken together, the items selected represent the whole.

SCHEDULE

See: RECORDS SCHEDULE

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

That part of a finding aid which illustrates the nature of the archival material being described necessary to an understanding of its documentary context and makeup.

SECONDARY VALUE

The capacity that documents have of serving as sources of information for persons and organizations other than their creator. See also: PRIMARY VALUE

SECURITY

The protection of archives from damage, loss, or unauthorized alteration.

SEMI-CURRENT ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

Documents required infrequently in the conduct of current affairs and eligible to be moved to a more economical storage area for continued management. See also: CURRENT ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS; NON-CURRENT ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

SERIES

1. Documents arranged systematically or maintained as a unit because they relate to a particular function or subject, result from the same activity, have a particular form, or because of some other relationship arising from their creation, receipt, or use.
2. A group of record items, either controlled by numbers or other symbols or not, which result from the same accumulation, are subject to the same processes and procedures of organization, or have similar physical shape and informational content.
3. A grouping of documents within a fonds created to accomplish one function. See also: SUBSERIES (2)

SERIES SYSTEM

A method of administrative control (2) and intellectual control of archives based on separate and linked descriptions of creators and series designed to cope with the effects of administrative change and the existence of series having more than one creator and/or controlling agency.

SOUS-FONDS

A subdivision of a fonds based on the structure of the creator or the organization of its activity.

SUBSERIES

1. A body of documents within a series readily identifiable as a subordinate or dependent entity on the basis of classification or filing.
2. A grouping of documents separately identifiable within a series by reason of form or organization which issue from the accomplishment of one activity of a creator.

TERRITORIAL PROVENANCE

The origin of a group of documents with respect to geographical areas. The concept is linked to the principle that archival material should not be removed from the territory in which it was created. See also: TERRITORIAL PERTINENCE

TERRITORIAL PERTINENCE

The geographical area to which a group of documents refers. It is now generally agreed that the concept of territorial pertinence should give way to territorial provenance. See also: TERRITORIAL PROVENANCE

TEXT

1. The wording of a document.
2. The main body of a document as distinct from its introductory part and conclusive parts.

TEXTUAL ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

Documents in which ideas or facts are represented by means of words and/or numbers perceivable by the eye or with the aid of a machine, as opposed to, for example, graphic or image documents.

TRANSACTION

An act or several interconnected acts in which more than one person is involved and by which the relations of those persons are altered.

TRANSFER

1. Change of physical custody of archival documents with or without change of legal title.
2. A group of documents so transferred.

VALUATION

The determination of the monetary value of documents. Also referred to as monetary appraisal. See also: APPRAISAL

VIRTUAL DOCUMENTS

As opposed to forms (3), documents existing only as variables which are not connected by statements expressing their significance and relationships, such as the annotations on the verso of a blank parchment or data sent by electronic mail but remaining in nonrelated form with the sender.

VITAL RECORDS

Records containing information essential to reestablish or continue an organization in the event of disaster.

WEEDING

The removal for the purposes of destruction of documents or files from a series. Also known as culling, purging, or stripping.