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# Glossary of Common Terms in Archival Management

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## **Glossary of Common Terms in Archival Management**

### **LIS 5937—Mr. Jim Schnur**

**Access:** Having permission to locate and retrieve information, regardless of format, for use within the legally established boundaries of privacy, confidentiality, and security clearance.

**Access Policy:** Formal statement, almost always in written form, describing the terms and conditions required to gain access to a collection.

**Accession:** The physical act of taking custody or acquiring a collection, usually done with a legal Deed of Gift, donor acknowledgement form, or other written document that records the transaction. Also, as a noun, this refers to the materials received in such a transaction.

**Accession List:** Sometimes known as a *Register*, this document provides information about materials acquired in the order received (name of donor, types of materials, etc.)

**Accession Number:** A unique serial number assigned to something acquired. This number may be assigned at the item level or at a level that includes multiple items. Formats may vary across series or collections, but should be consistent within a group of items or records (i.e., Tape 2008-08-A-01, Tape 2008-08-B-01, Tape 2008-08-B-02, etc.)

**Accretion/Accrual:** Additional materials added to a *Series* or *Accession* of records already in the possession of the archives.

**“Acid-Free” Paper:** Paper with a *pH* measurement of at least 7.0. Without an alkaline *Buffer*, “acid free” materials may become acidic through *Acid Migration*.

**Acid Migration:** Movement of acid to a less acidic element through direct contact or environmental exposure of acidic vapors.

**Acquisition Policy:** Another name for a Collection Development policy, an official document that identifies the types, formats, and areas of coverage for materials appropriate to an archive.

**Act:** A document that clearly describes the decision of a public body, legislature, or governing unit. Acts may also represent parts of a legal transaction.

**Administrative Control:** Using documentation to manage archival or record holdings without regard to the specific information that they contain. One example would be a shelf list that provides staff and managers with an accurate listing of the location of materials to facilitate retrieval.

**Administrative Value:** The present and future operational value of materials to an entity. In other words, this is an assessment of how useful records are to the *Agency* that created them, as well as any successive agencies that assume the same duties.

**Agency:** A body with legal authority created by an *Act* that is usually empowered by a mandate to perform certain duties and maintain records related to its activities.

**Alienation (of Records):** When the *Custodian* of materials gives, transfers, or loses items under their control to a person or entity that has no legal standing to possess them.

**Appraisal:** When an archivist determines the value (and thus the fate, or *Disposition*) based upon a variety of values (*Evidential, Informational, etc.*) and the appropriateness of the materials according to the institution's *Acquisition Policy*. For monetary appraisal, see: *Valuation*.

**Archival Information Package (AIP):** In the Open Archival Information System (OAIS) model, this package includes the digital object and any Preservation Description Information (PDI) associated with it that will allow for future access. See also: *Submission Information Package* and *Dissemination Information Package*.

**Archival Integrity:** Materials should be maintained and preserved in the *Fonds* or *Record Group* and should only be modified through *Accrual* or *Replevin* to maintain *Provenance*.

**Archival Quality:** In theory, the elements of an item allowing for its preservation. In products, sometimes the phrase "Archival Quality" appears to convey an impression that materials supposedly will help to preserve or protect items; this may or may not be true.

**Archival Value:** The various values—*Administrative, Evidential, Fiscal, Informational, Intrinsic, Legal*—that allow the archivist to justify the preservation of an item.

**Archives:** Of items: materials created or collected by entities in the course of their business or affairs that have *Enduring Value*. Of institutional records: *Noncurrent Records* of an institution kept for their *Enduring Value*. Of places: a building or part of a building that serves as a repository for items of *Enduring Value*. Of agencies: the body or organization empowered to seek, acquire, preserve, and provide access to items of *Enduring Value*.

**Arrangement:** The physical and intellectual processes that organize items/documents according to archival principles. Arrangement often occurs along with *Description*.

**Articles of Incorporation:** A written document describing an organization, its goals or purpose; as official records they are often filed with the state's Secretary of State or another administrative body.

**Bequest:** Custodial transfer of materials as stipulated by a will.

**Born Digital:** Information created in an electronic format, such as an email message or a document developed with a word processor or other software.

**Broadside:** Usually a single-sheet that is often posted or publicly displayed. Broadside almost always have printing on just one side.

**Buffer:** An alkaline substance (pH > 7.0) that inhibits acidification of organic documents.

**Bulk Dates:** The time period during which the largest proportion of materials was created. For example, the papers of a politician may have *Inclusive Dates* that cover an entire life (from birth certificates to death notices), but the bulk of the collection may focus on the years in public office.

**Cellulose Nitrate Film:** An unstable film emulsion used primarily from the 1890s into the mid-twentieth century. Similar to oily rags in a garage, if ignored it may become flammable.

**Certified Copy:** A copy of a document certified as a complete and accurate representation of the original; certification occurs through the office that serves as *Custodian* of the original document.

**Chronological File:** A file with originals or copies of documents organized in temporal order, or in the order they were created or received.

**Classification:** Examining, arranging, and distinguishing documents by examining their relationships with one another.

**Collection:** An “artificial accumulation” of materials brought together because they share similar characteristics without regard to *Provenance*. Characteristics could include a single theme, person, group, event, activity, or type of document.

**Concordance:** An archival *Finding Aid* that establishes the relationship between past and present arrangements of materials. For example, if an archivist rearranges a collection or renumbers materials within a collection, the concordance acts as a bridge between the old arrangement scheme and the new one.

**Conservation:** Act of preserving documents through physical or chemical treatments to prolong their usefulness.

**Container List:** A guide to materials at the box or container level, helpful in providing quick retrieval of items within a *Series* or *File* (i.e., Invoices—Tampa Office—2007: Oct.).

**Contingent Records:** In records management, these are materials scheduled for *Disposition* after a particular event (i.e., records marked “Destroy after Final Audit”).

**Controlling Agency:** The body or *Agency* that controls records, their use, *Retention*, and *Disposition*.

**Correspondence:** Written communication sent or received (such as letters, email messages, telegrams, postcards with messages, cables).

**Custodian:** The person or entity that has physical possession of documents and is entrusted to care for them while currently relevant; please note that the custodian may not always possess legal title or ownership of the materials.

**Deaccessioning:** The process used to remove materials from the custody of the repository because these items no longer fit within the parameters of the *Acquisition Policy*, the institution has transferred them to another location, or the institution has returned them to the donors.

**Deed of Gift:** A signed agreement allowing for the transfer of title and ownership received by a repository as a gift rather than a purchase. This deed is an *Instrument* that documents the voluntary transfer of items between the entity owning the property and the institution receiving the property.

**Dehumidification:** The use of equipment or chemicals to reduce the relative humidity of a location. In an ideal environment, temperature and humidity should remain constant once appropriate levels are reached. In drier climates, documents may undergo the process of humidification rather than dehumidification as a way of restoring moisture levels.

**Degaussing:** The act of erasing or randomizing magnetic signals on electronic media so that the content can no longer be read, played, or accessed. Examples include formatting disks and applying electrical currents to audio or videocassettes.

**Description:** Explaining the holdings of a collection during or after *Arrangement* so that it may be identified, managed, and located. This requires that the archivist analyze the contents of the collection, organize information about the materials, and record information in a way that encourages and enhances access.

**Diazo Film:** Film used for duplication of microfilm that provides a use copy rather than a preservation copy; copies are often made from a *Silver Gelatin Film* master.

**Digital Surrogate:** Unlike Born Digital documents, these items were originally created in a non-digital format and were scanned or digitized. For example, a handwritten letter or a photographic image derived from film, if digitized, would be Digital Surrogates.

**Digitization:** The process by which items in analog format are transformed into digital (or electronic) versions.

**Diplomatics:** An area of forensic inquiry that studies the *Provenance*, creation, and distribution of items to determine their authenticity. Used primarily with handwritten documents, this area of study attempts to confirm or deny whether the document is what it purports to be. Documents proven to be false through diplomatics include the supposed “Hitler Diaries” that a person “found” in the early 1980s. Shortly after their “discovery,” they were condemned as forgeries.

**Dispersal:** A way of protecting documents by placing copies of the originals in remote or offsite storage so that if a disaster destroys the originals, authentic copies remain available.

**Disposal Microfilming:** Use of microfilming so that authentic copies may be made and originals may be destroyed. This often occurs with government records. Many libraries also purchase microfilm reels of newspapers and discard original paper copies.

**Disposition:** The act of transferring or destroying *Noncurrent Records* in accordance with an *Appraisal* of their legal, statutory, or permanent value. Many records have a disposition date set by a *Records Schedule*.

**Dissemination Information Package (DIP):** In the Open Archival Information System (OAIS) model, this package includes one of more Archival Information Packages received by the consumer (the end-user) as a result of their request to the OAIS. See also: *Submission Information Package* and *Archival Information Package*.

**Document:** Something with recorded information, regardless of the format or characteristics.

**Documentation Strategy:** A plan by creators, managers, archivists, and even users to make determinations of what types of events should be documented, understanding the problems and limitations (such as space) in documenting events, and attempting to assure that the materials will be available in a retrievable format.

**Encapsulation:** The placement of documents in a clear plastic and inert envelope, usually after deacidification. Encapsulation occurs when the envelope or clear plastic sheets are sealed in a way that the document can later be removed from the hermetically sealed encapsulation without damage (unlike *Lamination*).

**Encoded Archival Description (E.A.D):** A way of describing archival materials and collections (and their finding aids) by using Extensible Markup Language (XML).

**Enduring Value:** The *Archival Value* of materials justifies their long-term preservation.

**Ephemera:** Documents with a short-term or immediate value.

**Ephemeral Value:** Items have immediate or short-term importance, but not long-term significance (Post-It notes, grocery store receipts, many fliers and promotional materials).

**Evidential Value:** The value of documents in proving or describing the activities and functions of the creator—how the items provide evidence of the nature and work of the creator.

**File:** An organized unit of materials, such as a folder of documents.

**Finding Aid:** A tool that describes a collection. It may take the form of a paper guide, a handwritten inventory, a digitized index, or other format that enhances access to materials.

**Fiscal Value:** The value of records to provide present or historical evidence of fiscal, business, and financial activities.

**Fonds:** The collective body of materials created (and accumulated) by a person or entity in response to their activities or functions.

**Frozen Records:** Items that cannot be destroyed according to the *Records Schedule* because of exceptional circumstances (court order, hold order, pending litigation, etc.).

**Fumigation:** The act of exposing documents to gas or vapors (usually in an airtight setting) to remove pests or abate mold growth.

**Functional Sovereignty:** A way of extending the principle of *Provenance* by taking into account the links of records or items not only to the creating agency, but also to a controlling agency or successive agency that may have taken on the responsibilities at a later time. For example, records created by the Immigration and Naturalization Service may now carry functions under the Department of Homeland Security's Office of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services after its creation in 2003.

**Holdings:** A statement or measurement of the totality of documents in the custody of a place.

**“Hollinger” Box:** A document box or container. Similar to the phrase “Xerox copy” in which Xerox refers to a specific business, Hollinger refers to a company (Hollinger Metal Edge) that makes archival containers. In common parlance, the phrase “Hollinger box” does—by extension—refer to acid-free archival containers constructed by other companies as well.

**Illuminated Manuscript:** A *Manuscript* that includes ornamental drawings or decorations, sometimes along with paintings. This term often refers to medieval manuscripts with such items.

**Inclusive Dates:** The actual beginning and ending dates for documents within a collection. This will sometimes be equal to but usually larger than the *Bulk Dates*.

**Informational Value:** The research and reference value of documents to provide information desired by the researcher regardless of their evidential value. For example, a death certificate provides evidential value of a person's death; however, a genealogist may locate information

about the parents of the deceased from that document even if the researcher has no interest in the person who actually passed away.

**Ingest:** In the Open Archival Information System (OAIS) model, this is the point at which information packages are submitted to the system. They will go through Data Management and Archival Storage and may be accessed by users of the system.

**Instrument:** A document that provides evidence of an act or agreement, such as a contract.

**Intellectual Control:** Acquiring or creating documentation (such as a *Finding Aid*) that allows others to access the information contained within records or document.

**Intrinsic Value:** The document's inherent value based upon its age, condition, and other factors. For example, an original document signed by a governor and an exact photocopy of the document possess the same *Informational Value*; however, the original has a higher intrinsic value because of the authentic signature and original letterhead.

**Inventory:** A *Finding Aid* describing materials at a higher level (usually at the *Series* level) with only brief explanation of origin or purpose of records as opposed to detailed (*Item* level) listings.

**Item:** The smallest indivisible unit (a single letter, photograph, or other "thing"). Items are assembled and organized into distinct *Series*.

**Lamination:** The process involves placing a fragile or damaged document between two sheets of material. In most cases, it refers to the process of thermoplastic lamination, a process that uses heat to fuse and permanently encase an item within plastic film. Archivists generally avoid this practice because it alters the physical state of the document and is irreversible without causing permanent damage or destruction to the item. *Encapsulation is preferred* and can be reversed by simply opening the encapsulated envelope and removing the document.

**Lateral File:** A file that stores records from side-to-side instead of front-to-back (which is a *Vertical File*).

**Legal Value:** The value of an item to provide evidence of past, present, or future legal business.

**Maceration:** A means of destroying documents by soaking them in liquid, sometimes referred to as pulping.

**Manifest:** A list, invoice, or record of items or people (such as materials shipped by freight or passengers on an airplane). Genealogists find these sources to be very helpful.

**Manuscript:** Refers to handwritten or typed documents, though documents created on a typewriter or similar device are more appropriately known as "typescripts."



**Manuscripts:** In the plural form, this refers to a body of documents or items that are primarily in the manuscript format, through other items (photographs, broadsides, etc.) may be part of a manuscript collection.

**Marginalia:** Notes or information placed on the margins of a document, such as notes a reader makes along the margins of pages in a book. Marginalia may decrease the value of the item if they diminish the integrity. It may also increase the value if the notes are placed there by a notable individual (i.e., marginalia by famous authors on books they read during their lifetimes).

**Medium:** The physical material that includes information or provides a place to record information, such as paper, film, diskettes, videocassettes, or *Parchment*.

**Memorandum:** A document with information for use within an organization. In the legal sphere, a memorandum refers to a document that supports a legal activity or court proceeding.

**Metadata:** Data that describe data.

**Noncurrent Records:** Records that the creator no longer requires to conduct their affairs.

**Office of Origin:** The body or unit that creates or compiles records used in the conduct of their affairs or business. This may be different than the *Controlling Agency*.

**Official Record:** A record that possesses authority and legal standing. In court proceedings, it may be used to establish factual evidence.

**Open Archival Information System (OAIS):** an archival entity that includes organizational structure of people and systems (processes and technical infrastructure) that has accepted the task of preserving information for one or more designated communities.

**Original Order:** The principle that materials from a single source or origin (*Provenance*) should, whenever practicable, retain the arrangement devised or imposed by the creator “to preserve existing relationships” and “evidential significance.” Where no logical original order exists, one may be imposed.

**Paleography:** The study of ancient writings (sometimes applied to medieval or more recent writings and script as well) to interpret and ascertain their meaning.

**Palimpsest:** Paper, parchment, or other material with writing in which things have been written more than once, with earlier writing partially visible. Examples include documents where original written content was partially erased or covered over, but fragments remain visible.

**Paper:** A physical medium for communication made from pulped cellulose (usually wood fibers).

**Papyrus:** An early physical medium used by Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans to record information, one that was made by soaking, forming, and drying certain water plants.

**Parchment:** Animal skin used as a writing material. Sometimes this term is used interchangeably with *Vellum*.

**Personal Papers:** Private items and documents collected by, created by, or belonging to an individual that have a *Disposition* under the control of that individual.

**Pertinence, Principle of:** Generally discarded principle that claims the best way to arrange archival materials is by their content rather than their *Provenance* or *Original Order*. An example of using the Principle of Pertinence would be if a repository selected similar items from a variety of sources and kept them together as a distinct unit while destroying evidence of their pedigree, historical ownership, or previous arrangement scheme.

**pH:** In general form, the chemical measurement of the acidity or alkalinity of *Paper* on a scale of 0 to 14, with 7 representing a neutral point. Values less than 7 are acidic; values greater 7 are alkaline. In applied chemistry, one may encounter pH values below zero.

**Phased Preservation:** A broader approach to *Preservation* that focuses on the big picture of trying to stabilize the holdings of a repository rather than focusing resources on individual *Items*. This involves developing preservation priorities, focusing on environmental controls, and putting together a disaster plan that considers priorities for various events (i.e., floods, fires).

**Physical Control:** The part of *Administrative Control* concerned with the quantity and location of materials in a *Records Center* or archival setting.

**Preservation:** All facets of preserving, stabilizing, and protecting documents from deterioration. This includes transferring information to another medium, such as preservation microfilming or preservation photocopying.

**Preservation Description Information (PDI):** In the Open Archival Information System (OAIS) model, this is information that accompanies an Archival Information Package that provides metadata and information for accessing the contents of the archived items. PDI may include the original software used to create the AIP, the version or release, and similar information that may be helpful to access the content in its original format or an appropriate emulation. See also: *Submission Information Package*, *Archival Information Package*, and *Dissemination Information Package*.

**Preservation Metadata: Implementation Strategy (PREMIS):** An international group concerned with core standards for metadata standards, guidelines, and use practices in digital archives.

**Proceedings:** Records of transactions or business that takes place in a meeting or conference.

**Process Control:** The part of *Administrative Control* concerned with what actions take place on documents in the custody of the *Repository*.

**Producer Archive Interface Method Abstract Standard (PAIMAS):** A standard in digital archives that provides a framework for the creator/curator by creating a checklist to formalize interactions, that outlines issues that may require negotiation or further discussion, that stresses the importance of validation or a review of any anomalies discovered, and that emphasizes understanding the nature of the relationship of the creator-curator to the system.

**Provenance:** The person, place, or thing that created, maintained, or used records before transferring them to an archives or *Records Center*.

**Provenance, Principle of:** The practice of keeping records or materials of the same pedigree or *Provenance* together and of not intermingling them with other materials. Often referred to as "*Respect des fonds*," this fundamental principle governs archival practice to keep items of different origins separated from one another to preserve their context.

**Public Records:** Documents created or acquired by government agencies for use in the course of public business. Some public records are closed to public inspection due to their sensitive nature or statutory exemptions. Chapter 119 of the Florida Statutes deals with public records.

**Reading Room:** The area of the repository where researchers or patrons examine archival records or documents under staff supervision. Although reading rooms represent a space where members of the general public may inspect items or documents, all repositories impose specific security measures and establish policies governing access.

**Reappraisal:** The act of reviewing archival or record holdings to determine if materials should be kept, weeded, deaccessioned, or transferred. Sometimes this is known as "retention review," because the staff makes a professional assessment (review) of what materials should be retained.

**Record:** A document created or received in a transaction or as a matter of business.

**Record Group:** A body of records that share a similar organizational pedigree and *Provenance*. For example, a university archives may organize documents by record groups related to various offices (i.e., RG 300: Academic Affairs Office).

**Records Center:** A place to store *Semicurrent Records* that may not require regular, immediate access but are not yet scheduled for disposal or transfer. These storage facilities provide an economical location to keep records, but often lack the levels of security and environmental controls found in archival repositories.

**Records Management Liaison Officer (R.M.L.O.):** The point person for an institution, office, or administrative unit that serves as a contact between that entity and the *Records Center* or archives. The R.M.L.O. often coordinates the transfer of records to the archives.

**Records Schedule:** This document describes the types of records created, their lifecycle, and how they should be discarded, destroyed, or transferred. For example, some records may only need to be retained until all audits are completed; others (such as birth and death records, academic transcripts, and legal instruments) have *Enduring Value* of permanent significance.

**Register:** A list of entries, often compiled in a bound volume.

**Replevin:** The legal means by which an entity attempts to recover materials they own.

**Repository:** A place where documents or items reside.

**Reprographics:** A broad name for the process of copying documents or information from documents.

***Respect des Fonds:*** See *Provenance*.

**Retention:** The period of time that records should be kept (that usually corresponds with the period during which records are current or semicurrent) before such materials are destroyed, disposed of, or transferred to offsite storage or an archival *Repository*.

**Reversibility, Principle of:** In preservation and treatment of materials, the belief that nothing should be done to a document or an item that cannot be undone, if necessary. For example, archivists may use *Encapsulation* to protect fragile documents, but never the irreversible process of *Lamination*.

**Safety Film:** A more stable medium than *Cellulose Nitrate Film* that is less flammable.

**Scope and Content(s) Note:** A narrative describing and summarizing the types of materials, their function, their characteristics, and their possible value to the researcher as a source.

**Semicurrent Records:** Records used infrequently that may be placed in offsite storage or a *Records Center* to create more space in a facility.

**Series:** Materials or documents arranged in a file system or as a unit because of the manner in which they were obtained or received. They often have an organic relationship or similar form and function to other items in the same series.

**Silver Gelatin Film:** Sometimes referred to as “silver halide film,” this film may be considered an archival medium if produced, exposed, processed, and stored in appropriate conditions.

**Sizing:** A process that adds substances to paper to make it suitable for printing or holding ink.

**Subgroup:** An accumulation of related records within a *Record Group*. Sometimes subgroups occur as subdivisions of an office; at other times, they represent divisions by time period, geographical location, function, or type of material.

**Submission Information Package (SIP):** In the Open Archival Information System (OAIS) model, this package contains information that the producer submits to OAIS as part of the Ingest process. See also: *Archival Information Package* and *Dissemination Information Package*.

**Subseries:** Documents within a series that are filed by type, content, or format.

**Thermography:** The process of using heat to make a photocopy, such as the creation of overhead transparencies.

**Transcript:** A verbatim written, typed, or printed version of something spoken (such as an oral history interview), or the exact copy of a text. In some cases, a summary or abbreviated transcript may be used to provide excerpts rather than the full text.

**Transfer:** The act of changing the physical custody of records or documents, with or without changing legal title of ownership.

**Transmittal List:** A document that clearly lists the items transferred to a *Records Center* or an archival repository. If signatures or an authority statement are included, the list may also call for a change in legal custody as well as physical location.

**Trusted Digital Repository:** A digital repository that is OAIS compliant, has appropriate levels of Administrative Responsibility, possesses Organizational Viability and Financial Sustainability, assures Technological and Procedural Suitability and System Security, all of which are reinforced by Procedural Accountability.

**Unit of Description:** The archival entity (*Fonds, Record Group, Collection, Series, Item*) at which a descriptive record is created.

**Vacuum Drying/Vacuum Freeze Drying:** A recovery process for treating documents exposed to water.

**Valuation:** Assessing a fair-market monetary value for items.

**Vellum:** Often used interchangeably with *Parchment*, this refers to animal skin (usually calfskin) used either as a writing medium or a binding.

**Vertical File:** A file that stores records from front-to-back instead of side-to-side (which is a *Lateral File*).

**Vesicular Film:** A film used for creating copies from other films, but not copies of archival quality.

**Vital Record:** Records or documents that contain essential information to re-establish an entity after a disaster by providing documentation of legal, financial, and other essential functions.

**Vital Statistics:** Of people, *Vital Records* kept by governmental authorities (such as marriage records, birth certificates, and death certificates) to provide evidence of existence.

**Watermark:** A translucent mark or image on paper used either for decoration or authentication.

**Working Papers:** Documents, including rough drafts and notes, created and used to help prepare other documents (such as final reports or drafts).

Source Consulted:

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