

Arranging & Describing Archives & Manuscripts

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The Context and Significance of Arrangement & Description

The first section should give the reader a sense of what archival arrangement and description is, why it is so important, and how it came to be what it is today. Basic terminology will be introduced, but not examined with any intensity. This section, perhaps twenty percent of the narrative, will either (1) provide the reader with everything she wants to know or (2) leave her with a foundation to understand and apply what follows in the rest of the book.

Its Purpose

The first chapter sets the stage for everything that follows by grounding the reader in the “meaning” of it all--what is it and why do we bother to do it, given that it requires so much of our overall resources. Important terminology will be introduced in a basic way and readers will begin to see arrangement and description within the broader sphere of archival work.

A Summary Overview

Why do Archivists Arrange and Describe Their Collections?

Relationships to Other Archival Functions

A Brief History of Archival Arrangement and Description

A concise history of arrangement and description practices will demonstrate not only the long sequence of methods, but also innovative responses to social changes and disruptive innovations. This sets the stage for envisioning arrangement and description as flexible practices that adapt to changing structures, audiences, and technologies. And who is it for?: the history and context will help to elucidate the changing nature of audiences for archival information.

The Pre-modern World Through the Nineteenth Century

The Impact of Explosive Growth in the Twentieth Century

Arrangement and Description in the Twenty-First Century

Core Concepts and Principles of Arrangement & Description

This section will emphasize at some length those few principles and concepts that are truly *core*

to the activities of arrangement and description. It is possible that the number of subsections will increase because the concepts need to be handled as discretely as possible to preserve clarity for the reader. Diagrams and tables will be necessary to help achieve this clarity. After this section of the work, the reader should be adequately prepared to move into the actual practices, procedures, and tools that comprise the day-to-day work of processing archival collections.

The Archival Hierarchy and Levels of Description

This chapter will explain the basic principles of the whole and its parts in archives as they affect arrangement and description. It will also treat the important relationship between physical arrangement and intellectual description, and explain the divergences of archival approaches to arrangement and description from those followed in the library and museum communities.

Provenance, Original Order, and the Archival Whole

Five Fundamental Levels of Control

The Relationship of Description to Arrangement

Archival Control vs. Library and Museum Control

Context vs. Content in Archival Description

A key concept in archival description, which holds much promise for future applications, is that of the bifurcated nature of archival description.

Describing the Creator

Describing the Records

Preservation and Use

This chapter will explain the preservation/conservation function as it relates to archival processing. It will also focus on use as the ultimate goal for preservation and processing activities, and strategies to facilitate discovery and access via description.

Preservation as a Processing Function

Use as a Processing Mission

Publishing Descriptions

Unsettled Ground

This chapter will briefly look at some of the challenges and disputes surrounding current approaches to arrangement and description that any novice practitioner needs to be aware of.

“MPLP” and the Introduction of Pragmatic Approaches

Structured Description in a Searchbox Age

The Impact of Digitization on Description and Access

Implementing a Program of Arrangement & Description

The third section will be the lengthiest of the three. It will move fairly sequentially through all of the activities that comprise the work that might be applied to any given archival collection. It will require a very practical narrative approach to avoid becoming abstract and unhelpful. It might be workable to define some hypothetical collection, and then carry it through the sequence to its conclusion.

It is possible that some of these chapters might split as they are written. And most will probably acquire subsections.

Accessioning

Accessioning will be treated as the bridge between acquisition and processing, and will separate into donation-focused and processing-focused activities and data elements.

Defining the Project and Creating a Workplan

Then comes the rather large area of deciding on the level and intensity at which processing will occur, the deliverables and deadlines, and the plan of work which will be followed.

Physical Arrangement and Preservation

How do you decide how to optimize the clarity of arrangement, given that you have already determined the “level” of processing you will employ? Then, tips and tricks for performing physical arrangement actions, including conservation treatment activities.

Describing the Materials

How do you actually use description to *represent* the physical arrangement? What does intellectual arrangement mean, and how do you do that? How much verbiage is the right amount? How do you use vocabulary to improve access? Do you prepare catalog records separate from the finding aid? How do you separate the description of context, from that of content?

Publishing for Discovery and Access

Here is where we discuss the nature and basic creation of networked finding aids, focusing especially on EAD, but also considering how EAD outputs (or any other outputs) might be generated--as documents, from a database structure, etc.

Digitization

How might you use digitization to facilitate use and to enhance the user experience? Single digitization? Digitization of iconic items or popular series? Mass digitization? This chapter will focus on the decision-making and will certainly not get into any of the mechanics.

Appendices

Please list any appendices you are considering for inclusion (e.g. recommended readings), in simple bullet form:

- Appendix 1: *Tools*: Standards, Best Practices, and Technologies
- Appendix 2: Glossary of Arrangement and Description Terminology
- Appendix 3: Finding Aid Examples (illustrative snips, not full texts)
- Appendix 4: Recommended Reading (organized by function or topic)