"PastPerfect-ion" : Optimizing PastPerfect for Archival Description

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http://hsp.org/hcipsar

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Overview

Among the most significant differences between archival work and museum or library work is archivists' focus on *collections* versus individual *objects*. Where a museum professional catalogs items and a librarian catalogs each copy of a book, an archivist catalogs a body of papers. There are several important reasons for this. The main reason has to do with context and provenance: documents all created by one entity relate to each other, and there is value in maintaining the original context so that researchers can see how those documents are related. Another important reason is expediency: such a huge quantity of important documents exists in archives that taking the time to exhaustively catalog lots of individual documents would mean leaving other documents completely un-described. Moreover, it is easier to summarize available resources to researchers when the materials can be grouped into a finite number of describable units, or collections.

Because PastPerfect is primarily designed for use by museums, it has an item orientation that does not lend itself to archival description. However, PastPerfect does have an archival description module (the "Archives Catalog"), that can effectively describe archival collections if utilized properly. This manual will guide you through optimal processes for describing archival collections in PastPerfect, based on two central tenets of archival cataloging theory:

1. **Hierarchical description**. All of the archival materials at a repository should be logically grouped into collections, which will serve as the main unit for description. Archivists try to follow the principles of "provenance" and "original order," although these guiding principles may not apply in the small repository context. However you define your collections, make sure that each has its own record in your catalog system (PastPerfect). Sub-units within each collection (series, subseries, files, items) may also be defined and described as desired.

2. **Metadata standards**. Metadata means "data about data," and in this context refers to the types of descriptive information that should be supplied (e.g. a collection's title, date range, language of materials, and so on). Archivists' adhere to the standards set by *Describing Archives: A Content Standards* (*DACS*), a manual published by the Society of American Archivists. Whatever format you use for your "finding aid" or collection description—a simple word-processed document, a web format like HTML, or PastPerfect—following DACS's principles and rules will help ensure that your description contains the information researchers need.

Hierarchical Description

Principles of Provenance and Original Order

The principle of provenance dictates that documents created by different entities should be kept in distinct collections according to creator. Do not divide or disperse collections based on other factors, do not add materials from other creators into collections, and do not co-mingle materials from various

creators. A corollary to the principle of provenance is that of original order, which dictates that, to the extent possible, materials be kept in the order in which their creator kept them. However, the archivist's principal duty is to render archives accessible and useable. In cases where there is no discernible original order, or if the original order is impractical, it is necessary to impose an order on materials in order to facilitate their use. Archivists must use their judgment in determining when and how to impose an order on a collection.

Principles of Hierarchical Organization and Description

If a collection is complex, archivists identify logical groupings of materials within the whole: series, subseries, and files into which individual items are organized. Archival description should summarize the entire body of a collection, and it may also (but need not) exist at lower levels in the organizational hierarchy. This is called multilevel description. Descriptions given at higher levels are assumed to be valid at lower levels unless otherwise specified. For example, unless the date range of a series is indicated, it is assumed that the date range of that series is the same as the range for the whole collection.

Metadata Standards

Describing Archives: A Content Standard (*DACS*), a manual published by the Society of American Archivists, provides recommendations for what types of information ("metadata") should be given about archival collections. Nine metadata fields, listed below, are required by *DACS* to meet minimum standards for archival description. Many additional optional metadata fields are defined in the *DACS* manual, and of these HCI-PSAR staff recommend eight metadata fields. If you participated in the HCI-PSAR project, you can find the information for most of the 17 metadata fields below in your HCI-PSAR Final Report. Then it is a simple matter of copying the information from your report into PastPerfect and adding to it. If you did not participate in HCI-PSAR, or if you have acquired a new collection since the project ended, you can improve the quality of your collections descriptions by including the fields given below.

The Metadata Matrix in the next section summarizes the required and recommended metadata fields, and identifies the locations where the fields can be found in the HCI-PSAR finding aids and in PastPerfect.

DACS-Required Metadata for Describing an Archival Collection

1. Collection number/ID—A code or number that uniquely identifies the collection should be used to label the finding aid and corresponding boxes (or even folders and items in the collection). Most small archives use the accession number.
2. Name of repository
3. Title of collection
4. Dates of collection
5. Extent (size) of collection – Usually measured in cubic feet or linear feet (the length of shelf space taken up by the collection)

6. Name of creator – The person(s), family(ies), or organization(s) responsible for the creation or accumulation of the materials.
7. Scope and contents note – Describe the types of materials and range of subjects covered by the collection.
8. Conditions governing access – If there are any restrictions on access, such as patient records unavailable to researchers or private letter restricted by the donor for 20 years, note them.
9. Language of materials

Recommended Additional Metadata Fields

10. Source of acquisition – The donor or source of the collection and the approximate year it was acquired.
11. Biographical/historical note – Provide brief background about the collection's creator or major subjects.
12. Subjects – "Access points," or keywords and names associated with the collection.
13. Shelf location
14. Related archival materials
15. Other finding aids – Note if there is a card catalog, paper inventory, or other aid to help navigate the collection. If the collection was included in HCI-PSAR, write the URL to the online finding aid. (Visit http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/pacscl/index.html, find the collection, and use the finding aid's permanent URL from the "Summary Information" section.)
16. Cataloger – Name the person or people who cataloged/described the collection and the approximate date (usually year and month or months) they did so.
17. Condition—Notes on the condition of the collection should not be publicly available, but you may wish to keep track of any potential preservation issues or concerns for your own reference.

Metadata Matrix

Element	Description/Notes	Location in HCI-PSAR finding aid	Location in PastPerfect
DACS required metadata			
1. ID	*DACS* required. A code or number that uniquely identifies the collection should be used to label the finding aid and corresponding boxes (or even folders and items in the collection). Most small archives use the accession number.	n/a	Top of all views > "Object ID"
2. Site	*DACS* required. The repository where the collection is held.	Cover page	Customize when installing PastPerfect
3. Title	*DACS* required. Collection title.	Cover page and Summary Information	Top of all views > "Collection" ; Archive view > Identity Statement tab > "Title"
4. Dates	*DACS* required. The dates when materials in the collection were created.	Cover page and Summary Information	Top of all views > "Date" and "Year Range" ; Archive view > Identity Statement tab > "Dates of Creation"
5. Size	*DACS* required. The extent (size) of collection is usually measured in cubic feet or in linear feet (the length of shelf space taken up by the collection).	Cover page and Summary Information	Archive view > Identity Statement tab > "Extent and Medium of the Unit of Description (Quantity, Bulk, or Size)"
6. Creator	*DACS* required. Name the person(s), family(ies), or organization(s) responsible for the creation or accumulation of the materials.	Summary Information	Archive view > Context tab > "Name of Creator"
7. Scope and Content	*DACS* required. Describe the types of materials and range of subjects covered by the collection.	Scope and Content Note	Archive view > Identity Statement tab > "Scope and Content / Abstract"; Archive view > Context tab > "Scope and Content / Abstract";
8. Access	*DACS* required. If there are any restrictions on access, such as patient records unavailable to researchers or private letter restricted by the donor for 20 years, note them.	Administrative Information	Archive view > Conditions of Access and Use tab > "Conditions Governing Access"

9. Language	*DACS* required. Language of materials	Summary Information	Archive view > Conditions of Access and Use tab > "Language/Scripts of Material"
Recommended additional metadata			
10. Source	Suggested. Name the donor (or other source) of the collection and the approximate year it was acquired.	Administrative Information	Source view
11. Bio	Suggested. Provide a biographical or historical note with brief background about the collection's creator or major subjects.	Biographical / Historical Note	Archive view > Context tab > "Administrative / Biographical History"
12. Subjects	Suggested. Keywords and names ("access points") associated with the collection.	Controlled Access Headings	People - Subjects Classification Search Terms view
13. Location	Suggested. Shelf where the collection is stored.	Summary Information	Top of all views > "Home Location"
14. Related	Suggested. Mention related archival collections at other repositories.	Related Materials	Archive view > Allied Materials tab > "Associated Materials in Other Repositories"
15. Finding Aids	Suggested. Mention other versions of finding aids, and if it is online, include a link. For collections surveyed during HCI-PSAR, visit http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/pacscl/index.html, find the collection, and use the finding aid's permanent URL from the "Summary Information" section.	Permanent URL on PACSCL finding aid website	Archive view > Conditions of Access and Use tab > "Finding Aids"
16. Cataloger	Suggested. Name of the cataloger and cataloging date	Cover page	Top of all views > "Catalog Date" and "Cataloged by"
17. Condition	Suggested. If the collection was surveyed during HCI-PSAR, you may wish to include the "Explanation of Scores" from its Assessment Report	Assessment Report > "Explanation of Scores"	Condition view > "General Condition Notes"

Inputting Descriptions into PastPerfect

The most important unit of archival organization is the collection, and every collection in your repository should have a catalog record in PastPerfect. PastPerfect provides two options for describing materials below the collection, but in either case you should begin by creating a record for the collection as a whole. Another option is to create a finding aid in another program, such as Archivists' Toolkit or a word processor, and then link it to the basic collection description in PastPerfect. This manual will guide you, step-by-step, through the process of creating a collection level record in PastPerfect that incorporates all the *DACS*-required and suggested fields (enumerated in the [Metadata Matrix](#)).

Next, this manual will discuss the options for describing series, files, or even individual items from the collection under the top-level record ([Lower-Level Description](#)).

Creating the Collection-Level Record

Step 1: Add New Catalog Record

Choose the "Archives" catalog from your home screen on PastPerfect. PastPerfect offers two options for hierarchical description, but we will return to this choice shortly. You will start by entering collection-level description. Inside the archives catalog, click "Add" from the top row of buttons. In the new window that pops up, enter the collection number/ID (*DACS* requirement #1). Remember, this is a unique number or code that you will use to identify the collection, usually the accession number. Next, under "Enter Object Name," write "Collection." Leave the other options on default, and click "Add New Record." An alert will pop up to tell you that "Collection" is not in the object names lexicon. Choose "Save Record with this Unclassified Name" to continue.
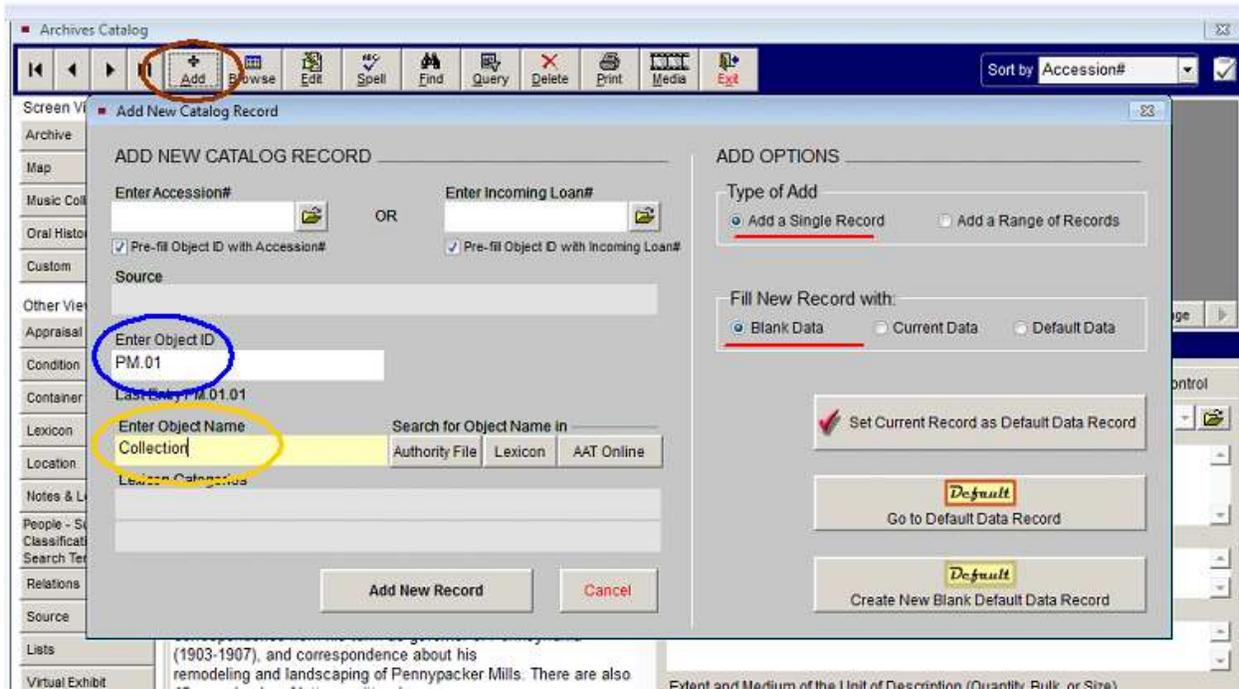
Step 2: Basic Information (top of all views)

A page will now open in the "Archive" screen view with the "Identity Statement" tab open. At the top of the page, the object ID and object name will automatically populate. Fill in additional fields at the top of the page: collection title (*DACS* requirement #3) next to "Collection" and collection dates (*DACS* requirement #4) next to "Date" and "Year Range." You may also choose to enter your information as the cataloger and specify the "Home Location" of the collection (if you are working from an HCI-PSAR finding aid, you fill find location on the "Summary Information" page).

Step 3: Archive view, Identity Statement tab

After you have filled out the top of this page, look at the fields in the "Identity Statement" tab on the bottom half of the page. Some of the information you need to enter here will duplicate information from the top half of the page: select "Collection" from the drop-down menu for "Multilevel Linking Level of Description," repeat the collection title under "Title," and the collection dates under "Dates of Creation." Then, enter the size of the collection (*DACS* requirement #5) under "Extent and Medium of the Unit of Description (Quantity, Bulk, Size)." You can measure extent in cubic feet (add together the volume of each box) or in linear feet (measure the length of shelf space necessary to store the whole collection, or the thickness of horizontally filed materials).

Step 4: Archive view, Context tab

After you have completed the fields in the Identity Statement tab, open the Context tab. When you click on the "Scope and Content/Abstract" box, it will auto-fill with the note you already inputted on the previous screen. Next, enter the creator of the collection (*DACS* requirement #6) next to "Name of Creator." If you are transferring data from an HCI-PSAR finding aid, you will find this on the Summary Information page. Then, enter the biographical/historical note (suggested #7).

Step 5: Archive view, Conditions of Access and Use tab

Now click on the Conditions of Access and Use tab. First, enter the "Conditions Governing Access" (*DACS* requirement #8). If there are any restrictions on access, such as patient records unavailable to researchers or private letter restricted by the donor for 20 years, note them. Or, you may enter something simple and generic such as "Contact [Your Repository Name] for information about accessing this collection." If you are working from an HCI-PSAR finding aid, you will find an access statement on the Administrative Information page.

Enter "Language/Scripts of Material" (*DACS* requirement #9). In most cases, it will simply be "English."

If desired, you may enter information about other finding aids—such as a card catalog or a paper inventory—that describe the collection. If the collection was surveyed during HCI-PSAR, you should include a link to the online finding aid on the PACSCL finding aid site. Visit http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/pacscl/index.html, find the collection, and use the finding aid's permanent URL from the "Summary Information" section. You may simply enter the URL. Or, if you have PastPerfect online and would like there to be a clickable hyperlink in the online record, enter the URL coded in HTML as shown below.

Click here for finding aid

will display in the report and in PastPerfect online (if you have it) as

Click here for finding aid.

Step 6: Archive view, Allied Materials tab

If there are other archival materials related to this collection (suggested #14) you may wish to note them in PastPerfect. Click the Allied Materials tab in the Archive View. If you are working from an HCI-PSAR finding aid, look for the Related Materials section. (There may not be such a section if no related collections were identified by Surveyors.)

Step 7: Condition view

Notes on the condition of the collection (suggested #17) should not be publicly available, but you may wish keep track of any potential preservation issues or concerns for your own reference. If the collection was surveyed during HCI-PSAR, use the "Explanation of Scores" from its Assessment Report. Choose the Condition view from the "Other Views" options in the left panel of PastPerfect, and enter your notes under "General Condition Notes."

Step 8: People – Subjects Classification Search Terms view

Associating keywords, subject terms, and names ("access points"; suggested #12) can make it easier to browse collections and find related materials. If working from an HCI-PSAR finding aid, look under Controlled Access Headings. Enter "Personal Name(s)" "Corporate Name(s)" and "Family Name(s)" from the finding aid into the "People" section of PastPerfect, and "Geographic Name(s)" and "Subject(s)" from the finding aid into the "Subjects" section of PastPerfect.

Step 9: Source view

Choose the Source view from the "Other Views" options in the left panel of PastPerfect and enter the immediate source of acquisition (suggested #12) under "Source." If you are working from an HCI-PSAR finding aid, look in the Administrative information section.

Lower-level description

Sometimes a collection-level record is not enough to describe the contents of a collection. You may wish to describe the folders in a collection individually, or to break down the collection into a more structured hierarchy with series, subseries, folders, and even items. PastPerfect has two options for lower-level description. One option is to create a container listing as part of a collection record. The advantage to this approach is that it is simpler and more straight-forward. However, it has two major disadvantages: (A) You can only describe one level below the collection—box names *or* folder titles *or* items—and cannot create a further hierarchy; and (B) The available data fields are limited to: location, container, folder, title, description, date, creator, and subjects.

The second option is to separate catalog records in PastPerfect to describe lower levels within the hierarchy, and then link them back to the collection-level record. This is a better choice if you wish to create a multi-tiered hierarchy, or if you wish to include many kinds of metadata for lower levels in the hierarchy. If you have already cataloged items from a collection in PastPerfect, this method will allow you to associate those existing catalog records with the collection-level record. (Unfortunately, this will only work if items are cataloged in the Archives Catalog, not the Objects, Photo, or Library Catalogs.)

A third option is to create a finding aid in another program, such as Archivists' Toolkit or a word processor, and then link it to the basic collection description in PastPerfect. After finding aids have been created in another program, it may seem superfluous to duplicate some of the information in PastPerfect. However, if PastPerfect is your primary collections management system, it is important to have all the necessary data in one place.

Step-by-step instructions for both the Container List and Linked Records options, as well as information on linking to an External Finding Aid, are given below.

Container List option

This option, as explained above, offers the advantage of being simpler than linking records, but it only allows you to describe one level of hierarchy and the metadata options are not as robust. If you wish to create a multi-tiered hierarchy, would like to describe items from the collection in great detail, or already have catalog records in PastPerfect for items from the collection, see the Linked Records option below.

To proceed with this option, choose the Source view from the "Other Views" options in the left panel of PastPerfect. Click on the "+" button to add a new container.

On the pop-up window that next appears, enter the desired information and click "Save."

Then click "Add" to input another entry or "Close" to return to the main view. Remember that to return to this edit view later on, if you wish to edit or delete container entries at any time, you can click on the open folder button (next to the plus button) from the main Container List view.

Linked Records option

If you wish to create a multi-tiered hierarchy, would like to describe items from the collection in great detail, or already have catalog records in PastPerfect for items from the collection, the linked records option is best for you. If you wish to go with a simpler method to create a single-level list in the collection, try the Container List option above.

With the linked records option, you can catalog lower levels in the hierarchy—such as a series, or a folder, or an item—in the same manner you just cataloged a collection. Save the collection record you have been working in (the alert will pop up again to tell you that "Collection" is not in the object names lexicon, but you can choose "Save Record with this Unclassified Name" to continue) and click the plus button to start a new record.

If you would like a refresher on creating records, return to the instructions above on how to Add New Catalog Record. (Remember to stay within the Archives Catalog. You can create "relations" between collections in the Archives Catalog and records in the Photos, Objects, or Library Catalogs, but you can't establish a hierarchy and they won't print with the rest of the collection report.) When choosing an Object ID, a multi-part Object ID system is recommended to keep related items together. If a collection is numbered "PM.01," for example, a series within the collection might be numbered "PM.01.A," a sub-subseries "PM.01.A.IV," a folder "PM.01.A.IV.f21," and an item, "PM.01.A.IV.f21.18."

For the Object Name, enter the unit level (e.g., "Series," "Sub-series," "File") or, if you are describing a particular item, you may enter the genre/form of the item (such as "Photograph" or "Letter"). "File" is already in PastPerfect's lexicon, as are many item genre/forms, but the unit levels "Series" and "Sub-series" are not. Do not worry if an alert pops up to tell you that "Series" is not in the object names lexicon. Just choose "Save Record with this Unclassified Name" to continue.

Use as many fields as you would like to describe the photograph, letter, folder, or series, or whatever unit you are working on. You do not need to fill in all of the *DACS*-required metadata fields because the record will be linked up to the collection-level catalog record you already created. In fact, it is better to *not* repeat information that is the same at the higher level (such as Access Conditions, Language, and Creator). In most cases it is sufficient to record simply the Title and Dates, plus the Object ID and Object Name (auto-filled from the previous screen). Do not forget to also fill in the Collection name at the top of the screen; this will make it easier to see all parts of the collection in the browse view.
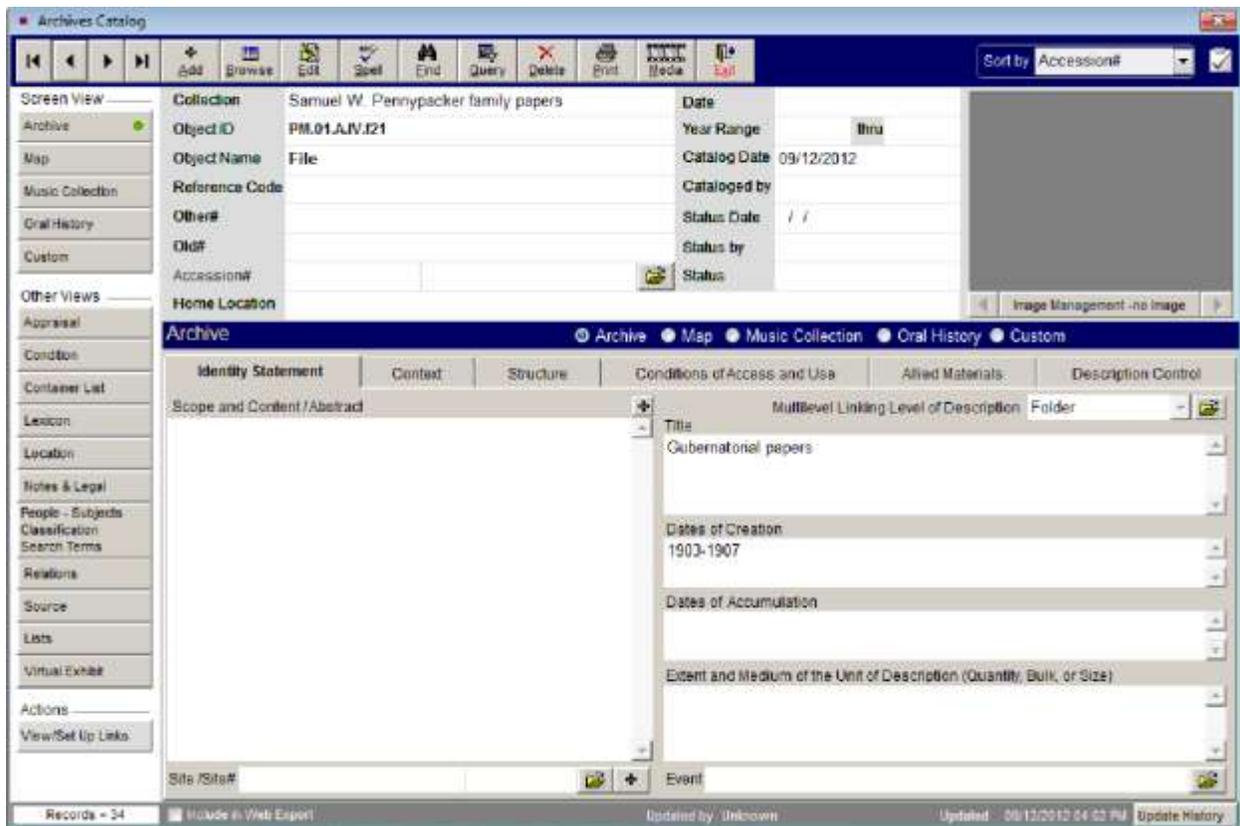
If you wish, you may add lots of extra information: a scope/content note that describes in greater detail this particular unit (rather than the whole collection), special access restrictions on sensitive materials, or appraisal of a valuable item, for example.

After you are finished cataloging the sub-unit at hand, save the catalog record.

PastPerfect only allows linking up through hierarchy, so make sure you are on the lower-level catalog record (the one you just created) to link it up to the collection. If you would like to create multiple hierarchy levels, start in the lowest level: after you have created records for items, series, and the collection, link each item record up to a series record and then link the series records up to the collection record.

To link a record up to a higher level, follow these instructions:

1. After you have saved the (lower-level) record, on the Archive View, Identity Statement tab, select a "Multilevel Linking Level of Description" from the drop-down menu for the record you are currently in. Save to continue.

2. Click on the folder button next to the "Multilevel Linking Level of Description" to open the "Multilevel Linking" pop-up form.

3. Click the "Add Link" button.

4. Type in the Object ID for the record you want to link to.

5. Click "Exit" to finish.

External Finding Aid option

If neither of the options for lower-level description in PastPerfect sound appealing, another option is to make a finding aid in an external program and then link or refer to it in a collection-level record PastPerfect. It may seem redundant to repeat the finding aid information in PastPerfect, but it is important for collections management purposes to have one database where you can track of all your holdings.

You can create a finding aid in a variety of formats, depending on your preference. You may wish to make a document in a word processor (such as Microsoft Word). That will give you the freedom to include any information in whatever layout you would like, although it is recommended that you follow an archival processing manual. Good references include Kathleen D. Roe's *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts* (Archival Fundamentals Series II; Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), David W. Carmicheal's *Organizing Archival Records: A Practical Method of Arrangement & Description for Small Archives* (2nd edition; Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), or Yale University-Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library's *Archival Processing Manual* (1997; http://www.library.yale.edu/beinecke/manuscript/process/index.html).

You may wish to download Archivists' Toolkit (http://www.archiviststoolkit.org/). It is a free program for managing and describing archival collections. Many professional archives utilize because it is easy to use and outputs finding aid reports in PDF, web-ready HTML, and EAD (the standard interoperable format for archival description). More information about Archivists' Toolkit, including instructions for installation and use, is available on their website at http://www.archiviststoolkit.org/. HCI-PSAR staff also recommend the manuals produced by Holly Mengel and Courtney Smerz, *Hidden Collections Processing Project Guide to the Archivists' Toolkit* (March 2012; http://clir.pacscl.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/PACSCL_Archivists_Toolkit_Guide.pdf) and *Installing the Archivists' Toolkit and MySQL and Connecting the Two* (http://clir.pacscl.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/install_MySQL_AT.pdf).

After you have finished your finding aid in another program, create a collection-level record in PastPerfect according to the instructions laid out above (see Creating the Collection-Level Record). Then, attach a copy of the finding aid to the collection-level record in PastPerfect. You can attach a PDF, HTML, Word DOC, and/or another format with the "Media" button at the top of the record.

1. Click "Media" from the top row of buttons in the Archives Catalog.
2. An "Add Multimedia Link Wizard" window will pop up. Click "Next"
3. Select the type of file you would like to attach. Click "Next"
4. Navigate to the file you would like to attach, change the name of the file as desired, and then click "Finish"
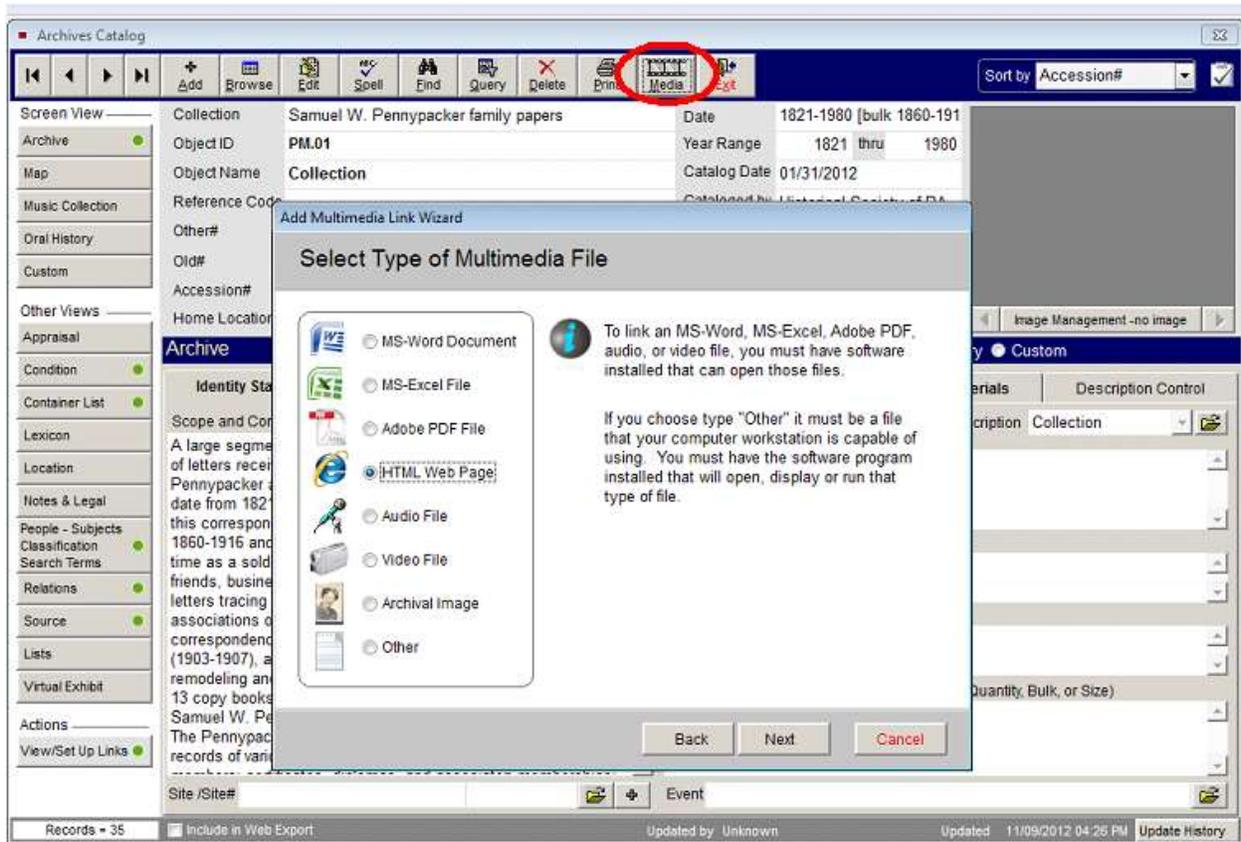
You may also wish to include a reference to the other existing finding aid in the collection record. See "Step 5: Archive view, Conditions of Access and Use tab." If the finding aid has been posted online, write the URL, or simply include a statement such as "A detailed finding aid for this collection is available to on-site researchers" or "A full finding aid for this collection is located in the Library under call number XXXX.XXX.XXX."

Creating Finding Aids (Reports)

PastPerfect allows you to generate a report which can be used as a finding aid for the collection. While viewing the collection record, choose "Print" button from the top bar on your screen. A new window will pop up ("Print Archive Record"). Focus on the box on the right—"Print Record." Make sure that "Archives" is selected and then choose "Print."

If you used the Linked Records option to describe lower levels in the hierarchy (series, subseries, folders, or items), another window will pop up asking if you want to include the related records as part of this finding aid/report. Choose "Yes."

Resources

Archivists' **standards for archival description** are laid out in a manual colloquially known as *DACS*. It explains the types of information recommended for inclusion in finding aids, how to formulate titles and names (e.g. when to say "collection" versus "records" versus "papers"), and general principles for archival description.

> *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007.

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County Special Collections has developed an archival management **workflow that integrates PastPerfect** (they use it primarily for accessioning and collections management) and other access systems (they use a MARC catalog and word-processed finding aids). The manual describing their procedures is available online.

> University of Maryland, Baltimore County Special Collections, Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery. *Archives Processing Manual: Description*. 2010. Accessed September 20, 2012. https://wiki.umbc.edu/download/attachments/11437110/UMBCProcessing_Description.pdf?version=1&modificationDate=1279567785000.

For more information about how to use PastPerfect, consult the **User's Guide** on their website. You may wish to only download the Archives guide, *PP5-8.pdf*.

> Witt, Betsy S., Jennifer C. Whitfield, and Adam J. Stepansky. *PastPerfect Software for Museum Collections, Version 5 User's Guide*, 3rd edition. PastPerfect Software, Inc., 2011. Accessed September 20, 2012. http://www.museumsoftware.com/userguide.shtml.

For **general information about archival description**, many books and manuals are available. Several recommended by HCI-PSAR staff include:

> Roe, Kathleen D. *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts*. Archival Fundamentals Series II. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005.

> Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. *Archival Processing Manual*. 1997. Accessed September 20, 2012. http://www.library.yale.edu/beinecke/manuscript/process/index.html

> Carmicheal, David W. *Organizing Archival Records: A Practical Method of Arrangement & Description for Small Archives*, 2nd edition. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004.

If you are considering **switching archival management software**, consult the Council on Library and Information Resource's 2009 report for more information about the advantages and disadvantages of the many available options.

Spiro, Lisa. *Archival Management Software: A Report for the Council on Library and Information Resources*. Council on Library and Information Resources, 2009. Accessed September 20, 2012. http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/spiro/.