

Guidelines for Standardized Holdings Counts and Measures for Archival Repositories and Special Collections Libraries

Introduction

Archivists and special collections librarians are becoming increasingly mindful of the need to gather, analyze, and share evidence concerning the value of the collections we hold, the effectiveness of the operations we manage, and the impact of the services we provide. The absence of commonly accepted definitions, metrics, guidelines, and best practices, however, has impeded our ability to undertake meaningful assessment activities and to engage in productive, cross-repository conversations about our collections, operations, and services.

In recognition of this two-pronged challenge, SAA and ACRL/RBMS jointly constituted a task force and charged it with developing guidelines that will provide metrics, definitions, and best practices for quantifying the holdings of archival repositories and special collections libraries. The guidelines to be developed should consider and address both the wide range of types and formats of material typically held and the different ways collection material is described and managed. The guidelines should also accommodate both basic and advanced counts or measures, and include recommendations for institutions that wish to engage in collections assessment. With this charge in mind, we took the following approach to our work.

We identified eight categories or types of collection material for which we would develop guidelines for quantifying holdings.

- Archives and Manuscripts (described and managed as collections)
- Manuscripts (described and managed as items)
- Books and Other Printed Material
- Cartographic Material
- Graphic/Visual Material
- Moving Image Material
- Objects/Artifacts
- Sound Recordings

We articulated three types of counts or measures that are appropriate for and relevant to the quantification of holdings information.

- Intellectual Units Held (titles or title-equivalents)
- Physical Units Held (volumes, sheets, audio cassettes, film reels, etc.)
- Space Occupied (linear feet, cubic feet, or gigabytes)

We considered the need to distinguish the following:

- Material described and managed at the collection level from material described and managed at the item level.
- Material that is described online and therefore discoverable from material that is not [yet] described online or discoverable.

We then turned our attention to that aspect of our charge that calls for us to articulate an approach to the quantification of holdings that would accommodate both basic and advanced counts or measures. What follows are our recommendations regarding a basic or "Level 1" count.

The Level 1 Count

The Task Force is proposing a Level 1 count that consists of the following counts and measures:

- Titles/title equivalents representing collection material described and managed at the collection level that is described online/discoverable, by category/type of material.
- Titles/title equivalents representing collection material described and managed at the item level that is described online/discoverable, by category/type of material.
- Physical space occupied by collection material that is described online/discoverable, by category/type of material, in cubic or linear feet as appropriate.
- Digital space occupied by collection material that is described online/discoverable, by category/type of material, in gigabytes.

The above can be summarized as follows.

1. Count intellectual units held. When counting intellectual units held

- count only collection material that is described online (in a catalog record or finding aid, or by way of a website) and therefore discoverable.
- distinguish collection material that is described and managed at the item level from collection material that is described and managed at the collection level.

2. Measure space occupied. When measuring space occupied

- measure only space occupied by collection material that is described online and therefore discoverable.
- distinguish between physical space occupied and digital space occupied.

We would like to draw your attention in particular to the following regarding the proposed Level 1 count.

Collection material that is not described online is not counted. "Described online," however, is intended to be interpreted very broadly as "any description of collection material that can be discovered by way of the web." As such, "described online" extends well beyond catalog records and finding aids to include a wide range of web content (blog posts, online exhibits, databases, lists of collections, etc.) as well as web-accessible content (documents, spreadsheets, etc.).

Physical units held (volumes, sheets, audio cassettes, film reels, etc.) are not counted, nor are the containers (boxes, drawers, etc.) in which collection material is held. A container count may be useful -- and used -- for purposes of calculating cubic or linear feet.

Please also note the following regarding space occupied.

- Collection material occupies physical space or digital space (not both).
- Physical space occupied is
 - reported in cubic feet for all categories of material except Books and Other Printed Material.
 - reported in linear feet for Books and Other Printed Material (only).
- Digital space occupied is reported in gigabytes.
- Convert linear feet to cubic feet and cubic feet to linear feet as necessary for reporting purposes.

More About the Level 1 Count

We are not recommending any methods or even best practices regarding the “hows” of counting or measuring. Our focus has been on developing and promoting a common language for sharing information about holdings rather than on prescribing a methodology for obtaining that information. We have striven to accommodate the wide variety of repositories and libraries that make up the SAA and RBMS memberships, and to account for the many differences among them, especially those having to do with local practices (for accessioning, describing, and managing collection material); available resources (for counting, measuring, generating reports, etc.); and existing systems and sources of information (including integrated library systems, content management systems, databases, and archival collection management systems).

A variety of methods exist for obtaining the counts and measures that are called for in the Level 1 count. These include

- generating a report (from a catalog, database, archival collection management system, etc.)
- doing an actual/physical count/inventory (of containers, volumes, items, etc.)
- getting an actual/physical measurement (of floor, shelf, online, etc. space occupied)
- tracking and tallying (accretions, additions, deaccessions, withdrawals, etc.)

Finally, we are proposing the following regarding surrogates, derivatives, and titles held in multiple copies.

- Surrogates and derivatives (digitized or microfilmed content, photocopies, access copies, etc.) of intellectual units held are not counted.
- Decisions regarding titles held in multiple copies are to be made at the discretion of the reporting institution. If it is preferable (because each copy held is considered unique or important for some reason) and/or practical or convenient (because of how the copies are described), the holding institution can report each copy held as a separate title.

Looking Ahead to a Level 2 Count

Our current thinking is that the Level 2 count will complement and expand upon the Level 1 count by including the following:

- Counts and measures for collection material that is not yet described online.
- Counts of physical units held (volumes, sheets, audio cassettes, film reels, etc.) and of the containers (boxes, drawers, etc.) in which collection material is held.

02_Reporting (Level 1 Count)

	Intellectual Units	Space Occupied	
		Physical Space Occupied	Digital Space Occupied
Archives and Manuscripts (managed as collections)			
described online/discoverable	titles/title equivalents	cubic feet	gigabytes
not [yet] described online/discoverable	[optional]	[optional]	[optional]
Manuscripts (managed as items)			
described online/discoverable	titles/title equivalents	cubic feet	gigabytes
not [yet] described online/discoverable	[optional]	[optional]	[optional]
Books and Other Printed Material			
described online/discoverable and managed at the item level	titles/title equivalents	linear feet	gigabytes
described online/discoverable and managed at the collection level	titles/title equivalents		
not [yet] described online/discoverable	[optional]	[optional]	[optional]
Cartographic Material			
described online/discoverable and managed at the item level	titles/title equivalents	cubic feet	gigabytes
described online/discoverable and managed at the collection level	titles/title equivalents		
not [yet] described online/discoverable	[optional]	[optional]	[optional]
Graphic/Visual Material			
described online/discoverable and managed at the item level	titles/title equivalents	cubic feet	gigabytes
described online/discoverable and managed at the collection level	titles/title equivalents		
not [yet] described online/discoverable	[optional]	[optional]	[optional]
Moving Image Material			
described online/discoverable and managed at the item level	titles/title equivalents	cubic feet	gigabytes
described online/discoverable and managed at the collection level	titles/title equivalents		
not [yet] described online/discoverable	[optional]	[optional]	[optional]
Objects/Artifacts			
described online/discoverable and managed at the item level	titles/title equivalents	cubic feet	n/a

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02_Reporting (Level 1 Count)

	Intellectual Units	Space Occupied	
		Physical Space Occupied	Digital Space Occupied
described online/discoverable and managed at the collection level	titles/title equivalents	cubic feet	n/a
not [yet] described online/discoverable	[optional]	[optional]	n/a
Sound Recordings			
described online/discoverable and managed at the item level	titles/title equivalents	cubic feet	gigabytes
described online/discoverable and managed at the collection level	titles/title equivalents	cubic feet	gigabytes
not [yet] described online/discoverable	[optional]	[optional]	[optional]

Categories/Types of Collection Material

The definitions and scope statements presented below are intended to be suggestive as opposed to prescriptive. They are also intended to encompass all content manifestations -- analog, digital, and microform -- of the category or type of collection material.

The actual categorization of existing bibliographic, archival, and other descriptions and representations of collection material will vary, in some ways significantly, from one repository to another. Each repository will have to determine, based upon a variety of factors including the nature and scope its collections and the granularity of available information, how collection material is to be categorized for purposes of preparing a Level 1 holdings count. Regardless of how a repository chooses to categorize its collection material, consistency in the application of categories is critical to producing a meaningful count of intellectual units held and how much physical or digital space they occupy.

Archives and Manuscripts (Managed as Collections)

Definition: Materials created, assembled, or received by a person, family, or organization (including the holding institution itself) that are described and managed at the collection level.

Scope: Includes organizational records, personal and family papers, and collections of mixed material in which unpublished materials predominate.

Manuscripts (Managed as Items)

Definition: Unpublished, primarily textual, usually handwritten or typed material that is described and managed at the item level.

Scope: Manuscripts may take the form of fragments, scrolls, codices, or single or multiple sheets, and are usually produced on papyrus, parchment, or paper.

Books and Other Printed Material

Definition: Materials produced for distribution and intended to be read.

Scope: Materials included in this category are frequently printed on paper but may be printed on other substances, such as parchment or cloth. Most materials in this category are textual, but the category also includes works that present non-textual content in book form.

Cartographic Material

Definition: Representations of the whole or part of the Earth or another celestial body.

Scope: Cartographic material includes maps, globes, and geographic information systems (GIS) data.

Graphic/Visual Material

Definition: Materials that communicate primarily visually, rather than textually.

Scope: Includes opaque and transparent formats including those intended to be projected.

Moving Image Material

Definition: Materials onto which a sequence of images has been recorded that creates the illusion of continuous movement when projected, broadcast, or played back.

Scope: Moving image materials exist in a variety of formats and include film, video, and interactive games that are predominantly comprised of moving images.

Objects/Artifacts

Definition: Material things that can be seen and touched.

Scope: Natural objects, artifacts (objects intentionally made or produced for a certain purpose), and three-dimensional works of art.

Sound Recordings

Definition: Materials onto which sound has been recorded.

Scope: Sound recordings exist in a variety of formats and contain spoken words, performed music, and other sounds.

Examples

The thirty-six examples presented below are intended to be illustrative as opposed to prescriptive. They are provided to show how the repository holding the collection material would categorize its description of it for purposes of preparing a Level 1 holdings count. Nineteen of the examples are accompanied by an explication that explains why the repository holding the collection material has categorized it as it has. The links lead to the catalog record, finding aid, or website in which the collection material is described.

Archives and Manuscripts (Managed as Collections)

Title: [Alice P. Broudy Papers on Broudy v United States](#)
Physical Description: 38.77 Cubic Feet (86 boxes)

Title: [Occupy Philadelphia Records](#)
Physical Description: 19 linear feet (11 boxes) and 41 gigabytes

Explication: The holding institution has categorized this collection of mixed material as "Archives and Manuscripts (Managed as Collections)." It would count as one title in that category. The physical space occupied by the 11 boxes of collection material would be included in the holding institution's report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Archives and Manuscripts (Managed as Collections);" the 41 gigabytes would be included in the holding institution's report of digital space occupied by "Archives and Manuscripts (Managed as Collections)."

Title: [Eesti NSV Riikliku Julgeoleku Komitee records, 1932-1991](#)
Physical Description: 16,010 gigabytes (6501 digitized file units)

Manuscripts (Managed as Items)

Title: [Letter, \[1609 Aug.\] to Sermo Principe \[i.e., Leonardo Donato, Doge of Venice\]](#)
Physical Description: 1 p. In portfolio.

Title: [Niagara Falls travel diary](#)
Physical Description: 1 volume

Explication: The holding institution has created an item-level description for this manuscript. It would count as one title in the "Manuscripts (Managed as Items)" category. The physical space occupied by the volume would be included in the holding institution's report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Manuscripts (Managed as Items)."

Title: [Treatise on the accurate marking of quadrants](#)
Physical Description: 1 v. ([8] p.) : ill. ; 21 cm.

Books and Other Printed Material

Described and managed at the item level:

Title: [The works of Lord Byron : in four volumes](#)
Physical Description: 4 volumes, [4] leaves of plates : illustrations, portrait ; 15 cm.

Explication: The holding institution has created an item-level description for this multipart monograph. It would count as one title in the "Books and Other Printed Material (Described and Managed at the Item Level)" category. The physical space occupied by the four volumes would be included in the holding institution's report, in linear feet, of physical space occupied by "Books and Other Printed Material."

Title: [The diabolical evolution of the chicken](#)
Physical Description: [20] unnumbered pages : color illustrations ; 15 x 15 cm.

Title: [The Philadelphia directory and register](#)
Physical Description: xii, 234 p., [1] leaf of plates : ill. ; 22 cm. (8vo)

Explication: The holding institution has created an item-level description for this directory, which it would categorize as "Books and other Printed Material (Described and Managed at the item Level)." The catalog record includes copy-specific notes describing the variances among the five copies of this title that are held. Because this particular holding institution considers each copy held unique, or important for some reason, it would -- if it can easily do so -- count this as five titles rather than one title. A different holding institution might, based on preference or convenience (or both), consider this one title and report it as such. In both cases, the physical space occupied by the five volumes would be included in the holding institution's report, in linear feet, of physical space occupied by "Books and Other Printed Material."

Title: [Necessary disclosures](#)
Physical Description: 1 ball-shaped bookwork ; 6.5 cm in diameter to 9 cm in diameter.
1 plastic box ; 10 x 10 x 10 cm
1 sheet ; 10 x 10 cm

Explication: The holding institution has created an item-level description for this artists' book, which is in the form of a round fiber ball within a plastic box, with several stacked "pages" within the ball. Despite its non-codex form, the holding institution would count this as one title in the "Books and Other Printed Material (Described and Managed at the Item Level)" category, as it does all artists' books regardless of form. The physical space occupied by the box would be included in the holding institution's report, in linear feet, of physical space occupied by "Books and Other Printed Material."

Described and managed at the collection level:

Title: [Menus : Michigan : Box M120](#)
Physical Description: 28 items

Explication: The holding institution has created a collection-level description for these menus. Although the catalog record includes a significant amount of item-level information, the fact that these 28 items are represented by a single record compels this particular holding institution to consider the material "described and managed at the collection level" and to count it as one title in the "Books and Other Printed Material (Described and Managed at the Collection Level)" category. The physical space occupied by the box of menus would be included in the holding institution's report, in linear feet, of physical space occupied by "Books and Other Printed Material."

Title: [YMCA pamphlet collection](#)
Physical Description: 14 cubic feet (approximately 2100 pamphlets)

Title: [Hoover Institution Library Pamphlet Collection](#)
Physical Description: 54,787 pamphlets

Cartographic Material

Described and managed at the item level:

Title: [Duche de Bretagne / dessigné par le Sieur Hardy](#)

Physical Description: 1 map ; 36 x 49 cm.

Title: [Hoover Dam and vicinity](#)

Physical Description: 1 map ; 54 x 43 cm folded to 22 x 10 cm

Explication: The holding institution has created an item-level description for this map. It would count as one title in the "Cartographic Material (Described and Managed at the Item Level)" category. The physical space occupied by the map would be included in the holding institution's report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Cartographic Material."

Described and managed at the collection level:

Title: [\[A collection of 16 maps regarding seal hunting rights in the Bering Sea\]](#)

Physical Description: 16 maps on 11 sheets : some color ; sheets 76 x 99 cm or smaller.

Title: [15 minute series \(topographic\) Nevada](#)

Physical Description: 475 maps : col. ; 45 x 35 cm

Explication: The holding institution has created a collection-level description for this set of maps and would count it as one title in the "Cartographic Material (Described and Managed at the Collection Level)" category. The physical space occupied by the maps would be included in the holding institution's report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Cartographic Material."

Graphic/Visual Material

Described and managed at the item level:

Title: [The Colorado and Southern Railway Company genesis : as of June 30, 1918](#)

Physical Description: 1 technical drawing : ink. on paper ; 1 sheet 61 x 143 cm.

Title: [Adenauer : photographic portfolio](#)

Physical Description: 1 volume (1 album box) (0.4 linear feet)

Explication: The holding institution has created an item-level description for this portfolio. Because it consists entirely of photographs, the holding institution considers it "Graphic/Visual Material (Described and Managed at the Item Level)" and would count it as one title in that category. The physical space occupied by the album box would be included in the holding institution's report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Graphic/Visual Material."

Described and managed at the collection level:

Title: [Francis E. Stafford Photographs](#)

Physical Description: 3 oversize boxes (1.2 linear feet)

Title: [\[Postcards of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad\]](#)
Physical Description: 9 postcards : col. ; 14 x 9 cm.

Title: [YMCA lantern slide collection](#)
Physical Description: 1727 slides and 9 volumes (31 boxes)

Explication: The holding institution has created a collection-level description for these lantern slides, which are accompanied by some textual material. For this particular holding institution, it would count as one title in the "Graphic/Visual Material (Described and Managed at the Collection Level)" category, and the physical space occupied by the boxes in which the material is stored would be included in the holding institution's report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Graphic/Visual Material." A different holding institution might consider this "mixed material" and count it as "Archives and Manuscripts (Managed as Collections").

Title: [Jamey Stillings Photographs](#)
Physical Description: 285 digital files

Explication: The holding institution has created a collection-level description for these digital photographs. Although the photographs are described individually in the finding aid, the 285 files are managed as a collection and would count as one title in the "Graphic/Visual Material (Described and Managed at the Collection Level)" category. The digital space occupied by the files would be included in the holding institution's report, in gigabytes, of digital space occupied by "Graphic/Visual Material."

Title: [Warren D. Segraves Architectural Drawings, 1953-1976](#)
Description: 265 project drawings

Explication: The holding institution has created a collection-level description for these architectural drawings. It would count as one title in the "Graphic/Visual Material (Described and Managed at the Collection Level)" category. The physical space occupied by the drawings would be included in the holding institution's report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Graphic/Visual Material."

Moving Image Material

Described and managed at the item level:

Title: [Silver spike ceremony on the Union Pacific Railroad branch line from Las Vegas to the Boulder City townsite \[videorecording\] : September 17, 1930](#)
Physical Description: 1 videocassette (ca. 8 min., 50 sec.) : si., b&w ; 1/2 in.

Title: [A is for atom B is for bomb](#)
Physical Description: 1 videotape cassette

Explication: The holding institution has created an item-level description for this recording of moving image material. It would count as one title in the "Moving Image Material (Described and Managed at the Item Level)" category. The physical space occupied by the videocassette would be included in the holding institution's report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Moving Image Material."

Described and managed at the collection level:

Title: [Special events videotapes of the Boston Medical Library, 2000-2014 \(inclusive\)](#)
Physical Description: 8 VHS videotape cassette recordings and two DVD recordings in 2 letter size document boxes and 1 VHS videotape cassette recording in 1 letter size document box. 2 DVD recordings in 1 half letter size document box.

Explication: The holding institution has created a collection-level description for these moving image materials. It would count as one title in the "Moving Image Material (Described and Managed at the Collection Level)" category. The physical space occupied by the boxes in which the materials are stored would be included in the holding institution's report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Moving Image Material."

Title: [Herman Axelbank motion picture film collection](#)
Physical Description: 271 motion picture film reels, 1 oversize box (27 linear feet)

Objects/Artifacts

Described and managed at the item level:

Title: [Pocket watch purported to belong to John Collins Warren \(1778-1856\)](#)
Physical Description: Pocket watch, chain, key, and leather pouch purported to belong to John Collins Warren (1778-1856) and gifted via the family line of his daughter, Mary C. Warren (1816-).

Explication: The holding institution has created an item-level description for this artifact. It would count as one title in the "Objects/Artifacts (Described and Managed at the Item Level)" category. The holding institution would include the physical space occupied by the box in which pocket watch and other items are stored in its report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Objects/Artifacts."

Title: [Penn's Desk](#)
Physical Description: [secretary desk made in London circa 1710]

Explication: The holding institution's description of a secretary desk formerly owned by William Penn is discoverable by way of a webpage and would count it as one title in the "Objects/Artifacts (Described and Managed at the Item Level)" category. The holding institution would include the physical space occupied by the desk in its report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Objects/Artifacts."

Described and managed at the collection level:

Title: [Brotherhood of America Medals](#)
Physical Description: [ten medals]

Title: [YMCA Archives memorabilia collection](#)
Physical Description: Approximately 1600 items in 164 boxes

Explication: The holding institution has created a collection-level description for these artifacts. It would count as one title in the "Objects/Artifacts (Described and Managed at the Collection Level)" category. The holding institution would include the physical space occupied by the boxes in which the memorabilia are stored in its report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Objects/Artifacts."

Sound Recordings

Described and managed at the item level:

Title: [Interview with Elizabeth D. Hay, M.D., 02 April 1991](#)

Physical Description: 1 audio cassette and 1 folder in 1 half letter size document box.

The holding institution has created an item-level description for this sound recording, which is accompanied by a transcript. For this particular holding institution, it would count as one title in the "Sound Recordings (Described and Managed at the Item Level)" category, and the physical space occupied by the document box would be included in the holding institution's report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Sound Recordings." A different holding institution might consider this "mixed material" and count it as "Archives and Manuscripts (Managed as Collections)".

Title: [Home means Nevada \[sound recording\] : folklife in the Silver State](#)

Physical Description: 1 sound cassette (76 min.) : analog, mono. + program (4 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.)

Described and managed at the collection level:

Title: [Said Hyder Akbar Sound Recordings](#)

Physical Description: 1 manuscript box (0.4 linear feet) (17 cassettes and 25 MiniDiscs)

Title: [George T. Chandler Sound Recordings](#)

Physical Description: 1 manuscript box (0.4 linear feet)

Explication: The holding institution has created a collection-level description for these sound recordings. It would count as one title in the "Sound Recordings (Described and Managed at the Collection Level)" category. The physical space occupied by the manuscript box would be included in the holding institution's report, in cubic feet, of physical space occupied by "Sound Recordings."