

Guidelines 2 - Glossary of Archival terms

Access: Terms and conditions of granting permission to use archives and collections in a repository; access may be restricted in some instances because of confidentiality, the fragile state of the documents or statutory Requirements e.g. public Records Acts.

Accession: A *group* of records taken into a *repository* from the same source at the same time; the process of taking in such material.

Acquisitions/collecting policy: The official statement issued by a repository identifying the types of archival material it will collect or acquire and the terms and conditions under which it will do so.

Appraisal- archives: The selection of records for permanent preservation as archives by analysing their value or potential value as archival material.

Appraisal- records management: Assigning a value to records which helps to decide how long they should be retained.

Archival value: The value, evidential and/or informational, which justifies the permanent retention of records as archives .

Archive: An accumulation of *records/documents* with a common *provenance*.

Archives: Those *records/documents* created in the normal course of the life of an institution, family or individual, regardless of medium, selected for permanent preservation due to their continuing informational, evidential or historical value as primary source material

Arrangement: The organisation of archival material according to archival principles of *provenance* and original order; where the latter does not exist the archivist will devise an arrangement based on the perceived inter-relationship of the *documents*.

Bibliographic description: Information about books and other published materials which librarians devise in their cataloguing activity in order to identify and locate items.

Calendar: A descriptive list in date order of the documents in an *archive*; to make such a list.

Cataloguing: The process of *arrangement* and *description* of *archives* to produce a structured *list* or catalogue, usually prefaced with an outline history of the *documents* and their originator/s, which enables *users* to locate the documents they need.

Classification: The process of assigning to information a system of appropriate grouping, naming, security protection, user permissions and searching, which aids identification and retrieval.

Description: Information about the type, content and date of *documents* .

Destruction: Final action carried out on inactive records which have been appraised as having no continuing value. Secure destruction should be either by shredding or incineration.

Disaster: A sudden and negative event that damages some or all archival *holdings* and interferes with normal services and programs of the archives: may also harm1 organisation's property and interfere with business activities.

Disposal: Decision about the final fate of records, either *destruction* or permanent preservation.

Document: 1. Similar to record and often used interchangeably. Tends to be evidence of a single transaction, often with strong legal connotations; 2. A single item in a record group

Finding aids: Reference material such as catalogues, *lists* and *indexes* providing information on the records and made available in the *repository*.

Folio: 1. One leaf of a book, of paper or parchment, numbered on the front (*recto*) only; the back is referred to as e.g. f. 10v(*verso*). 2. A large-size paper volume.

Group: A discrete sub-set of an archive e.g. the records of a department within an organisation or the papers of an individual within a family archive

Hardware: physical components of a computer system.

Holdings: The whole of the archival material in a *repository*.

Indexing: Extracting and alphabetising reference terms, e.g. personal names, place names, subjects, from *documents* or *finding aids*.

Information management: A broader professional grouping for all activities and functions concerned with managing information, regardless of its nature or medium. The records management and archives professions fit into this category.

Item: A single indivisible unit within an archive e.g. a letter, a file, a ledger

List: Brief *description* of archives at *group*, *series* or *item* level.

Membrane: A piece of parchment or vellum joined by sewing at the top or bottom to make a roll

Original order: The order in which records were kept when in active use by their creators; the archivist aims to maintain or recreate this when cataloguing, unless it is been irretrievably lost or never existed i.e. documents were randomly collected.

provenance: The source (person or organisation) of origin of the records and their proven custodial history. The archival principle of provenance requires that archives from different sources should not be intermixed.

Records: Information by-products (regardless of form or medium) of organisational and social activity, providing evidence of single or serial transactions and functions. Not all records become *archives*.

Records management: The discipline and function of designing and implementing systems to effectively and economically manage the creation, maintenance, retrieval and disposal of records, regardless of medium, in accordance with legal, professional, ethical and cultural considerations.

Repository: The institution or building where archival material is stored and/or made available to researchers.

Retention schedules: Lists of the series of records produced by an organisation indicating the length of time for which they must be retained before disposal.

Series: Documents forming an entity within an archive or group e.g. minute books, out-going correspondence, clinical records.

Search Room User: Any member of the public who is allowed access to the *repository* and its *holdings*.

Vital records: Those records, regardless of medium, which are essential to the organisation in order to continue with its business-crucial functions both during and after a *disaster*. They need not be permanent, might be active or inactive, originals or copies.

Copies of this Guideline may be obtained from the British Records Association, c/o Finsbury Library, 245 St John Street, London EC1V 4NB. it is issued free, but donations to help our work are greatly appreciated.

Registered Charity no. 227464/ACL