

Session seven: Arrangement

INFO 7401 Archival Appraisal, Arrangement, and Access





Chaos

The diagram features a solid black arrow pointing from the bottom-left towards the top-right. The arrow is set against a solid blue background. Along the path of the arrow, the word "Chaos" is positioned at the start, and the word "Order" is repeated three times at progressively higher points along the arrow's trajectory.

Order

Order

Order

Why arrange?

Arthur Harris Friedman Papers, The
LGBT Center Archives

Intellectual control

The establishment and maintenance of documentation that describes and accommodates access to the informational content of archival resources.

Arrangement

The process of organizing materials with respect to their provenance and original order, to protect their context and to achieve physical or intellectual control over the materials.

59. In charting a map of the sexual categories and meaning systems operative in the early twentieth century, moreover, I do not mean to ascribe to those maps a regularity, clarity, and certainty they did not possess. As Bourdieu has argued (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 2, 37–38), the very act of drawing a map covers up irregularities in the terrain and implies a kind of predestination to the patterns of social relations that are constantly being negotiated, contested, and reformulated. The maps I sketch here seem to me to have guided the sexual practices of most men, but they sometimes took detours and forged their own paths, and different men followed different maps of sexual meaning. On maps of meaning, see also Stuart Hall, “Culture, the Media, and the ‘Ideological Effect,’” in *Mass Communication and Society*, ed. James Curran et al. (London: Open University Press, 1979).

Arrangement, coupled with description, is how users/researchers are able to **discover, identify, and locate** archival materials relevant to their research successfully.

Provenance

Information regarding the **origins, custody, and ownership** of an item or collection

Original order

The organization and sequence of records established by the creator of the records

Arrangement with respect to original order
presumes such an order is discernible.

**Archivists may arrange such materials in
a way that facilitates their use and
management without violation of any
archival principle.**

“Provenance and original order act less as guidelines to be followed and more as a **conceptual framework for understanding a body of records**, highlighting the knowledge necessary to place and preserve records in context.”

Intellectual arrangement should
reflect context and function of
records.

Function

The activities of an organization or individual performed to accomplish some mandate or mission.

Context

The **organizational, functional, and operational circumstances** surrounding materials' **creation, receipt, storage, or use**, and its **relationship(s)** to other materials.

Establishing contextual information
for arrangement and description

Questions for contextual information:

- Who created the records, how and why?
- What specific function or activity do the records relate to?
- What specific procedure or process gave rise to them?
- How were the records maintained by the creator and/or custodian?
- What are the different record formats?
- What functions did the different record formats each serve in the framework of action within which they participated?

“This contextual information is then used to trace the complicated contours of creatorship **with an eye toward establishing a linkage between the creator and the physical records,** which...is not necessarily a one-to-one relationship.”

“Archival arrangement is essentially a process of identifying relationships, not a process of physically ordering and storing documents.”

Eastwood, T. (2000). Putting the Parts of the Whole Together: Systematic Arrangement of Archives. *Archivaria*, 50, 93-116.

Identify or provide a physical arrangement for the records

Identify the intellectual relationships and arrangement of the records

“Natural units are the basis for organization of archival holdings.”
(Heil 39)

Barbara Rosenthal's Artist Archives

Level of arrangement

The position of an aggregation of archival records within a **hierarchy** of arrangement

Level of arrangement

Traditional levels of arrangement:

- Repository
- Record group
- **Fonds**
 - **Collection**
 - Subgroups
- **Series**
- **Subseries**
- **File**
- **Item**

Fonds

Collection
Papers

The entire body of records of an organization, family, or individual that have been created and accumulated as the result of an organic process reflecting the functions of the creator.

Series

A group of similar records that are arranged according to a filing system and **that are related as the result of being created, received, or used in the same activity**; a file group; a record series.

Subseries

A body of documents within a series readily distinguished from the whole by filing arrangement, type, form, or content.

File

A group of documents related by use or topic, typically housed in a folder (or a group of folders for a large file).

Item

A thing that can be distinguished from a group and that is complete in itself.

An item may consist of several pieces but is treated as a whole. For example, a letter may have several physically discrete pages but is treated as an item because of its content. A decision about the boundaries of an item is sometimes ambiguous; a photograph album may be considered an item, and the individual photographs within the album may also be considered items. Items are generally considered to be the smallest archival unit.

Physical arrangement
does NOT need to
match intellectual
arrangement.

The finding aid can be
used to intellectually
bring together related
material stored in
different containers.

Outcomes of establishing intellectual control

Arrangement supports the **security** and **control** (**accountability**) of archives by identifying and, if appropriate, ordering materials so that they may be described and then safely stored and protected, whether physically in boxes on shelves or electronically in digital storage systems.

Outcomes of establishing intellectual control

Description reveals the content, context and structure of archives, and the actions the archivist has taken to care for them, which **supports their value as evidence** and helps **make them available for use.**

(DACS Statement of Principles)

Outcomes of establishing intellectual control

The descriptive outputs (database entries, finding aids or lists of boxes or files) **demonstrate the work** performed by the archivist to receive, appraise and process materials, holding the archivist and archival institution accountable for their actions and decisions.

