

Session eight: Description principles and standards

INFO 7401 Archival Appraisal, Arrangement, and Access



Description

A set of data crafted to identify and represent an archival resource or component thereof

Description reflects arrangement

Archivists **expose contextual significance** by describing records, agents, activities, and the relationships between them.

DACS Principles of archival description

- Archival description expresses professional ethics and values.
- Users are the fundamental reason for archival description.
- Archival description must be clear about what archivists know, what they don't know, and how they know it.
- Archivists must document and make discoverable the actions they take on records.

DACS Principles of archival description

- Descriptive rules apply equally to all records, regardless of format or carrier type.
- Each collection within a repository must have an archival description.

DACS Principles of archival description

- Archival description is accessible.
- Archival description should be easy to use, re-use, and share.
- Archival description is a continuous intellectual endeavor.
- Archivists must have a user-driven reason to enhance existing archival description.

DACS Principles of archival description

- Records, agents, activities, and the relationships between them are the four fundamental concepts that constitute archival description.

Description standards

Advantages to using description standards:

1. Predictability: data acting in a way that it is expected to or is easy to predict
2. Interoperability: The ability of two or more computer systems or pieces of software to exchange and subsequently make use of data
3. Efficiency: makes it easier/faster to produce intended data
4. Quality: consistently produces good results

What constitutes *archival* description
(as opposed to other kinds of LIS
description)?

Descriptive standard

A collection of rules, practices, and guidelines that codify the kinds and structure of information used to represent materials in a finding aid, catalog, or bibliography.

General International Standard for Archival Description

ISAD(G)

A standard published by the International Council on Archives that establishes general rules for the description of archival materials, regardless of format, to promote consistent and sufficient descriptions, and to facilitate exchange and integration of those descriptions.

Identifies and defines 26 elements that may be combined to constitute the description of an archival entity

Descriptive standard

Essential elements of archival description:

1. Identity
2. Context
3. Content
4. Conditions of access and use
5. Allied materials
6. Notes
7. Descriptive control

How do I write *effective and useful*
archival description?

Content standard

A set of formal rules that specify the content, order, and syntax of information to promote consistency.

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

DACS

Rules maintained by the Society of American Archivists specifying the data elements to be used to represent an archival resource and its components

Controlled vocabulary

(sometimes called a value
standard)

An enumerated list of terms
preselected from natural language
and chiefly used to aid discovery in
information retrieval systems

Art and Architecture Thesaurus

AAT

A controlled vocabulary that includes terms useful for describing and indexing collections of fine art, architecture, decorative arts, archival materials, and material culture

Homosaurus

The Homosaurus is an international linked data vocabulary of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) terms. This vocabulary is intended to function as a companion to broad subject term vocabularies, such as the Library of Congress Subject Headings.

Libraries, archives, museums, and other institutions are encouraged to use the Homosaurus to support LGBTQ research by enhancing the discoverability of their LGBTQ resources.

How is archival description
discoverable?

Data structure standard

A formal guideline specifying the elements into which information is to be organized.

Encoded Archival Description

A standard for encoding descriptions of archival resources in XML so that the descriptions can be exchanged, modified, and rendered by computers.

The Encoded Archival Description (EAD) standard is maintained jointly by the Society of American Archivists and the Library of Congress.

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Description inputs

Authorities

|

Free text

Description outputs

Catalog record

An entry describing a work within a catalog.

Often, finding aids will be in library catalogs as MARC records and will lose the multilevel/contextual information structure of the formal finding aid.

Inventory

A list of materials.

Finding aid

A description that typically consists of **contextual and structural** information about an archival resource.

Finding aids can describe a single level or a single item, or contain many levels of arrangement/description.

ArchivesSpace

An open-source software application for information management in archives.

ArchivesSpace is the joint successor of Archon and Archivists' Toolkit.

