

Appendix C: Cataloging Guidelines

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APPENDIX C: CATALOGING GUIDELINES

A. Overview

1. *What types of guidelines are in this appendix?*

This appendix has recommended guidelines and terms to help you with cataloging your museum collections. It includes information on:

- cataloging component parts, pairs, and sets
- methods of describing objects
- uniform terms to use when describing condition
- measuring and recording dimensions and weight
- cataloging nitrate negatives

2. *Can I use the information in this appendix with all types of collections?*

In general, the guidelines in this appendix apply to cultural resources collections. The guidelines for measuring (Sections E-F) also apply to natural history collections.

The lists and terms in this appendix are by necessity incomplete. Add your own lists and references for descriptions and terms specific to the material in your park's collection.

Refer to Appendix L: Bibliography, in this handbook for references on specific types of objects.

B. Component Parts, Pairs, and Sets

1. *What are component parts?*

Many objects have removable parts. The most common example is a teapot and its lid. Objects with component parts usually meet the following conditions:

- the parts can be physically separated or detached from the object
- the object is more or less incomplete without all of its parts
- the object and its parts were manufactured or made together
- the object name includes its separate parts

A vacuum cleaner with attachments is a good example of an object with component parts. You can separate the attachments from the vacuum cleaner. The vacuum cleaner isn't complete without its attachments. The vacuum cleaner and its attachments were manufactured together. The term "vacuum cleaner" is broad enough to cover the vacuum and its attachments.

2. *How do I catalog objects with component parts?*

Give an object with component parts a single catalog number, and count it as one item. Assign a lowercase letter designator to each removable part. Use the Component Parts field that appears after the Catalog Number field in ANCS+. The component part designators appear after the catalog number. For example, PARK 345 a-f shows that the object 345 has six component parts. You should mark the catalog number and appropriate designator on each part.

The ANCS+ Component Parts supplemental record allows you to list the names of the component parts. Refer to Section III of Chapter 3 in the *ANCS+ User Manual* for information on using this supplemental record.

Don't assign individual catalog numbers to the component parts of an object.

3. *How do I catalog pairs?*

Catalog a matched pair, such as a pair of shoes or matching andirons, with a single catalog number. Give each item a suffix of a or b. Use the Component Parts field that appears after the Catalog Number field in ANCS+. Count the pair as one item. Note in the Description field that the object is a pair. You should mark the catalog number and appropriate designator on each part.

Don't catalog pairs on separate catalog records.

4. *What are sets?*

Sets or kits are groups of objects intended to be used together. The word "set" or "kit" should be part of the object name. A set or kit usually includes different types of items, such as a surgical kit or a manicure set. If objects are the same, such as a set of identical bowls, use lot cataloging. Refer to Appendix I in this handbook for information on lot cataloging.

Note: For history objects, check the ANCS+ controlled table of history terms. This table includes a list of the approved terms that use "set" or "kit" as part of the object name.

5. *How do I catalog sets?*

Give the set or kit one catalog number. Give each removable piece of the set or kit a lowercase letter designator. Use the Component Parts field that appears after the Catalog Number field in ANCS+. You should mark the catalog number and appropriate designator on each part. Count the set or kit as one item.

The ANCS+ Component Parts supplemental record allows you to list the names of the pieces in the set or kit. Refer to Section III of Chapter 3 in the *ANCS+ User Manual* for information on using this supplemental record.

6. *Can I give the pieces of a set separate catalog numbers?*

Yes. You should individually catalog items in a set or kit that are of high value or susceptible to theft. For example, you might assign individual catalog numbers to the items in a Civil War surgeon's kit that is on exhibit.

If you individually catalog the items in a set or kit, be sure to cross-reference between the catalog numbers.

C. Methods of Describing Objects

1. *What's the best way to describe an object?*

There isn't one best way to describe objects. Descriptions depend on the type of material and the subject discipline. For example, archeologists use terms and standard descriptions that are different from descriptions of fine arts material.

The best way to describe the objects in your collection is to be consistent in the terms and methods you use. Set up templates for how to describe the specific materials in your park's collection. Consistency is especially important if you have many different catalogers. It gives you and others better access to data about your collection.

Note: If you are unfamiliar with cataloging, look at the ANCS+ fields and the on-line field help for the discipline you are cataloging. Specialists chose the discipline-specific fields for each discipline. These fields will give you a good idea of the types of information you need to record.

2. *Are there common ways of looking at objects?*

Yes. There are some common methods for looking at objects. Record the distinguishing and significant features. You can learn a lot of information about an object by looking at it. Other types of information, such as the date when an object was made, will require research.

Use the list below as a guide to get you started recording observable data.

Overall Shape/Style	Round, square, rectangular.../ Chippendale, Queen Anne...
Details of Shape	Work from the base to the top or describe it as it's normally described in the discipline.
Manufacturing Techniques	Fired, tanned, coiled ...
Materials	Mention materials if not sufficiently covered in the Medium/Materials field.
Texture	Corrugated, cord-marked...
Color	Reference to the Munsell color chart.
Design Details	Rosette, scroll, cross-hatching...
Condition Features	Point out features that make the object unique, such as "paint peeling" or "foxing".
Marks	Proofmarks, hallmarks, serial numbers, signatures, watermarks in paper, inscriptions.
Labels	Copy any original labels that are attached to the object or labels made with or for the object.

Note: ANCS+ has separate fields for many descriptive elements, such as marks, color, style, and manufacturing technique.

D. Terms for Describing Object Condition

1. *Are there standard terms for describing an object's condition?* Yes. There are standard terms for describing the condition of an object on an object condition report or on the catalog record. Using these terms helps you precisely describe condition and helps other people understand your description.

Note: Conservators may use different terms for describing condition.

2. *Why is it important to be precise when describing condition?* Precise vocabulary allows you to detect changes in the condition of an object from one inspection to the next. For example, condition descriptions, such as “corrosion on tip of blade” or “flaking paint,” may call attention to the need for conservation work.

3. *What are some standard terms for describing condition?* The following list includes terms that will help you with condition descriptions.

Abrasion	A surface loss apparently caused by friction. The loss may be to the substance of the object or to paint or other decoration on it. Often superficial. Related terms: Scrape, Rub.
Accretion	A relatively widespread accumulation of extraneous material adhering to the surface of an object that alters the original texture and usually the color, either generally or locally. Usually tenacious. Often seen on objects that were buried. Related terms: Incrustation, Stain, Spot.
Adhesive Residue	Usually a sticky residue from glue, paste, or tape.
Bleaching	Lightening of color through exposure to light and/or chemical agents.
Bleeding	The suffusion of a color into adjacent materials, usually other colors or a ground. Often caused by water or other solvents. Also refers to the penetration of ink through paper.
Blister	An inflated pocket in a film or layer. A separation between layers that appears as an enclosed, bubbled area. Generally used when describing painted surfaces. A broken blister may result in a rupture.
Bloom	The bluish-white cloudiness often seen on varnished surfaces, especially paintings and wood furniture. Sometimes called efflorescence.
Break	An abrupt, significant change or interruption in a continuous surface. Disruption or total separation of parts, as distinguished from a fracture.
Brittle	Loss of flexibility causing the material, usually thin, to break or disintegrate when bent.
Bronze Disease	Appearance of powdery, light green spots, resulting from exposure to moisture. Attacks copper, bronze, and brass.

Buckling	A distortion of a plane surface caused by shrinkage or compression. A distortion of the flat plane of a painting or other picture often accompanied by a rupture in a paint or ground layer.
Check	A rupture in wood along the grain and less than the length of the piece, usually caused by the drying of wood at an exposed end grain. Checks may appear anywhere along the grain due to surface shrinkage. An incomplete split.
Chip	A small cavity in the surface of an object caused by material that has been broken away. See also: Dent, Dig, Gouge.
Cleavage:	Separation between or in any of the layers in a stratified composition or construction. This term is used primarily when describing oil paintings and refers to separation between paint layers caused by the contraction of the support.
Corrosion	The chemical alteration of metals caused by agents in the environment or by reagents applied purposely. Hard nodules or crusts are formed on metal surfaces. The color and texture of a metal surface may be changed without alteration of the form if there is no increase in the volume of the corrosion products. Rust is the corrosion product of ferrous metals. Tarnish is a corrosion product of silver. Use the general term "corrosion" for all other metals. See also: Incrustation, Efflorescence, Patina.
Crack	A surface fracture or fissure across or through a material. It can be in a straight line or branch. There is no loss to the object. A blind crack stops part way. A hairline crack is a tiny fissure. An open crack is a large fissure.
Crackle	A system or pattern of fracture lines in a painted or varnished surface. Also a system or pattern of fissures, sometimes purposeful, in the glaze of ceramic ware.
Crazing	A very fine system of crackle or cracking in a varnish, paint film, and glass that appears slightly opaque to the eye. It may be found in aged painting films that are very dry and are approaching their final stages of embrittlement. It can powder off. This term also applies to surfaces of old varnished furniture.
Crease	A tightly pressed fold, causing fibers of cloth, paper, or leather to weaken and break.
Cupping	Varnish, paint, or ground that stand as islands with edges lifted and raised away from each other or from lower layers. Strong cupping can distort the support of an oil painting. Related term: Curling.
Delamination	A separation of layers. A type of splitting.
Dent	A surface defect caused by a blow. A simple concavity from which no material is missing. See also: Chip, Dig, Gouge.

Dig	A surface defect caused by a blow. A dig implies that some surface material has been displaced, usually laterally, but that little or no material has been completely removed. See also: Chip, Dent, Gouge.
Discoloration	A partial or overall change in color caused by aging, light, and/or chemical agents. Includes yellowing and darkening; bleaching, the lightening of color; and fading, a loss of color and/or change in hue.
Disjoin	The partial or complete separation of a join between two members or elements of an object, as distinguished from separation at some point other than a join, such as a fracture, tear, check, or split.
Dry Rot	Decay of seasoned wood that is caused by fungi that consume the cellulose of wood, leaving a soft skeleton that is readily reduced to powder.
Efflorescence	Change from a crystalline salt to a powdery mass with loss of water. The term is used more broadly for museum objects to describe powdery or crystalline crusts on the surface of stone, ceramics, or metals, resulting from other interactions. Not to be confused with corrosion, which is a surface oxidation or other chemical reaction between surface molecules and the environment. Efflorescence results from molecules surfacing from the interior of the object because of chemical changes or hydrostatic pressures within. See also: Corrosion, Incrustation.
Embrittlement	A loss of flexibility that causes material such as paper and leather to break or disintegrate when bent or curled.
Ferrotyping	Glossy patches found on the surface of photographs that have had lengthy contact with a smooth-surface enclosure, such as polyester or glass.
Flaking	A loss of material, usually from the surface, resulting from cleavages or crackles in the surface layers. Also a method of manufacture for stone tools.
Fracture	Refers to the cracking of hard substances, such as bone, and implies an incomplete break in which there is no significant separation of material. A break can later occur along a fracture line. See also: Rupture.
Fragment	A part broken off or detached, or an object that is incomplete. Use of the term usually implies a small percentage of the whole.
Fraying	Raveled or worn spot indicated by the separation of fibers, especially on the edge of fabric or paper.
Gouge	A surface defect caused by a blow. A gouge implies that some material has been scooped away. See also: Chip, Dent, Dig.
Grime	Soil tenaciously held on the surface of an object.
Hole	An opening through a substance. Usually implies that some of the substance is missing and not simply pushed aside as in a tear or dig. Also implied is that the hole is a defect, although it could be a later intentional modification. See also: Gouge.

Incrustation	A crust or hard coating of some foreign material or product on the surface of an object. Use the more specific terms corrosion and efflorescence, if the nature of the incrustation is known.
Iridescence	Color effect in glass due to the partial decomposition of the surface and the formation of innumerable thin scales, resulting in an uneven, flaky surface.
Loss	A general term applying to a missing area or hole. Note the extent of the loss.
Missing element	Loss of an integral component of the object.
Oxidation	Surface “crust” or tarnish on metal resulting from a chemical reaction with oxygen in the presence of moisture. It can be a dull, reddish-brown or black film, depending on the metal type.
Patina	A surface oxidation, corrosion, or decomposition, usually on glass, lead, pewter, or copper or one of its alloys, which is homogeneous, usually hard, and often attractive. A patina or lack of it is no guarantee of age. The patina often provides a protective barrier against further corrosion, and, consequently, may be desirable to retain. See also: Corrosion, Incrustation. The term may be used to describe the polished glow acquired by wood that has been frequently handled.
Pitting	Series of small, irregular, shallow pinhole-size surface depressions due to the introduction or spattering of some eroding or corrosive agent.
Red rot	Powdery red substance found on vegetable-tanned objects that is the result of a chemical reaction with pollutants in the air.
Rip	A hole or flaw caused by a pulling in one rapid uninterrupted motion, especially along a seam or by a joint, or along the straight-line of a fabric. A rip has relatively even or straight sides.
Rub	A mar on the surface of an object caused by contact with another body under pressure and friction. Distinct from abrasion or scrape in that no surface material appears to have been removed, although surface texture, sheen, or reflectance may have been altered.
Rupture	Refers to the tearing or breaking of soft substances, such as layers of an oil painting. It implies that surface material is forced outward, though not necessarily lost. See also: Fracture.
Scrape	Surface damage or injury caused by one or more strokes by an edged instrument or an abrasive resulting in shallow loss of surface material over a relatively wide area. Shallow gouges may occur simultaneously. See also Abrasion.
Scratch	A linear surface loss due to abrasion with a sharp point.
Silvering	Shiny or mirror-like discoloration in the shadow areas of a photographic image caused by the aging of excessive residual silver compounds. Also known as bronzing or mirroring.

Spalling	Shallow losses or flaking from the surface of stone or ceramic.
Split	A rupture running along the grain of a piece of wood, bone, or ivory. It's usually caused by external mechanical means or too rapid drying. A split could develop into a break.
Soil	<p>A general term referring to any material or substance that dirties the surface of an object. Use more specialized terms whenever possible.</p> <p>Dust refers to loose soil generally distributed on the surface.</p> <p>Grime refers to soil tenaciously held on the surface.</p> <p>Smear and Fingermark refer to localized forms of grime, usually caused by human action.</p> <p>Spatter, Run, and Stream refer to dried droplets or splashes of liquid foreign material.</p> <p>Spot refers to a small area visibly different (in color, finish, or material) from the surrounding area. It is a mark made by foreign matter, such as mud, blood, paint, or ink. The implication is that the foreign matter hasn't penetrated the surface.</p> <p>Stain is similar to a spot, but the term implies discoloration of the surface by penetration of the foreign matter. Spots can stain if the surface is porous or absorbent.</p>
Stiffness	Loss of flexibility and suppleness of fibers, offering resistance to bending.
Tarnish	A dullness or blackening of a bright metal surface.
Tear	A hole or flaw caused by a forceful pulling apart of a material leaving ragged or irregular edges. If the material is organic in composition, such as paper, cloth, or basketry, individual fibers often will be split. See also: Disjoin, Rip, Split.
Wear (Worn)	Impaired, deteriorated, or consumed gradually by use or by any continued process, especially by rubbing, scraping, or washing. The term can apply to all parts of an object, not just to its surface. It can describe a defect in an object's function as well as its appearance.
Weeping	A reaction on glass between water and formic acid.

E. Measuring Objects

1. *Why should I measure objects?*

Measurements can give you important information about an object. They help you:

 - identify and describe an object
 - calculate storage and exhibit space requirements

Note: Researchers may use measurements of archeological materials and natural history specimens for comparative purposes.

When you measure objects, be sure to follow the rules for handling museum objects. Refer to the Museum Handbook , Part I, Chapter 6: Handling, Packing and Shipping.

2. *What tools do I use when measuring objects?*

Measurements should be consistent and accurate. Accuracy increases when you use the most appropriate tools for the material. Keep the equipment clean, calibrated, and in good working condition. The equipment you'll need to measure and weigh objects includes:

- folding rule
- steel tape
- cloth tape
- steel or aluminum meter rule (or smaller)
- measuring stand (upright measuring rod and a movable arm at right angles to it, for measuring height of irregular objects)
- measuring frame (grid lines marked or inscribed on a board with a raised frame along two adjacent edges for measuring length and width of irregularly shaped objects)
- calipers
- balance

Note: You can get many of these materials through the Federal Supply Service, General Services Administration (GSA).

3. *Should I use metric or English measurements?*

In most cases, use metric measurements. Use English measurements only when they are the standard measuring convention for an object. For example, the bore diameter for a Rodman Cannon is measured in inches.

The Measurements field in ANCS+ has enough space to enter both metric and English measurements, if you choose to do so.

4. *Should I convert English measurements to metric?*

No. Don't convert English measurements to metric. Remeasure the object.

Don't remeasure biological specimens. Collectors take measurements from fresh specimens. The specimens may dry and shrink over time.

5. *May I abbreviate units of measure?*

Yes. The following list supplies common examples of units of measurement and abbreviations. Use all capitals or lower case for abbreviations, but be consistent in your use. Don't use periods with abbreviations.

centimeter	CM	cm
cubic centimeter	CC	cc
cubic feet	CF	cf
feet	FT	ft
gram	G	g
inches	IN	in
kilogram	KG	kg
linear feet	LF	lf
liter	L	l
meter	M	m
milligram	MG	mg
millimeter	MM	mm
milliliter	ML	ml
ounce	OZ	oz
pound	LB	lb

6. *What types of objects should I measure?*

Take measurements appropriate to the specific discipline. For example, measure archives by linear or cubic feet.

Measure or weigh all cultural objects if you catalog them individually. For lot cataloged objects (see Appendix I in this handbook), you might:

- measure all the objects, if there are only a few
- measure a representative sample from the lot
- decide not to measure the objects
- choose to weigh the objects

Measure or weigh geological and paleontological specimens, as appropriate.

Usually you'll find biological specimen measurements on the specimen label. Copy the label information exactly. There are specific conventions for measuring most specimens. For example, the measurements for mammals are total length, length of tail, length of hind foot, and height of ear in millimeters. The dimensions are followed by the weight in grams. Dashes separate the measurements.

Generally, collectors don't take measurements of plant or insect specimens. Collectors usually measure mammals, birds, and reptiles while the specimens are fresh, before preparation.

7. *How many measurements should I take?*

Take a minimum of two dimensions or measure by volume or weight. In general, use height (or length) and width for two-dimensional objects. Use height, length or width, and depth or thickness for three-dimensional objects. You may need additional measurements for specific types of objects.

F. Recording Dimensions and Weight

1. *What degree of accuracy do I need?*

You want to be as accurate as possible. Use the following guidelines when taking measurements:

- Don't measure beyond the level you can accurately judge.
- Make all measurements for a single object in the same unit of measure to the same degree of accuracy.
- Measure the point of greatest dimension, such as the widest part of the object.

<i>If an object...</i>	<i>Then...</i>
measures less than one meter,	measure it in centimeters to the nearest tenth (0.1) of a centimeter.
measures more than one meter,	measure it in meters to the nearest centimeter.

2. *What are some common dimensions and their abbreviations?*

Complete measurements include the unit of measure and the type of dimension. The most common types of dimensions and abbreviations appear below. Use all capitals or lower case for abbreviations, but be consistent in your use. Don't use periods with abbreviations.

Circumference	CIR	cir
Depth	D	d
Diameter	DIA	dia
Height	H	h
Length	L	l
Radius	R	r
Thickness	T	t
Volume	V	v
Width	W	w

Note: Use depth for measuring an item from an outer surface to some interior space, such as the depth of a chair. Use thickness to measure the distance between outermost edge to outermost edge, such as the thickness of a book.

3. *Must I enter dimensions in a consistent order?*

Yes. Use the same order when recording dimensions, and use the same format consistently for each type of object. For example, enter the height, width, and depth of chairs. Height usually goes before width. Consistent order and format make it easier to compare objects.

Separate dimensions by a comma and a space, unless there is a standard convention for the discipline. For example, dashes are always used between mammal measurements.

Place the abbreviation of the type of dimension before the number. Place the

unit of measurement at the end. If the value is less than one, use a zero before the decimal point.

Example: H 15.0, W 8.9, L 5.6 cm
H 10.3, W 6.8, D 4.5 cm
L 20.3, W 15.6, T 0.5 cm
H 15.5, DIA 8.4 cm

4. *How do I measure irregular objects?*

Always give maximum measurements unless otherwise noted. If necessary, use the abbreviation “irreg” in parentheses. Use height or length for the greatest dimension, unless you know the orientation of the object is different.

Example: H 4.9, W 3.7, T 1.3 cm (irreg.)

5. *How do I record more than one measurement for an object?*

Use qualifiers for more than one measurement or maximum and minimum measurements. Place the qualifiers in parentheses after the dimension type.

Example: H (max) 20.3, H (min) 10.5, W 5.0, T 1.2 cm
H 40.0, W (Top) 32.0, W (Btm) 36.5, T 12.1 cm

6. *How do I measure objects with parts?*

Record the overall measurements for the entire object. Normally, overall dimensions include separable parts like a vessel and its lid or a pipe and its stem. You can use notes to show whether the measurement includes parts such as a handle or base.

Example: L 5.3, Dia 6.9 cm, w/handle

If you want to separately measure the parts, record these measurements after the overall measurements. Note which part you are measuring.

Example: Pipe: H 3.8, L 17.5, DIA (bowl) 2.5 cm
Handle: L 12.5, W 1.0 cm
Bowl: H 3.8, L 5.0, DIA 2.5 cm

7. *How do I measure incomplete objects?*

Record the overall measurements of the object. If the object is incomplete, note this in the Condition field of the catalog record. You may want to note which parts are missing in the Description field of the catalog record.

To show that a certain dimension is incomplete for the object type, use “inc” in parentheses after the measurement.

Example: L 5.9 (inc), W 3.2, T 0.8 cm

8. *When should I weigh material?*

You can measure some objects better by weighing them. Use this method for items like pollen and lot cataloged items. Weigh to the nearest 0.1 gram or kilogram.

Example: 0.05 g

Note: You don’t need to use an abbreviation, such as WT, to show that you are recording weight.

9. *When do I use volume as a measurement?*

Volume is the most accurate measurement for objects in liquid form. It's possible to use volume either by itself or in conjunction with other measurements. The volume of certain scientific or kitchen equipment, like a 150-milliliter beaker and a liquid measuring cup, can aid in identification.

Example: V 150 ml
V 8 oz

10. *What other ways can I use to show dimensions?*

Images are a useful supplement to dimensions, particularly for irregular objects. Use a sketch, trace, or photograph to further identify the measurements of an object. You can trace small objects, if tracing won't damage the object. Note that the drawing is a trace.

Mark the image to show where you measured the object. With a sketch or trace, you can place the measurements directly on the drawing. When possible, make the sketch to scale.

With a scanner, you can digitize a sketch or trace and attach the image to your ANCS+ catalog record. If you don't attach the image to your catalog record, note on the catalog record that the drawing exists. Store the image in the catalog or accession folder.

You could also show dimensions on a digitized photograph by using photo editing software. You can attach these images to your ANCS+ catalog record.

11. *How can I learn the measuring standards for the types of material in my collection?*

There are standard methods of measuring most types of material. Consult curators with similar collections, or refer to discipline-specific texts. *The New Museum Registration Methods* has a section on measuring specific types of material. See Appendix L of this handbook for a publication citation.