

Standard Practices for Primary Archives Management Tasks

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Archival Arrangement and Description is the Society of American Archivists' (SAA) initial piece in its modular series "Trends in Archives Practice." This volume covers recent standard practices for the primary tasks in managing archives and is meant to complement SAA's 2005 *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts* by Kath-

leen Roe. It includes three modules:

1. "Standards for Archival Description" by Sibyl Schaefer and Janet M. Bunde
2. "Processing Digital Records and Manuscripts" by J. Gordon Daines III
3. "Designing Descriptive and Access Systems" by Daniel A. Santamaria

Editors Christopher J. Prom and Thomas J. Frusciano define the publication's intended audiences as experienced and new archivists and those in related professions. This review considers each of the modules separately.

Standards for Archival Description

Schaefer and Bunde provide a thorough and readable history of archival standards and an overview of descriptive standards and acronyms. They state the importance of standards to appropriately describe archival collections from both the archivist's and user's perspective, but they also acknowledge that standards have not always been universally ac-

cepted. Still, they say, "...standards will help your descriptions get discovered."

The authors provide four logical sections:

1. Data Structure Standards (e.g., machine readable cataloging [MARC] and encoded archival description [EAD])

Archival Arrangement and Description

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2. Data Content Standards (e.g., Anglo-American cataloguing rules [AACR] and *Describing Archives: A Content [DACS]*)
3. Data Value Standards (e.g., Library of Congress subject headings [LCSH] and others)
4. Metadata and Companion Standards (e.g., descriptive and structural)

These sections offer a blend of quick reference and examples for what can seem tedious subjects for some audiences. Taken together, the ensuing “Archival Descriptions for Your Repository” section, the module’s conclusion, and three appendices are perhaps the most helpful parts of this module.

Processing Digital Records and Manuscripts

Daines uses familiar archival terminology to describe steps to process and make accessible born-digital materials in four sections: “Issues and Challenges Posed by Digital Records”; “Arrangement and Description: Mapping a Business Process”; “Digital Processing: Practices and Procedures”; and “Recommendations.”

In the first section, the author provides context for and the history of archivists’ responses to the constantly shifting nature of technology and the increasing volume and formats of information arriving at many archives.

Daines uses the business process framework to describe the workflow of best practices as applied to digital records: accessioning, documenting context, conservation assessment, arrangement, description, and access tools. He emphasizes here and in the subsequent section how this familiar archival checklist can work with digital records.

In the concluding recommendations section, Daines encourages practitioners to engage with the literature (e.g., in the appendices); embrace “digital curation” as a concept; not wait for perfect storage solutions

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(i.e., work on solutions and learn some of the tools available, starting with the list in the appendices); develop policies and a preservation plan; and pursue specific professional development (e.g., digital forensics). The author presents a helpful set of tangible steps in this section.

The appendices include two case studies, recent activities, standards, and further reading.

Designing Descriptive and Access Systems

Santamaria covers a range of solutions and tools for accessioning, describing, and providing access to both physical and digital archives through the Internet. He emphasizes the need for descriptions and descriptive data to be captured and created in a manner to facilitate its delivery for efficient patron access.

He also recognizes the nationally pervasive and problematic lag between accessioning and the availability of online finding aids for most repositories (i.e., backlogs). The author recommends a “workflow” approach by moving some of the descriptive work to early stages of pre-accessioning and accessioning for later data productivity. A concise and helpful bulleted list of “Description and Access Activities” reinforces this big-picture approach.

In the section on describing archival materials, Santamaria highlights creating catalog records and finding aids and analyzing certain standard types. He offers prescriptions for managing legacy data for older collections (e.g., converting older MARC records to other formats like EAD, hypertext markup language, or portable document format for Internet posting).

The author also acknowledges the benefit of recent “More Product, Less

Process” methods that focus on doing the minimal arranging, preserving, and describing of materials that are necessary for meeting user needs as a way to reduce backlogs of accumulated collections.

In the section devoted to providing patrons access through online descriptive systems, Santamaria describes a range of options for larger and smaller repositories to consider (e.g., using EAD or non-EAD files). He includes an overview of commonly used digital collection systems and the opportunity for (and challenges of) patron-initiated contributions to digitization efforts like crowdsourcing.

The author concludes with a reminder of the benefits of an evaluation of systems that considers users’ perspectives. This module is the most heavily illustrated of the three, but some of the more detailed screenshots are visually difficult to read. Of the five appendices and case studies for this module, the “Summary of Recommendations,” “Selected Tools,” and “Sample Workflow and Tools for Small Repositories” are particularly welcome.

Recommendation

Taken together or separately, each module within *Archival Arrangement and Description* offers timely topics for consideration by archivists, records managers, and other cultural resource stewards who face these challenges. Although many of the topics interrelate across the modules, the editors and authors are careful to ensure that this overlap is mutually reinforcing, not confusing or too redundant. **END**

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