ARCHIVES TERMINOLOGY – SELECT TERMS
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for the ASA Archives Institute 2006

Italics indicates a term defined elsewhere in this list

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ALPHABETICAL LIST OF TERMS

AABC - acronym for Archives Association of British Columbia

ACA - acronym for Association of Canadian Archivists

ANA - acronym for Archives Network of Alberta

ANLA – acronym for Association of Newfoundland and Labrador Archives

ASA - acronym for Archives Society of Alberta

ACCESS – The process of providing archival material for use through reference services, finding aids and retrieval. (*1)

ACCESS POINT - A name, term, etc. by which a descriptive record may be searched and identified (8)

ACCESSION – a. (v.) to accession or accessioning - The act and procedures involved in a transfer of legal title and the taking of records into the physical custody of an archives. (*2)
b. (n.) The process by which a fonds, collection or item enters the holdings of an archives. (*1)
c. (n.) Fonds, collection or item acquired at one time from single source. (1)

ACCRUAL – An acquisition of archival material belonging to a fonds or collection already in the custody of a repository. (1)

ACQUISITION – a. The process or activity by which an item, fonds or collection enter the custody of an archives. (*1)
b. An addition to the holdings of an archives by transfer, deposit, purchase, gift or bequest. (*1)
ACTIVE RECORDS – also Semi-active records - See Record

ADMINISTRATIVE VALUE -- The usefulness or significance of records to support ancillary operations and the routine management of an organization. Traditionally, archivists have seen administrative value as transient. For administrative records to be considered archival, they must also possess other values. (9)

ANALOG – See Electronic record

APPRAISAL – The process of determining the archival value and disposition of records based on their former administrative, legal and fiscal use; their evidential and informational value; their arrangement; and their relationship to other records. Also known as “selective retention.” (*2) Not to be confused with Monetary value.

ARCHIVAL PROCESS - The set of activities carried out by an archives to provide access to archival fonds and records. Activities are: acquisition appraisal, accessioning, arrangement, description, preservation management and access. The term processing generally pertains to appraisal, arrangement, description and preventive conservation. (11)

ARCHIVAL VALUE – A value which justifies the preservation of archival materials. (*1)

ARCHIVE/S – a. (n.) The non-current records of a person(s), organization or corporate body preserved because of their enduring value; also referred to as “archival holdings”. (2)
  b. (n.) The building, or part thereof, where archival records are housed; also referred to as “archival repository”. (*2)
  c. (n.) The agency or program responsible for acquiring, caring for and providing access to archival records. (*1)
  d. (n.) Archives profession - person practicing this profession is know as an archivist.
  e. (v.tr.) To place or store in an archive (5)
  f. In computing - (n) A store of (usually large amounts of) data kept in machine-readable form (*5)
     (v.tr) Transfer data to a store of less frequently used files (5)

ARCHIVES CANADA – Online database of archival descriptions drawn from provincial and territorial networks such as ANA. Previously known as the Canadian Archival Information Network (CAIN). (11)

ARCHIVIST - a. An individual responsible for appraising, acquiring, arranging, describing, preserving, and providing access to records of
enduring value, according to the principles of provenance, original order, and collective control to protect the materials’ authenticity and context. (9)
b. An individual responsible for the management and oversight of an archival repository or of records of enduring value. (9)

ARRANGEMENT – The organization of archival materials according to accepted archival principles and practices.

Intellectual arrangement involves the organization of a fonds or collection according to the archival principles.

Physical arrangement involves activities such as sorting, numbering, foldering, labeling, boxing and shelving. (*1)

ARTIFACT - Man-made, physical object. Even though documents and other two-dimensional materials are artifacts because of their physical nature, 'artifact' is often used to distinguish three-dimensional materials from two-dimensional materials. Many fonds or collections contain artifacts among other more traditional visual and textual material, such as a campaign button filed with the flyer documenting an individual’s political career. (*9)

ARTIFACTUAL VALUE - The usefulness or significance of an object based on its physical or aesthetic characteristics, rather than its intellectual content. (9)

AUDIOVISUAL RECORDS - Works that consist of a series of related images that are intrinsically intended to be shown by the use of machines or devices, together with accompanying sounds, if any. (*9)

AUTHORITY LIST - Relative index showing key words by which subjects are classified. (2)

BCA – acronym for Bureau of Canadian Archivists/le Bureau canadiens des archivists. The Bureau is a joint agency of the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) and the Association des archivistes du Québec (AAQ).

BEQUEST – A gift made through a will (11)

CAIN - acronym for Canadian Archival Information Network (now Archives Canada) (11)

CCA - acronym for Council of Canadian Archives

CALENDAR - A finding aid that is a chronological listing of documents in a collection [fonds] which may be comprehensive or selective, and which may include details about the writer, recipient, date, place, content, type of document, etc. (*9)
Typical of finding aids produced until the mid-twentieth century, but rarely produced today. (11)

CARTOGRAPHIC RECORD - A record containing information depicting, in graphic or photogrammetric form, a portion of the linear surface of the earth or of a celestial body (such as maps, charts, plans and related materials including globes, atlases, topographic and hydrographic charts, cartograms and relief models, and aerial photographs). (8)

CASE FILE - A file of documents generated by the Archives during the acquisition and processing of a fonds or collection. (11)

COLLECTION – a. An artificial accumulation of documents of any provenance, brought together on the basis of some common characteristic (eg. subject, theme, or media), that may be described as a unit under a common title. The person or body that accumulated a collection is the collector. (*1)
   b. Commonly used in singularly or plural form to refer to the total holdings of a repository. (2)
   c. Previously used to refer to what is now correctly known in Canada as a fonds (11)

CONSERVATION – See Preservation

CONSERVATION TREATMENT - The component of preservation that deals with the physical or chemical treatment of damaged archival materials, to improve their condition or to prevent further deterioration. (1)
   Conservation treatment is carried out by a conservator. (*1)

CONSERVATOR - A professional trained in the theories and practices of conservation. (*1)

CONTENT - The intellectual substance of a document, including text, data, symbols, numerals, images, and sound. Along with context and structure, content is one of the three fundamental aspects of a record. (9)

COPYRIGHT – Legal rights of the author of a document and his/her heirs or assignee to publish or reproduce the document or to authorize publication or reproduction of it. (*1)

CORPORATE BODY - Group of persons regarded collectively especially as having a corporate function. (5)

CREATOR – The individual, family, or corporate body that creates and uses, or receives and uses, archival materials. (*1)
CULTURAL PROPERTY - Objects, collections, specimens, structures or sites identified as having artistic, historic, scientific, religious, or social significance. (10)

CUSTODY – The guardianship of archival records which preferably includes both physical possession (protective responsibility) and legal title (legal responsibility). (*2)

DPP - acronym for Disaster Preparedness Planning

DEACIDIFICATION - Preservation technique intended to increase the longevity of paper documents by raising the pH value (acidity level) to at least 7.0 (neutral), and often including the deposit of an alkaline buffer. (9)

DEPOSIT – v. To transfer records or other materials to a repository without transfer of title. Same as loan. (9)
n. – Materials placed in a repository by such action. (9)
See also Loan

DESCRIPTION – a. The recording of information in a standardized form about the structure, function and content of archival materials. The Canadian standard for description is the Rules for Archival Description (RAD) developed by the Bureau of Canadian Archivists (BCA). (*1)
b. The intellectual representation of the fonds and its physical characteristics. (11)

DIGITAL – see Electronic record

DOCUMENT – n. Recorded information. See also Record. (8)
v. To record into a document. (5)

DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE - The totality of all records preserved. Phrase can be applied to a nation, community or organization. (11)

DONATION - Material for which legal title is transferred from one party to another without compensation. Same as gift. (9)

ELECTRONIC RECORD - Data or information that has been captured and fixed for storage and manipulation in an automated system and that requires the use of the system to render it intelligible by a person. Known previously as a machine-readable record. Electronic records most often refers to records created in electronic format (born digital), but is some times used to describe scans of records in other formats (reborn digital or born analog). (9)
Digital: representing information through a sequence of discrete units, especially binary code. Analog: continuously varying in correlation to a physical process (9)

Digital photographs capture and record images that are printed using a non-photographic print process. (9)

ENCAPSULATION - The process of placing a document between sheets of plastic (usually polyester) sealed at the edges, thereby providing significant support and protection. Does not protect against continued chemical deterioration of the document and may accelerate deterioration. (9)
Not to be confused with lamination, an inappropriate process for archival preservation that irreversibly fuses layers of materials together. (11)

EPHEMERA - Materials, usually printed documents, created for a specific, limited purpose, and generally designed to be discarded after use. Examples include advertisements, tickets, brochures, and receipts. Individuals often collect ephemera as mementos or souvenirs. Personal collections of ephemera are often kept in scrapbooks. (*9)

EPHEMERAL VALUE - Useful or significant for a limited period of time. (9)

ETHICS – Moral principles; rules of conduct. (5)
A Code of Ethics for Canadian archivists was developed by the Association of Canadian Archivists (1999) (11)

EVIDENTIAL VALUE – The value of the records of a particular individual, family, organization or corporate body necessary to provide an authentic and adequate documentation of its organization and functioning. (*2)

EXTENT – (In archival description:) The number and specific material designation of the physical units of the material being described. (*1)

FOIPP – acronym for Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (Alberta)

FILE – a. An organized unit of documents, often within a series, relating to the same activity, transaction or subject. A file differs from a folder. One file may be stored in several folders. (*1)
b. A level of description. (1)

FINDING AIDS – Descriptive tools containing information that provides a context for records, explains their arrangement, and facilitates their retrieval. Examples of basic findings aids are guides, inventories and indexes in printed or electronic form. Finding aids may be national, regional or local. (*1)
FISCAL VALUE - The usefulness or significance of records containing financial information that is necessary to conduct current or future business or that serves as evidence of financial transactions. (9)

FOLDER - An archival storage enclosure, generally made of paper, covering a set of documents (11)

FONDS – The whole of records, regardless of form or medium, created and/or accumulated and used by a particular individual, family, organization or corporate body in the course of that creator’s activities and kept for future reference. (*1)

FUMIGATION - The process of exposing records to a gas or vapor which destroys insects, mould, mildew, fungus or other harmful forms of life. (3) Fumigation presents significant health risk for humans. (11)

GIFT - See Donation

GUIDE – A broad description of the holdings at one or more archives, typically at the fonds level. Types of guides include subject, thematic, repository and inter-repository. (*9)

HIERARCHY - A system in which classes are ranked one above the other. (*5)

HYGROMETER - An instrument which measures relative humidity. (3)

INACTIVE RECORDS – See Record

INDEX - An ordered list of headings that points to relevant information in materials that are organized in a different order. Generally, an index provides no explanation about the information it points to beyond its location. (*9)

INFORMATIONAL VALUE – The value of a record that provides unique and permanent information for purposes of research. (2)

INTRINSIC VALUE - The usefulness or significance of an item derived from its physical or associational qualities, inherent in its original form and generally independent of its content, that are integral to its material nature and would be lost in reproduction. Intrinsic value is independent of informational or evidential value. A record may have great intrinsic value without significant informational or evidential value; records with significant informational or evidential value may have little intrinsic value. (*9)
INVENTORY – A listing of materials with descriptive details usually arranged systematically. Inventories may take a number of formats such as electronic, sheet, book, card or microform. Sometimes referred to as a catalogue. (*1)

ITEM - A thing that can be distinguished from a group and that is complete in itself. Generally considered to be the smallest archival unit. An item may consist of several physically discrete pieces (eg. pages of a letter or photograph prints in an album), but is treated as an item because of its content. (*9)

LEGAL VALUE - The usefulness or significance of records to document and protect the rights and interests of an individual or organization, to provide for defense in litigation, to demonstrate compliance with laws and regulations, or to meet other legal needs. (9)

LEVEL OF DESCRIPTION – Level, in the arrangement, of the unit being described: fonds, sous-fonds, series, sub-series, file, record or item. (*1)

LIFE CYCLE - The series of developmental stages of records, from creation to disposition. (*5)

LIST – A written series of discrete items. A list may be ordered or random. The items in a list may be of any nature and the list may contain different types of items. (9)

LOAN - The temporary transfer of materials from one party to another. (9)
   See also Deposit

LOCATION REGISTER – An internal finding aid that records the storage location of archival materials. As a security measure, many archives do not include the storage location in finding aids used by the general public. Also known as a location index or location list. (*9)

MAIN ENTRY – The heading used as the principal access point. The main entry is usually the name of the individual chiefly responsible for the intellectual or artistic content of a work, a corporate entity, or the title of the work. (*9)
   The main entry of a fonds is the provenance of the fonds. (11)

MANUSCRIPT – a. A book, document, etc. written by hand (5)
   b. An author's text (as for submission for publication) (*5)
   c. In an archival institution, manuscript can also refer to an unpublished record. (11)
MONETARY APPRAISAL – The monetary evaluation of records; to determine the financial value of potential acquisitions based on current fair market value. (*1,*2)

MULTIMEDIA RECORD - Record that combines two or more media types, which, for reasons of intellectual continuity, must be conceived of as a unit. (8) (eg. slide-tape program, scrapbook)

MULTIPLE MEDIA FONDS – A fonds containing more than one broad class of material. (*8)

ORAL HISTORY - a. An interview that records an individual's personal recollections of the past and historical events. (9)
   b. The audio or video recordings, transcripts and other materials that capture and are associated with such an interview. (9)

ORIGINAL ORDER – The principle that an archivist retains the arrangement within a fonds as established by its creator. (1)

PIPA – acronym for Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (Canada)

PAPERS - Records, including manuscripts, typescripts, and clippings, primarily created on sheets of paper. “Papers” was previously used (and is sometimes still casually used) to refer to what is now correctly known in Canada as a fonds. (11)

PERSONAL INFORMATION - Information about an identifiable individual but [that] does not include the name, title or business address or telephone number of an employee of an organization. (6)

PHOTOGRAPH – a. A still picture formed on a light-sensitive surface using an optical system and fixed by a photochemical process (9)
   b. An image rendered using a camera (9)
   Digital photographs capture and record images that are printed using a non-photographic print process. (9)

POLICY – A basic guide to action that describes the boundaries within which activities are to take place. (2)

PRESERVATION – The professional discipline of protecting materials by minimizing chemical and physical deterioration and damage to minimize the loss of information and to extend the life of cultural property. (9)
PRESERVATION MANAGEMENT - Archival program involving a systematic, planned approach to the stabilization and long term survival of the physical form and/or the information of archival records. (*7)

PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION – Measures to prevent damage and deterioration of archival materials through proper storage, careful handling, environmental standards/regulation, reformatting, security, emergency planning and ongoing assessment. (*1)

PRIMARY VALUE - Value of the record to the record creator. Examples of primary values are administrative value, legal value or fiscal value. (11)

PRINCIPLE – A fundamental truth or law as the basis of reasoning or action (5)

PROCESSING – See Archival process

PROVENANCE – The individual, family or corporate body that created, accumulated and/or maintained and used records prior to their transfer to an archives. The principle of provenance states that records of the same provenance should not be inter-filed with those of any other provenance. (1)

RAD – acronym for Rules for Archival Description. RAD is the Canadian standard for archival description. RAD2 is the second edition (2005) of the Rules for Archival Description. (11)

RECORD – Recorded information regardless of medium or characteristics. Frequently used interchangeably with document. Types of records include textual record, visual record, cartographic record, audiovisual record, sound recording and electronic record (*2)

Active records - Continue to be used with sufficient frequency to justify keeping them in the office of creation; current records

Semi-active records - Seldom used in day-to-day operations and appropriate for off-site storage

Inactive records - No longer used in the day-to-day course of business, but which may be preserved and occasionally used for legal, historical, or operational purposes (9)

Archives are concerned with inactive records only

RECORD GROUP – a. Fonds. Record group is the term used by American archivists. (11)

b. A group of records that share the same provenance and are of a convenient size for administration. A hierarchical division that is sometimes equivalent to provenance, representing all the records of an agency and its subordinate divisions. However, the records of a large agency →
may be broken into several record groups, treating the records of different divisions as separate collections [fonds] rather than as a series. (*9)

RECORDS CENTRE - A facility used for low-cost storage of inactive records and semi-active records before those records are destroyed or transferred to an archives. (*9)

RECORDS MANAGEMENT - The act of controlling the creation, use, and disposition of records created by an office or agency. Records management helps to improve economy and efficiency in the office, ensure the regular transfer of valuable records to a records centre, and control the regular disposal of records no longer worth keeping. (3) The systematic and administrative control of records throughout their life cycle to ensure efficiency and economy in their creation, use, handling, control, maintenance, and disposition. (9)

RECORDS SCHEDULE - Schedule that guides the transfer of inactive records to the Archives. (11)

RESPECT DES FONDS – The principle that the records of a person, family or corporate body must be kept together in their original order, if it exists, and not be combined with the records of another individual or corporate body. (*1)

RETRIEVAL - a. Process of locating and withdrawing archival materials from storage. (1) b. Action of recovering information on a given matter from stored data. (1)

RULES FOR ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION – Standardized rules for the description of archival materials in Canada. Commonly known as RAD. (11)

SECONDARY VALUE - Value of the record to others than the creator. Examples are evidential value, informational value and intrinsic value. (11)

SELECTIVE RETENTION - see Appraisal

SEPARATION SHEET - A form identifying archival material that has been removed from a larger body of records for various reasons, including storage, conservation or disposition. (3)

SERIES – Filing units or records within a fonds which are arranged in accordance with a filing system or maintained as a unit because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, have particular form, or because of some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt or use. (*2)
SOUND RECORDING – A record medium capable of capturing and reproducing an audible signal. A generic term used to encompass a wide range of formats, including phonograph records, magnetic tape, compact discs and computer files, but not multimedia recordings that include sound, such as the soundtrack on a motion picture. (*9)

SOUS-FONDS – The records of a sub-unit of the creator of the fonds. (*1)

SUB-SERIES – Records within a series that are readily identifiable as a subordinate or dependent entity because of filing, physical form or content. (1)

TEXTUAL RECORD – Written documents, either handwritten or typed, on a paper base. (3)

TOTAL ARCHIVES – A strategy to document the historical development and all segments of a community by acquiring both official administrative records as well as related personal papers and corporate records. Total archives was developed in Canada. It emphasizes collecting a wide range of materials. (*9)

TRANSFER – Administrative and physical movement of records from one place or agency to another, usually from the creating body to the archives. (3)

VALUE – The worth, usefulness or importance of a thing (5)
See: Archival value, Evidential value, Fiscal value, Informational value, Monetary value, Primary Value, Secondary value

VISUAL RECORD – Material composed of images rather than words. Examples are photographs, films and paintings. (3)
 SOURCES

Definitions have been taken from or adapted from (indicated by *) the following:


8.  *Rules for Archival Description / Bureau of Canadian Archivists.*


11.  Michael Gourlie and/or Margery Hadley
Principles
Original order
Provenance
Respect des fonds

Values
Administrative value
Archival value
Artifactual value
Ephemeral value
Evidential value
Fiscal value
Informational value
Intrinsic value
Legal value
Monetary value
Primary value
Secondary value

Archival process
Acquisition
Appraisal
Accession / accessioning
Arrangement
Description
Preventive conservation
Access

Hierarchy
Fonds
Collection
Sous-fonds
Series
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Types of records
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Sound recording
Textual record
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Calendar
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### Acronyms

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