

Guidelines for Efficient Archival Processing in the University of California Libraries

Version 3.2

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1. Introduction

These guidelines were developed for special collections and archives in the University of California Libraries. The University of California is comprised of 10 campuses at Berkeley, Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, Merced, Riverside, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Cruz and Santa Barbara.

1.A. Background

According to the final report, "[New Modes for Organizing and Providing Access to Special Collections, Archives, and Digital Formats](#)" (2011) from the Next Generation Technical Services (NGTS) Phase 2 team, "UC special collections and archives units have over 71,605 linear feet of unprocessed manuscript collections, archival records, and university archives. At the current rates of processing ... the time it would take to eliminate backlogs on campuses range from 0.2 to 23.6 years (depending on the campus). Of the reported 46,662 individual collections maintained across the UC campuses, 41,806 have collection-level records. Hence, 4,856 lack description and are, for all practical purposes, invisible and inaccessible to end users." The report observed, "It is simply not sustainable to continue arranging and describing these unique collections across all campuses, using current methods and the current processing rates."

The University of California, Council of University Librarians concurred that it was a high priority to apply "More Product, Less Process" (MPLP) tactics to reduce the backlogs of unprocessed special collections materials and expedite access to hidden collections. A new team, NGTS POT 3 (Next Generation Technical Services Power of Three Team Three), was charged to "accelerate processing of archival and manuscript collections." As part of this, a Lightning Team was tasked to develop a manual to guide the implementation of MPLP throughout the UC system. These guidelines are the result of the work of this Lightning Team.

MPLP emerges from the article written by Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," published in the Fall/Winter 2005 issue of the *American Archivist*.¹ MPLP emphasizes making more collections available to users by reducing the amount of staff resources spent doing detailed arrangement, preservation, and description of collections. Greene and Meissner wrote, "We should be paying more attention to achieving basic physical and intellectual control over, and thus affording research access to, all our holdings, rather than being content to process a few of them to perfection." (MPLP p.237) In processing archival materials, they exhort us to find the "golden minimum" for each collection, that is, "the least we can do to get the job done in a way that is adequate to user needs, now and in the future." (MPLP p. 240) They called for "a new set of arrangement, preservation, and description guidelines that 1) expedites getting collection materials into the hands of users; 2) assures arrangement of materials *adequate* to user needs; 3) takes the *minimal* steps necessary to physically preserve collection materials; and 4) describes materials *sufficient[ly]* to promote use" (MPLP pp. 212-213).

¹ Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, "[More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing](#)," *American Archivist* 68 (Fall/Winter 2005): 208-63. Hereafter cited as MPLP.

1.B. Goals

These guidelines will help UC Libraries:

- change existing practices
- make archival processing practices more efficient
- define new baseline archival processing standards
- make collections available for research as quickly as possible after acquisition
- publish basic description about all archival collections
- implement "iterative" archival processing approaches
- evaluate processing needs for archival collections
- set target processing rates for various situations or kinds of archival collections
- assess archival processing productivity

1.C. The Core, Recommended Principles

Greene and Meissner's survey of the archival profession revealed wide variation in repositories' definition of a baseline or norm for processing work. With growing backlogs, they pushed for a new set of assumptions for how we process our collections.

It is recommended that all University of California Libraries adopt the following principles for managing their archival holdings:

1. Aim to provide access to all holdings.

- a. A repository's first priority should be to gain collection-level control over all its holdings. Detailed processing work should wait until all holdings are minimally accessible.
- b. Unprocessed collections should be presumed open to researchers. Exceptions may be made for collections with legal or contractual restrictions, fragile or moldy materials, or materials with high theft potential.

2. Always look for the "golden minimum."

- a. For each collection, perform the minimum amount of work necessary to make a collection usable.
- b. Work beyond the minimum should be justified, e.g., for research value or other business requirements.
- c. Resist the impulse to handle material at the item level.

3. Analyze the work necessary for every collection and be flexible in the amount of work applied.

- a. Be more flexible in determining when a collection is "processed."
- b. Do not expect an "one-size-fits-all" standard for arrangement, description, or preservation across all collections or even within collections. The amount of work required to achieve the golden minimum will vary from collection to collection, or series to series.

4. Arrange, describe, and preserve materials in harmony.

- a. For any given unit of archival collection materials, arrangement, description, and preservation work should all occur at the same hierarchical level. If arrangement occurs only to the series level, so should description and preservation actions. Any variance must be justifiable (e.g., a repository has a surplus of student or volunteer labor to perform repetitive tasks at lower levels of granularity).

5. Measure and compare processing rates to ensure processing is carried out efficiently.

In addition to MPLP principles, we also recommend that campuses use the Archivist’s Toolkit or an archival collections management system to streamline the creation and management of description or metadata about archival collections.

1.D. How to Use These Guidelines

These guidelines are meant to define a philosophy or approach to processing that informs all processing activity. Whether processing a large, modern collection with a bare minimum of effort or processing a high-value photographic collection that might receive intensive use, these guidelines are relevant. The guidelines emphasize assessment, access, and efficiency. They strongly encourage repositories to focus first on making all collections minimally accessible to researchers. They ask archivists to consider their repository’s needs and capacities. They provide strategies and shortcuts to help archivists tackle massive backlogs. They help archivists to determine how much processing work is necessary. They empower archivists to evaluate the specific needs of a collection and make a series of sound, professional decisions to promote a level of access appropriate to that collection’s requirements. They value archivists’ time as precious, and suggest ways in which archivists’ attention may benefit more collections and researchers. They encourage archivists to measure and track their processing productivity to help repositories achieve their goals.

Although these guidelines suggest many ways to make collections accessible with a minimal amount of work, this minimum is not prescriptive. Collections are obviously not all the same.² Nevertheless, these guidelines are designed to help archivists reduce the amount of effort invested in any one collection so that effort may be employed more broadly to promote access to more materials more quickly.

These guidelines are not intended to be a complete processing manual. References to other institutions’ manuals may be found in the [Appendix](#). These guidelines should be used in tandem with your institution’s manual and overlaid as over-riding principles.

² Mark Greene explained that his “article did *not* maintain that minimal processing must become universal within a repository, arguing rather that some series and some collections could certainly justify more traditional processing approaches—as Dennis Meissner has wryly noted, ‘MPLP is not a processing template (your own brain is still part of the equation).’ The specific remedies MPLP recommends are that ‘minimal’ (also referred to as ‘accessioning,’ ‘extensible,’ and ‘basic’) processing should become the new baseline approach to arranging and describing series and collections.” “MPLP: It’s Not Just for Processing Anymore.” *American Archivist* (Spring/Summer 2010): 175-203.

1.E. Why is MPLP Relevant to the UCs?

Greene and Meissner's article challenged many of the assumptions archivists make about the importance of preservation activities in processing, or in the arrangement and description activities necessary to allow researchers to access collections effectively. For example, many archivists have focused on Greene and Meissner's recommendations to not remove fasteners, not replace folders in good condition, or not write detailed biographical notes. In reviewing the uptake of and response to MPLP, Greene and Meissner emphasize that "MPLP, fundamentally, is not about specific processing actions. It is about resource management..." and the goal, to "establish an acceptable minimum level of work, and make it the processing benchmark."³

Archivists and librarians within the UC system see the utility in adopting the MPLP approach. A December 2011 survey provided some interesting comments. Here are a few responses to the question, "For your institution or processing work, what is most important about MPLP?":

- [MPLP gets] materials into the hands of users more quickly and efficiently.
- ...it offers a way to work through our large backlog of manuscript collections ...
- [MPLP] provides a philosophical and practical approach to processing that favors efficiency, thus allowing more ready access to material.
- It allows me to focus on the practical preservation of materials [to] increase access, and whittle down my large backlog while ensuring the long term stability of the item or material. Putting valuable source materials in the hands of researchers as soon as possible instead of languishing in a backlog.
- It allows us to consider material "finished" rather than deferred or backlogged, at a point where we have provided basic housing and description and minimized threats to preservation. The state of description and housing may be far from ideal, but we don't have to consider the collection "unprocessed" and, most importantly, can open the material to researchers in good conscience.
- [MPLP gives me the] flexibility to process the collections at different levels of description.
- [MPLP allows me to spend] the right amount of time to provide adequate access to a collection. Let the researcher spend time looking at the collection instead of the curator spending time to itemize the collection.

1.F. "Good-enough" Processing Can Be Quality Processing

Quality processing does not require extensive arrangement, description, or preservation. As the Northeastern University Processing Manual notes: "There are many degrees of processing, each of which can be done well." Quality processing finds the most appropriate amount of work to perform to make a collection usable. High-quality processing may just as easily refer to a concise finding aid describing a collection that was skillfully arranged to the series level, as it might refer to a meticulously organized, extensively described collection. In other words, quality in archival processing is not

³ Dennis Meissner and Mark A. Greene, "More Application while Less Appreciation: The Adopters and Antagonists of MPLP." *Journal of Archival Organization* (2010): 174-226.

measured by intensity or level of detail. Quality may be measured by how effectively a processed collection serves its user base and how wisely a processor spent a repository's resources to achieve this.

For those archival processors troubled by efficient processing techniques, remember that a processor's craft lies in analysis and decision-making. A skilled archival processor weighs many criteria to determine how much description, organization, or preservation is truly necessary. A skilled archival processor flexibly applies the most appropriate arrangement, description, or preservation technique from an arsenal of possibilities. A skilled archival processor asks "What are the costs?" and "What are the benefits?" for almost every processing action. A skilled archival processor finds the most efficient way to achieve sufficient intellectual mastery and adequate physical control over the materials. In some ways, streamlined processing is more difficult than traditional processing, because streamlined processing decisions require planning, flexibility, creative compromises, and innovative shortcuts to "get the most bang for the buck." In sum, the efficient processing techniques described in this manual do not devalue your work or your collections. They empower you to make complicated, informed choices about the work you perform so that you may surface more of your institution's important research material to its users. You may still take pride in all that you accomplish and all the researchers you serve when you use efficient processing techniques.

1.G. Implications Beyond Technical Services

Implementation of these guidelines will impact a repository's public services. Institutions may need to change their access policies and reading room procedures. Public services staff may need more training to support use of unprocessed or efficiently processed collections. Users may also ask that public services staff help them find information in collections that are organized with less granularity. Recommendations for changes to public services practices are addressed in [Section 2.B](#).

Backlogs in UC special collections and archives are not merely a problem for technical services, they are also a collecting problem. Backlogs can be the result of institutions acquiring more material than their staffing and resources can handle. They can result from assuming that appraisal⁴ will happen during processing, rather than during the negotiation process when acquiring materials. Selectors and curators may also do their part in reducing backlogs in special collections and archives in three ways:

1. Rely on well-defined collecting policies to guide all collecting decisions.
2. Collect responsibly. Do not collect more than your institution can reasonably make available.
3. Make appraisal decisions before material is accessioned into the repository.

⁴ The [SAA's Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology](#) defines appraisal as "the process of determining whether records and other materials have permanent (archival) value. Appraisal may be done at the collection, creator, series, file, or item level. Appraisal can take place prior to donation and prior to physical transfer, at or after accessioning. The basis of appraisal decisions may include a number of factors, including the records' provenance and content, their authenticity and reliability, their order and completeness, their condition and costs to preserve them, and their intrinsic value. Appraisal often takes place within a larger institutional collecting policy and mission statement. Appraisal is distinguished from monetary appraisal, which estimates fair market value."

4. Consider deaccessioning unprocessed, low-value collections.⁵

⁵ See SAA's [Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning](#). It suggests that repositories use reappraisal and deaccessioning to accomplish multiple goals, including "to assess and prioritize backlogs" and "to better balance research potential of collections with the necessary allocation of resources (space, staff, time, and conservation resources) for their care and preservation" (p.8).

2. The First Step: Expose All Archival Holdings

2.A. At Minimum, Provide a Collection-Level Record for All Archival Holdings

The [NGTS Report: New Modes for Organizing and Providing Access to Special Collections, Archives, and Digital Formats](#) recommended that campuses “provide collection-level description for every archive and manuscript collection in the UC Libraries, ensuring that every collection is visible to users.”

POT 3 Lightning Team 3 recommended that UC special collections and archives follow the “Single-Level Minimum” guideline in DACS to create brief collection-level records in MARC and/or EAD.⁶ Their recommendations are described in the report: “UC Bibliographic Standards for Cooperative, Vendor, and Campus Backlog Cataloging.” Application of this brief record standard should enable repositories to create brief records for all collections more quickly.

Brief collection-level records should be made available online in the Online Archive of California or Next Gen Melvyl/Worldcat, or both.

To implement this, we recommend the following:

- 1) For institutions that have not yet represented all their holdings online, refocus staff energies on creating brief, collection-level records for all holdings.
- 2) Create brief collection-level descriptions as part of the accessioning process.
- 3) When additional accessions are received for a collection, update existing MARC records or finding aids to reflect that addition as part of the accessioning process.
- 4) Use Archivist’s Toolkit or an archival collections management system to streamline the creation and management of collection-level records, and export them in an appropriate format (e.g., EAD and/or MARC) for loading into the Online Archive of California, Next Gen Melvyl/Worldcat, and/or other local systems.
- 5) If you have existing box lists, inventories, etc. that are serviceable and can be made available in electronic format (such as searchable PDF), consider linking your collection-level descriptions to those inventories.⁷

⁶ DACS refers to *Describing Archives: a Content Standard*. (Society of American Archivists. Chicago : Society of American Archivists, c2007). DACS is the national standard for archival description, maintained by the Society of American Archivists. It is the U.S. implementation of international standards (i.e., ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF)) for the description of archival materials and their creators. For more information, see <http://www.archivists.org/governance/standards/dacs.asp>

⁷ Also note that if you use the California Digital Library’s [RecordEXPRESS](#) utility to create collection-level records for the OAC, you have the option to upload one or more searchable PDF documents that will be linked to the collection-level record. RecordEXPRESS is available through your [Contributor Dashboard](#).

2.B. Suggested Access Policies and Procedures

Once all holdings are represented online, users will start requesting them. Traditionally, many institutions have barred patrons from using unprocessed collections. We recommend that UC special collections and archives revise their access policies to promote access to unprocessed materials.

MPLP principles advocate that all unprocessed collections, barring donor imposed or legal restrictions, be presumed open for research. Messiness alone should not be cause for denying access. However, making collections available with minimal to no processing may create concerns regarding privacy, security, preservation, and the possibility that additional burden will be placed on the reference staff. Adjusting policies and procedures can help minimize any potentially negative impact streamlined processing may cause.

Recommendations

1. As part of accessioning, determine whether an accession (or parts therein) is open for research before processing. Note this in the collection-level record.
2. When the condition of an unprocessed collection is unknown, review requested materials on demand to determine suitability for use.
 - a. In the collection-level record, indicate that there is a review process. For example: "The collection has not been processed. It may contain restricted materials. Please contact the Department of Special Collections and Archives in advance to request access."
 - b. Reviews for sensitive or restricted materials can be done by processing staff and need not be the responsibility of the reference staff.
 - c. Processing staff should look foremost for legally restricted records, such as student records, or donor-restricted records.
 - d. Processing staff can advise public services staff about any special handling issues and prevent damage to the materials.
 - e. After material is reviewed, update the access note appropriately in the collection-level record.
 - f. Err on the side of providing access.
3. Assess your institution's tolerance for risk. Review and restrict materials based on this assessment.
 - a. Your institution may need to accept that some overlooked and inappropriate material may get into the hands of researchers. Communicate how this risk is balanced against the need to process collections efficiently and provide timely access to materials.
 - b. Establish procedures for reacting to user discovery of material posing privacy concerns.
 - c. Consider language in researcher guidelines and registration information that alerts researchers to their responsibility not to publish or disseminate information that is a breach of an individual's privacy. This may need to be cleared with your campus's legal counsel.

4. Develop or revise reading room policies to account for use of unprocessed or efficiently processed material.
 - a. Determine how you will handle unfolded material, or material in original folders and envelopes with no apparent order. Providing patrons with place cards to mark where material is removed from a box might be an easy solution.
 - b. Provide gloves when patrons use unsleeved photographs.
 - c. During accessioning or after a review, develop a way to communicate with public services staff about known special access needs. For example, write on the outside of the box that photographs are present and gloves are required for use.

5. Train public services staff to deal with unprocessed or efficiently processed materials in the reading room.
 - a. Train staff to be comfortable with a variety of surprises beneath a box's lid.
 - b. Encourage public services staff to take an active role in reading room management and instruct patrons in how to use materials. Reading room vigilance will help ensure unprocessed materials stay in order and are not damaged during use.
 - c. Some researchers may have more questions because materials are less finely described. Public services staff may need to provide enhanced assistance for these materials. Alternately, public services staff may recommend that out-of-town researchers hire local researchers (e.g., local graduate history students) to do research for them.

6. Track use. Allow user demand to guide processing priorities.
 - a. Efficient processing is an iterative process. If collections are in high demand, if the level of description is not adequate for user needs, or if materials are found to be at risk, the collection can be processed to a higher level of detail and control.
 - b. Obtain feedback from reference staff and/or researchers to determine satisfaction or identify potential problems.

2.C. Suggested Accessioning Approaches

Accessioning is the first phase in the arrangement and description of archival collections. During accessioning, archivists gain initial control over incoming records: the content and condition of materials are reviewed, some description is created, and some housing issues are addressed before material is shelved. Changes in accessioning practices may increase the accessibility of collections, reduce later processing efforts, and reduce the number of collections that enter the processing backlog.

1. Create the minimal collection-level record as part of accessioning.

As part of the accessioning process for a new collection, create at least a preliminary or brief MARC collection-level record or finding aid for the Online Archive of California (OAC). If feasible, include whatever preliminary information is available, even preliminary box-level inventories. This ensures that new material will not remain hidden. If appropriate, indicate that the material is unprocessed and may require review before use.

Example: [Berkeley Gray Panthers](#)⁸

For an accession of additional material for a previously processed collection, update the MARC record and finding aid to represent the new material.

Example: [Irene Saltern Salinger Papers](#)⁹

If a collection is small or of low-research value, consider whether any additional work is necessary beyond accessioning and the creation of a brief MARC record and/or finding aid. Perhaps the new accession doesn't need to be added to a processing queue.

Examples:

- [Eduardo Molina collection of Túnel de Lerma materials, circa 1919-1967](#)¹⁰
- [Minutes of the Finance Committee of the University of California Board of Regents, 1919-1935](#)¹¹

2. Prepare for access of unprocessed materials during accessioning.

As part of accessioning, conduct preliminary searches for restricted materials and note whether collections or boxes can be open for research before processing is complete.

Example: [Christine Browning Files on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues at the University of California, Irvine](#)

3. Perform some processing during accessioning.

During accessioning, the archivist gains familiarity with a collection and its creator and has an opportunity to quickly perform some basic processing. Small collections or those with low-medium research value are good candidates for processing during accessioning. Larger collections can also be given this treatment when enough information is available. For example, a box list or other descriptions may be gathered from a curator or donor, and can be used in the finding aid.¹²

Doing some basic processing work during the accessioning stage may require as little as an hour per linear foot to make materials accessible. If the staff is available and there aren't competing priorities, performing accessioning and processing at the same time is a good investment because it saves many hours of a processor's time getting familiar with a collection. In addition, the new accessions won't be added to a processing backlog.

Example: [Charles Lave papers, UC Irvine](#)

⁸ (<http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b18615815~S1>)

⁹ (<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt0c6022rp/dsc/?query=additional%20materials#ref61>)

¹⁰ <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b18348769~S1>

¹¹ <http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/record=b16308020~S54>

¹² See also: Christine Weideman, "Accessioning as Processing," *American Archivist* 69 (Fall/Winter 2006): 274-83.

3. The Second Step: Process Collections at an Appropriate Level

"A collection is 'processed' whenever it can be productively used for research."¹³

Good processing "1) expedites getting collection materials into the hands of users; 2) assures arrangement of materials *adequate* to user needs; 3) takes the *minimal* steps necessary to physically preserve collection materials; and 4) describes materials *sufficient[ly]* to promote use."¹⁴

3.A. Levels of Control

Archivists often use the concept of "levels of control" to manage arrangement and description. Processing work may be viewed as a continuum whereby archivists start with the most general or largest grouping of materials (e.g., a collection) and proceed in organizing and describing smaller and smaller subsets (e.g., series, subseries, files, and, finally, items). Some collections require more finely detailed organization and/or description than others. Even within a single collection, some parts may require more work than others.

The key to efficient processing is to find the most appropriate level of detail for appraising, preserving, arranging, and describing a collection, appropriate to its research value and condition. Processors must find the "golden minimum" of effort required to make a collection, or series within a collection, usable. In order to be usable, a collection or series must be discoverable, materials with significant research value must be findable, and typical use should not create undue risk of harm.

The following chart describes various processing levels that may be employed in a repository. (Note that equivalencies of terminology and appropriate actions are provided as a conceptual framework, not hard-and-fast definitions.)

Level of Effort	Level of Control	Description	Arrangement	Preservation	Appraisal
Minimal	Collection Level	Collection-level record in MARC or EAD (at least DACS single level minimum) possibly with a brief box listing	As is	Rebox if unserviceable in current housing.	Weeding not appropriate at this level. For collections with privacy concerns throughout, restrict entire collection

¹³ Helen Slotkin and Karen Lynch, "An Analysis of Processing Procedures: The Adaptable Approach," *American Archivist* (Spring 1982): p. 157

¹⁴ MPLP p. 212-213.

					from users and review for use on demand.
Low	Series or Subseries Level	Brief finding aid or detailed MARC notes (arrangement and scope & content) with series/subseries descriptions and/or box listings.	Put series and/or boxes into rough order.	Replace damaged boxes. House loose items. Replace folders, binders, or envelopes only if unserviceable.	Appraise series, subseries, or large, discernible chunks, but avoid finer levels of weeding. For series with privacy concerns throughout, restrict entire series from users and review for use on demand.
Moderate	File Level (expedited)	Succinct finding aid with abbreviated folder lists or simple inventories. Existing description repurposed.	Put folders in rough order. Preserve original order when usable. Perform rough sort of loose items.	Replace boxes. Retain existing folders and labels when in good shape.	Appraise at the folder level; avoid finer levels of weeding. Segregate folders with privacy concerns.
Intensive	Folder Level (traditional)	Finding aid includes detailed folder lists, scope and content notes, and/or historical notes. Folder titles are refined and standardized.	Put folders in order. Impose new organizational scheme or make significant improvements. Sort loose items into folders.	Replace boxes and folders. Selectively perform preservation actions for fragile or valuable items.	Appraise at the folder level; avoid finer levels of weeding. Segregate folders with privacy concerns.
Highly Intensive	Item Level	Detailed finding aid includes item lists, or folder lists with explanatory notes.	Items are placed in order in boxes and folders.	Replace boxes and folders. Comprehensively address housing or preservation needs for fragile items. Reformat audio-visual material.	Item-level weeding appropriate. Segregate items with privacy concerns.

As a general rule, every archival collection should have a collection-level description available online for users to discover. This should be a repository's first priority. Small collections and those with low-research value may never receive more than collection-level treatment.

After a repository has the minimum level of control over all of its holdings, we recommend low or moderate effort processing, particularly for those within institutions with processing backlogs. Many collections will be adequately useable with series or subseries level control. Some collections, due to their value, use, condition, and/or complexity will warrant folder-level control. Even when processing at the folder-level, processors may look for short-cuts that save time and resources. Intensive file-level work or more intensive item-level handling should be reserved for the most important treasures in your repository.

The following chart gives a brief overview of some considerations for determining appropriate levels of processing.

Level of Effort	Level of Control	Attributes of likely candidates for this level of control / effort:
Minimal	Collection Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent accessions. • Collections less than 2 linear feet. • Collections with low research value or little expected use. • Collections with simple organizational schemes. • Collections with uniform kinds of materials or subjects. • Collections in any format.
Low	Series or Subseries Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collections greater than 2 linear feet. • Collections with low to medium research value and expected research use less than every few years. • Collections with potentially high research value or use that need expedited processing to get materials into the hands of users quickly. Patterns of use may be tracked for making further processing decisions. • Series of any size with adequate original order, description, and housing. • Series for which a succinct scope and content note in place of a folder list would offer adequate information for discovery. • Series of any size in which content or format is uniform and the existing arrangement is adequate for finding material, appropriate to the anticipated level of use. • Series with low research value, even if the content and/or formats are highly varied. • Collections lacking discernible order for which a rough sort of materials enables use.
Moderate	File Level (expedited)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collections with moderate to high research value and expected research use at least once per year. • Series or collections with serviceable existing housing, organization, and/or description. • Series where the content and/or formats are highly varied.

Intensive	Folder Level (traditional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collections with high research value and expected research use on a regular basis. • Collections or series with little to no original order or housing. • Collections or series with a wide variety of topics or material types. • Collections or series with privacy issues, where restricted materials are scattered throughout.
Highly Intensive	Item Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rarely appropriate and should be reserved for collections, or materials within collections, that are significantly rare and have the highest research value.

3.B. Assessing Collections

Determining an appropriate processing level is not an exact science and will vary from collection to collection, or from series to series within a collection. There are a number of factors that must be weighed when evaluating how much effort to invest in processing, including value, expected use, condition, and complexity, as well as an institution's resources.

This section will guide you in this assessment. As a general rule, high value collections deserve more processing effort than those with lesser value. In other words, a collection with demonstrated research value and projected high use should be processed more finely than one in which the value or use is questionable or unknown. If two collections present similar preservation needs, more resources (*i.e.*, staff time and supplies) should be devoted to the one with greater value to a greater number of users.

In order to assess how much processing is necessary for a collection or series, we suggest the following steps:

1. Assess the value of the collection.
2. Consider the collection's condition. Given its value, determine how much work should be invested in the collection to make it usable.

3.B.1. Assess value

=> How important is this collection (or series) to researchers, scholarship for its field, and your institution? Consider the following:

- User interest: How frequently do/will researchers seek material on the topics documented in the collection? What kinds of researchers are interested in the material?
- Quality of documentation (or research value): How significant is the documentation to scholarship on this topic? How unusual, extensive, or detailed is the documentation?
- Institutional value: Does the collection have particular interest to your institution or repository? Does the collection serve clientele of particular interest? Are there political or other reasons to highlight the collection?

- Object value: Does the collection include materials that are significantly rare, unique or precious? Do the materials have significant exhibit value? Are they likely targets for theft?

Using the table below, assign a rating from 1-5 for each of the four values, for a total score of 4-20.

Scale	User Interest	Quality of Documentation	Institutional value	Object value
1	Negligible	Slight	Negligible	Negligible
2	Slight	Limited	Limited	Limited
3	Moderate	Pertinent, average	Moderate	Moderate
4	High	Important, extensive	High	High
5	Very high	Unique, very rich	Very high	Very high

3.B.2. Determine appropriate level of effort

3.B.2.a. Target level of control

Given the value of the collection, what level of intellectual and physical control should be achieved to satisfy user demand? What level of granularity is appropriate for surfacing material relevant to specific user inquiries?

Using the value score from the table above, determine the range of processing levels appropriate for that collection (or series) in the table below.

Value Scores	Appropriate level of effort or control
4-5	Minimal effort Collection level
6-10	Minimal effort Collection level Low effort processing Series or subseries level
11-15	Minimal effort Collection level Low effort Series or subseries level Moderate effort File level (expedited)
16-18	Minimal effort Collection level Low effort Series or subseries level Moderate effort File level (expedited) Intensive effort File level (traditional)

19-20	Minimal effort Collection level Low effort Series or subseries level Moderate effort File level (expedited) Intensive effort File level (traditional) Highly intensive effort Item level
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This chart shows how multiple levels of processing may be appropriate for collections of greater value, depending on the nature of the collection and your institutional circumstances. However, intensive levels of processing are not appropriate for collections of lower value. Calculating a collection's value is most useful when comparing multiple collections to determine which collection deserves more resources.

There is no magic formula to help you choose the right level of control or amount of effort to expend on processing a collection. When collections are identified for further processing, *we recommend that institutions use low or moderate effort processing levels most often*, but we also recognize that intensive or highly intensive effort is sometimes necessary for very significant materials.

Erring on the side of under-processing is advisable because a collection can always be processed to a more granular level if research use warrants it, but you cannot undo time consuming processing that wasn't needed. For every processing task, weigh whether the time and cost will considerably help researchers find significant materials or will protect important materials from damage. If you are not adding a lot of value to a collection, then reduce your effort and work at a higher level of control. Even if under-processing a collection places a greater burden on public services staff, consider the overall time investment in making the collection accessible. For example, series-level, rather than folder-level, processing is a smarter investment of staffing resources when a collection is used less than once or twice a year. Rather than spending hundreds of hours on processing an entire collection to the folder level just in case researchers will use some portion of it, public services staff might instead spend just a few hours helping the occasional researcher identify needed material within a series when it is needed. If public services staff repeatedly spend time helping researchers with an under-processed collection, then this collection or one of its popular series might be processed further, once it has been demonstrated that this further investment of processing labor will benefit researchers and save public services' staff time.

3.B.2.b. Other factors influencing the level of control

Understanding a collection's value may help you identify a target processing level and determine if a collection deserves more effort than others in the repository, but the exact amount of labor a collection requires to make it adequately usable depends on the collection's unique characteristics. The labor actually allocated to its processing will, of course, also depend on, the resources available to your institution. Below are six factors to consider when evaluating how much labor to invest in a collection to make it adequately usable, relative to its value.

Physical condition

- How much preservation work is necessary to correct major preservation threats?
 - Look for mold, insect infestation, and nitrate film.
- What is the condition of the existing housing (e.g., boxes, folders, envelopes, or bound volumes (e.g., scrapbooks or ledgers) etc.)?
 - How much use can the existing housing withstand?
 - Is the existing housing damaging the materials inside?
 - Are labels affixed adequately?
- How does the physical condition of the materials affect their use?
 - How much preservation work is necessary to prevent damage or further deterioration of the items under expected use patterns? Is this level of work justified for the collection's value?
 - For media materials, will the typical user wait or pay for materials to be migrated to playable formats upon request? What equipment is needed for access?

Physical order

- For expected levels of use, how much arrangement or organization is needed to make the materials accessible?
 - How big is the collection?
 - Is the organization simple or complex?
 - Are there obvious series?
 - Given expected levels of use, how many boxes must a researcher peruse to find a needed item?

Intellectual access

- How much additional description is necessary to make the collection usable and support expected levels of research?
 - Are the materials homogenous or heterogeneous?
 - Is series level or box-level description adequate?
 - To what degree can you rely on existing folder titles? Are folder titles legible and accurate?
 - Can you repurpose an existing inventory?
 - Can you repurpose other contextual information (e.g., a biography)?
- How much tolerance will researchers and/or reference staff have for browsing for needed information? For the projected lowest level of description, how many boxes must a user request to peruse the contents?
- How many boxes per day can be retrieved from off-site storage for a researcher?

Appraisal and privacy issues

- How likely is it that the creator created or maintained legally restricted records (e.g., student records, personnel records, medical records, attorney-client records, etc.)?

- How easy is it to identify the records with privacy issues and segregate them? How much review is necessary?
- For the expected levels of use, how finely should the collection be reviewed in advance for restricted materials? If restricted materials are present, should restrictions be made at the series, subseries, folder, or item levels?
- How much non-archival material is present? Does it detract from use? How easy is it to identify and separate?

Institutional resources

- Who is available to complete the work?
 - A professional archivist? Library assistants? Students? Interns? Volunteers? What level of work are they most capable of completing?
 - Given the expertise and cost of each level of employee, what processing tasks are the best uses of their time?
 - Can a team-approach be employed to perform different kinds of processing work?
- How much institutional pressure is there to address the backlog?
 - Institutions with backlogs should process at higher levels of control so that processors may address more collections more quickly.
- Is there funding available for processing? Does the funding justify more intensive levels of work?

3.C. Processing Rates

There are many ways to process collections and archivists bring a variety of approaches, levels of experience, subject knowledge, and other strengths and weaknesses. Very few processors would process the same collection in the same way, however it is possible to derive some averages across institutions and across the profession for how long processing will take, taking into consideration the level of control achieved and the initial state of the materials.¹⁵ The chart of processing rates below is designed to help determine the time and resources needed for a processing project, depending on the level of processing desired.

**Average processing rate (hours per linear foot)
given level of processing effort and condition of the materials**

¹⁵ See:

- [“The Decision to Minimally Process Should Be a Collection by Collection Decision.”](#) PACSCL blog.
- [CLIR UCEC Processing Metrics Report](#)
- UCI Processing Manual, based on the Northeastern University Processing Manual
- [Beinecke Library Processing Manual](#)
- T. Abraham et al. ["What Is Backlog Is Prologue: A Measurement of Archival Processing"](#) *American Archivist* (Winter 1985)

	Poor condition or many barriers to access¹⁶	Average condition or moderate barriers to access	Excellent condition or few barriers to access
Minimal effort - Collection level	1-3	1-2	1
Low effort - Series or Subseries level	4-8	3-6	2-4
Moderate effort - File level (expedited)	9-14	7-11	5-8
Intensive effort - Folder level	15-21	12-17	9-13
Highly intensive effort - Item level	22+	18+	14+

3.D. Assessing Labor Allocations

Determining labor allocations among archivists or archival processors, volunteers, interns, and students for most streamlined processing projects depends in large part on an institution's size, structure, and local practice. Typically most institutions are short on professional staff, but many have funds for student assistants or may utilize volunteers. Delegating processing tasks and dividing processing between staff of different skill levels and wages can save time and money. Utilizing professional staff for processing from beginning to end is not in keeping with MPLP except with the most complex or high value materials. Outlined below are three different strategies that can be employed.

Supervisory archivist, archival processor, and assistant (student assistant, intern, or volunteer) team processing

A supervisory archivist is the project manager, overseeing and giving guidance on the processing project. The supervisory archivist is involved in creating the processing plan, training staff, ensuring that deadlines are met, and maintaining quality control. The archival processor is dedicated to executing the processing plan, which involves the intellectual arrangement and high level description. Simpler and routine tasks are delegated to the assistant, such as inventorying, rehousing, labeling boxes and folders, physical arrangement, or processing the simpler series.

Archival processor and assistant (student assistant, intern, or volunteer) team processing

¹⁶ Barriers to access include any characteristic of a collection that might impede user access and require staff attention before a collection may be used productively for research. Barriers to access include disorganization, poor housing, poor description, preservation issues, the presence of special media or other fragile materials, etc.

An archival processor focuses on the initial survey of material, creating a processing plan, intellectual arrangement, and high level description. Simpler and routine tasks are delegated to the assistant, such as inventorying, rehousing, labeling boxes and folders, physical arrangement, or processing the simpler series.

Student assistant, intern, or volunteer as processor

This model gives the student assistant or volunteer the bulk of the responsibility for a processing project. The supervisory archivist gives guidance and direction, but the assistant surveys the material, creates a processing plan in consultation with the archivist, completes the intellectual arrangement, physical arrangement, description, and rehousing. The archivist reviews the work and does the final editing to the finding aid.

3.E. Processing Plans

Many institutions use processing plans to guide processing work; countless examples are available online. Processing plans may help ensure collections are processed at an appropriate level of control and that extra work is justified and sanctioned. A processing plan for an efficiently processed collection might include the following elements:

About the collection	Collection Creator/s
	Collection Title
	Collection Number
	Accessions to be processed
	Brief description of the creator
	Brief description of the collection
Value	Describe.
Proposed processing level	Justify proposed level. Explain any variances (e.g., series or subseries that deserve more granular work).
Appraisal	What? How much?
	Proposed method of implementation. Justify any variance from processing level.
Restricted or sensitive content	What? How much?
	Proposed method of handling. Justify any variance from processing level.
Arrangement	Proposed arrangement
	Potential arrangement issues
	Proposed labor strategy (who does what?)
Preservation	What work will be completed? Justify any variance from processing level.
	Potential preservation issues
	Proposed labor strategy (who does what?)
Description	What work will be completed? Justify any variance from processing level.
	Potential arrangement issues
	Proposed labor strategy (who does what?)
Labor estimate	Estimate hours of labor required to process the collection

Supply estimate	Determine supply needs and costs
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3.F. Assessing and Prioritizing Your Backlog

Institutions with large backlogs may wish to survey their backlog in order to prioritize work. These projects may serve as models:

1. [Bancroft Library Manuscripts Survey Project](#)
2. [PACSL Consortium Survey Initiative](#)
3. [Columbia University Special Collections Materials Survey](#)
4. [Historical Society of Pennsylvania Survey Method](#)

3.G. Processing Metrics

When making decisions about processing approaches and estimating time and resource allocations, it is useful to have data at hand that is tied to specific processing metrics. These metrics can provide valuable information about a variety of activities performed during processing work -- and ultimately, facilitate data-driven decision making.

Tracking processing is recommended as a programmatic activity that is incorporated into the processing workflow for all staff performing processing tasks. Measuring time spent on certain activities can provide more accurate and meaningful data on processing rates at the local level. At the UC systemwide level, sharing of data points can facilitate for a set of common benchmarks for efficient processing, and can be used to iteratively refine heuristics such as those provided in Section 3.C.

The intent of a processing metrics program is not to measure the productivity of individual staff, or to evaluate performance. The intent should be on measuring *processes* -- i.e., assessing time needed and resources required to process collections, and the impacts of taking particular processing approaches. Data points can be used as heuristics for estimating and projecting staffing and resource needs, to process collections based on particular levels -- and can inform and hone benchmarks (such as the estimates outlined in Section 3.C). Data points can also be used as evidence to justify staffing and the financial resources needed, in the context of discussions with donors, when preparing grant applications, etc. Processing efforts can be demonstrated in real time with actual metrics, illustrating the value and justifying the significance of processing work.

A minimum, baseline approach is highly recommended for implementation in the UC context, in order to facilitate the creation of a core set of data points and processing benchmarks. Emphasis should be placed on tying metrics to processing levels, as outlined in Section 3.A. Metrics are most useful when tied to a clear understanding of the type and extent to which a collection was processed. A more thorough option is to go beyond the baseline set of activities -- based on local needs and priorities -- and tracking processing activities at a more granular level, or tracking additional activities and resources involved in processing.

Baseline data elements for tracking

The following elements constitute a baseline level of data that should be recorded, per each collection processed, to promote a shared understanding of processing data points across the UC system. As previously noted, repositories may opt to further differentiate tracking of specific processing activities, for individual tallying. Repositories may also opt to include additional data elements for tracking, beyond the baseline recommendations (for example, tracking of types of tools used as part of the processing workflow, such as Archivists' Toolkit, etc.). If elements are further differentiated (beyond the baseline elements enumerated below), or if additional elements are added, it is important to ensure that they are clearly defined and agreed upon by repository staff.

Element Tracked	Definition/Notes
Repository	Name of contributing institution, department, etc.
Collection/series	Collection title, call number, series number, etc.
Value score	Indicate total score on a scale of 4-20 points of the value of the collection (cumulative user interest, quality of documentation, institutional, and object value), as outlined in Section 3.B.1. and 3.B.2.
Condition	General characterization of the overall condition of materials in the collection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor: Use for poor condition or many barriers to access • Average: Use for average condition or moderate barriers to access • Excellent: Use for excellent condition or few barriers to access
Processor(s)	Enumeration of staff, student assistants, etc. involved in processing
Processing start date	
Processing end date	
Extent, pre-processing	Linear feet measurements must be defined and agreed upon by repository. A suggested guideline for measuring extent is provided by the Yale Linear Footage Calculator .
Total processing hours	The total number of staff hours required to process the collection, encompassing the full range of tasks needed to process the collection to the particular identified Processing Level (as outlined in Section 3.A). Repositories may choose to further enumerate total hours spent on particular processing activities; however, specific hours spent on these activities should be tallied into a "Total processing hours" element. Specific processing activities for individual tallying might include: accessioning, rehousing, preservation photocopying, initial survey, development of processing plan, authoring of finding aids and catalog records, digitization, and publishing and promoting

	finding aids.
Processing level	As determined during assessment and processing planning and based upon processing levels as outlined in Section 3.A: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum: Use for Minimum Collection level • Low: Use for Low effort Series or subseries level • Moderate: Use for Moderate effort File level (expedited) • Intensive: Use for Intensive effort File level (traditional) • Highly intensive: Use for Highly intensive effort Item level
Average processing rate	An estimate of the average processing hours required to process 1 linear foot of the collection.
Funding source	If applicable, indicate if processing was funded by a grant, donor, etc., as well as the funding source.
Notes	Record any additional notes or special conditions.

Time tracking methodology and tools

Time tracking intervals and frequency of reporting should remain at the discretion of the repository. The following spreadsheet can be used and adapted (for example, for inclusion as part of a processing plan document), for recording baseline metrics for individual collections:

[UC Libraries Archival Processing Metrics Worksheet](#)

Below are additional examples tools that can be adapted by repositories, for recording processing activities at a more granular level:

1. [PACSCL/CLIR Hidden Collections Processing Project, Processing Worksheet](#)
2. [Processing Metrics Collaborative: Database Development Initiative](#)
3. [Worksheet for CFPRT expense report from UCLA](#)

4. Efficient Processing Approaches

This section suggests strategies for minimal, low, and moderate-effort processing (i.e., collection level, series/subseries level, or expedited file level processing), as defined in section 3.A. Time-saving techniques are emphasized. Section 4.A. provides strategies applicable to all collection types. Additional considerations for university records, 19th century collections, photographs, and audio-visual materials follow discussion of the broad strategies.

These approaches are meant to supplement, not replace, the processing manuals used in your institution.

4.A. Applicable to All Collections

4.A.1 Arrangement

Level of Effort	Level of Control	Arrangement Actions
Minimal	Collection Level	No action.
Low	Series/ Subseries Level	Put series and/or boxes into rough order.
Moderate	File Level (expedited)	Put folders in rough order. Preserve original order when usable. Perform rough sort of loose items.

Minimize physical arrangement (or re-arrangement) of files.

- Look for a “good enough” organization. Trust that users have the patience to examine the contents of a box (or more), as well as multiple folders, to find needed information.
- Leave folders in original order, rather than alphabetizing them or imposing another order. Users can search online finding aids for needed items. Allow the finding aid to guide users to the right location in a box, or across multiple boxes.
- While it is important to identify series, and which files constitute a series, it is not necessary to bring all the folders that are part of a series together physically. The finding aid can be used to intellectually bring together related material stored in different containers.

Do not work at the item level. Keep to the established level of control in your processing plan.

- Never arrange items within folders.
- Do not remove items from folders and place in other folders. Rather than sorting finely, describe the variety of content in folders as you find it. (Exceptions may be made for preservation threats or restricted materials.)

Folder, but do not sort, clumps or piles of unfolded material.

- Group loose papers into folders, keeping adjacent, related items together.
- Don't sort loose items. Rather, describe the items collected in the folder. Use whatever information can be gleaned quickly, e.g., dates, material types, prevailing correspondent.

Tolerate larger aggregations of related materials.

- For moderate processing, look to gain physical control at the file unit level (i.e., between the subseries and folder levels). A file unit may consist of multiple folders. Consider whether adding detail helps a user identify a **box** with relevant materials. For example:

A view into how individual folders are labeled within a box

<p>Moderate effort arrangement:</p> <p>Folder 1 Correspondence, 1982-1996</p> <p>Folder 2 Correspondence, 1982-1996</p> <p>Folder 3 Correspondence, 1982-1996</p> <p>Folder 4 Correspondence, 1982-1996</p> <p><i>In the finding aid, this is represented as:</i> <i>F. 1-4 Correspondence, 1982-1996</i></p>	<p>Intensive effort arrangement:</p> <p>Folder 1 Correspondence, 1982-1984</p> <p>Folder 2 Correspondence, 1985-1988</p> <p>Folder 3 Correspondence, 1989-1992</p> <p>Folder 4 Correspondence, 1993-1996</p>
<p>Moderate effort arrangement:</p> <p>Folder 1 Smithsonian Institution, Regents Board records</p> <p>Folder 2 Smithsonian Institution, Regents Board records</p> <p>Folder 3 Smithsonian Institution, Regents Board records</p> <p>Folder 4 Smithsonian Institution, Regents Board records</p> <p><i>In the finding aid, this is represented as:</i> <i>F. 1-4 Smithsonian Institution, Regents Board records</i></p>	<p>Intensive effort arrangement:</p> <p>Folder 1 Smithsonian Institution, Regents Board correspondence</p> <p>Folder 2 Smithsonian Institution, Regents Board budgets</p> <p>Folder 3 Smithsonian Institution, Regents Board reports</p> <p>Folder 4 Smithsonian Institution, Regents Board minutes</p>

Opt for simple arrangement schemes.

- Avoid elaborate hierarchies. Establish subseries or sub-subseries only when very necessary, taking provenance and original order into consideration.

Limit perusal of documents within files.

- For minimal processing, identify series and subseries based on original order and/or existing folder description. Do not examine the contents of every folder, but only take quick glances inside a few to confirm the proper identification of the series.
- For moderate processing it is also not necessary to examine the content of each folder. Use original order and existing description to identify and order series and subseries; only examine the contents of folders when necessary for description.

4.A.2 Description

Level of Effort	Level of Control	Description
Minimal	Collection Level	Collection level record in MARC or EAD (at least DACS single level minimum)
Low	Series/ Subseries Level	Brief finding aid or detailed MARC notes (arrangement and scope & content) with series/ subseries descriptions and/or box listings.
Moderate	File Level (expedited)	Succinct finding aid with abbreviated folder lists or simple inventories. Existing description repurposed.

Create a MARC record and/or brief EAD record for all collections.

- A minimal collection-level record is appropriate for unprocessed or minimally processed collections.
- A minimal collection-level record is also appropriate for collections that might not be available due to privacy concerns.
- More detailed MARC records, with access points and more specific notes, are appropriate for moderately to intensively processed collections.
- Use the Archivist’s Toolkit or an archival collections management system to streamline the creation and management of collection-level records, and export them to MARC and/or EAD.

A collection-level record may provide adequate access to some collections. Further description might not be necessary in the following cases:

- Collections are small enough for users to review physically in a single research day (e.g. 5 cartons for Bancroft Library collections stored at NRLF.)
- Collections have homogenous subject matter not requiring rich description.

- Container numbers or physical locations are clearly delineated within either arrangement notes or scope & content (summary) notes.

Example:

Title: Frank P. Doherty papers on Hiram Johnson, 1922-1969.

Summary: Box 1: mostly contains materials relating to Johnson's failed presidential campaign in 1924; Box 2: materials about Johnson's political career in the California State Senate from 1922-1945, including copies of speeches by and about him, 1921-1969; Box 3: disbound binder about individuals in California who supported Johnson's reelection campaign in 1940; Volume: checkbook for the Hiram Johnson for Senator campaign, dated 1934, May 15-November 5.

- Notes are rich and detailed enough to enable discovery through keyword searching.
- Controlled access points are provided for key individuals, organizations, and topics.

Vary descriptive detail according to material present.

- Uniform material might be described at the box or series/subseries level with little impact on users.
- The level of description may vary within a collection. Portions of a particular series in a collection may have more value and warrant more detailed description, while other areas may need very little description.
- Resist temptation to describe the subject content of correspondence, unless of the foremost value and importance.
- Descriptive detail must truly help lead a user to a relevant box. For moderate processing, rather than describing folders with related content individually, look for ways to describe multiple folders of related content together. For example:

Moderate-effort description:	Intensive-effort (traditional) description:
F. 2-7 Research files on "Utopian Experiments in American History", circa 1974-1985	Research files on "Utopian Experiments in American History" F. 2 California's Utopian colonies: lecture notes, articles, and other materials 1979-1983 F. 3 European Utopian socialists: lecture notes and articles 1974-1985 F. 4 Fourierism in America: lecture notes undated F. 5 Introductory material: syllabi, course notes, and other materials 1981-1982

	<p>F. 6 The Mormons: lecture notes, articles, and other materials 1974-1985</p> <p>F. 7 The Oneida Community: lecture notes and articles 1980-1981</p>
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Existing description on folders within a box	Low effort / series-level description	Moderate effort / folder level (expedited) description
<p>Apple sales, 1976. Sales reports, 1977. Macintosh apples, 1972-1980. Apple pests, 1972. Pest control, 1973-1974. Refrigeration of apples, 1974-1976. Apple shipping and transportation, 1973-1979. Banana sales reports, 1971-1973. Sales reports for bananas, 1974-1975. Organic farming, 1972-1974. Organic farms, 1974-1982. Banana pest control, 1978. Pesticides for bananas, 1979. Cabbage sales, 1972-1976. Reports of cabbage sales, 1977-1979. Organic farms, 1974-1976. Cabbage pests, 1972-1973. Pesticides used on cabbage crops, 1974-1976. Pests and insect control, 1977.</p>	<p>Farming records, circa 1972-1980</p> <p>Includes information about organic farming, pesticides, sales, and shipping for apples, oranges, and cabbages.</p>	<p>Farming records, circa 1972-1980</p> <p>Apples (7 folders)</p> <p>Bananas (6 folders)</p> <p>Cabbages (6 folders)</p>

Example adapted from the [Minnesota Historical Society's Detailed Description Guidelines](#).

Use scope and content notes strategically.

- A good scope and content note for a series, subseries, or large chunk of files may make arrangement and description at the folder level unnecessary. It is often less time consuming to summarize contents in a note, rather than organizing or listing out individual folder titles. Use keywords to improve identification of material in online searches.

Write brief scope and content notes, biographical notes, or historical notes.

- Provide enough information to help users determine that a collection is appropriate to their research needs. Leave detailed research to the researchers.

- If there are published biographies or histories available, refer to those rather than writing long notes.
- Use a short chronology rather than a narrative note if it saves time.

Repurpose existing description.

- For moderate processing, use the creator's folder headings or descriptions when possible. Invent or refine folder descriptions to further identify the contents of folders only when it is necessary in order to enable discovery.
- Use student assistants or interns to create inventories by keying transcriptions of existing headings or description.
- When reasonable, encourage donors to label materials or create electronic inventories of materials before donation.
- If your repository has non-standard inventories not in EAD, scan or convert them to PDF and make them available online. You can host them on your own website and link to them from your finding aid, or you can upload them to the Online Archive of California (OAC) with the California Digital Library's [RecordEXPRESS](#) utility (available through your [Contributor Dashboard](#).) Nonstandard description of a collection available online is better than none at all.
- If a creator provided extensive description, make it available as a supplementary finding aid or as the collection's primary container list.
- If extensive biographies of individuals or organizational histories already exist, refer to them, don't replicate them.

Record approximate ("circa") dates for collections, series, subseries, or folders.

- Do not examine items to determine exact dates.

Write sparingly.

- If your repository finds it necessary to include the same information on every folder (e.g., repository name, collection title, collection number, etc.), use labels or stamps for repetitive information.
- For moderate processing, abbreviate information on the folders, but elaborate or spell out in the online finding aid if more complete information enables discovery.

Reconsider how you use folder numbers.

- Omit folder numbers from finding aids. Folders may still be numbered within boxes to help with refiling.
- Do not number folders by using a consecutive sequence throughout a collection. Start over with 1 in each box.

Rely on web search engines (e.g. Google) to index and surface your online finding aids and limit the construction of authorized terms to MARC records.

- Rely on the description in your finding aids to lead users to you. (Currently most users start their research in Google and U.C. finding aids on the OAC are well exposed to Google searches. If your finding aids include description with names, topics, and places, then users will discover your finding aid.
- Establishing names in Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) is time consuming. Deemphasize this work and establish only a few key names.
- Constructing authorized subject headings is time consuming. Deemphasize this work and rely on a limited number of key base headings rather than exhaustive subject analysis and construction of subdivided heading strings. (e.g. “Earthquakes”, not “Earthquakes—California—San Francisco – Sources”)

4.A.3 Preservation

Pay most attention to active, major threats.

- Examine folder contents very briefly, with an eye out for major threats (active agents of damage) such as insects, mold, or nitrate or acetate film based media. (Even minimal processing must remove or isolate active threats.)
- Assess less active threats broadly. Can material be handled by users without *likely* damage that results in loss of information? If so, do not intervene.

Store materials in an environment with ideal temperature and humidity.

- Well maintained environmental controls protect materials more effectively than proper enclosures for individual items. Focus on improving your storage areas for all materials before focusing on preserving individual items.
- “A frequent recommendation is a stable temperature no higher than 70°F and a stable relative humidity between a minimum of 30% and a maximum of 50%. Research indicates that relative humidities at the lower end of this range are preferable since deterioration then progresses at a slower rate. In general, the lower the temperature the better. ... Maintaining stable conditions is crucial. An institution should choose a temperature and relative humidity within the recommended ranges that can be maintained twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year.”¹⁷

Limit the amount of re-folding.

¹⁷ Sherelyn Ogden. “[Temperature, Relative Humidity, Light, and Air Quality: Basic Guidelines for Preservation.](#)” Northwest Document Conservation Center Preservation Leaflet (2007).

- Do not replace folders that are in good, serviceable condition. Only replace folders in poor condition, or when necessary to support expected levels of use. Folders should adequately hold and protect materials as they are taken in and out of a box.
- If replacing folders, delegate this task to lower-cost staff, such as student assistants or volunteers.
- If necessary, staple original adhesive file labels to folders to prevent loss of information.
- If original folders or envelopes have annotations, but must be replaced, retain the original enclosure, or photocopy the exterior. Do not transcribe detailed information by hand.

Deal efficiently with fasteners and wrappers.

- Do not routinely remove metal fasteners (e.g., staples, paper clips, or binder clips) from materials. Leave them in place.
- Bundles originally housed in rubber bands or other un-usable wrappers should be rehoused in the most time-efficient way possible. Use an archival envelope or a folded 11 x 17 sheet of paper to maintain arrangement within the folder without further analysis or documentation.

Avoid unfolding, flattening, or unrolling items, unless the value of the collection warrants item-level treatment.

Postpone item-level preservation actions until a user requests access.

- If material would be damaged through use, and intensive preservation actions are necessary, defer the preservation actions until the user demand is clear.
- Specify in a restriction note in the finding aid that a preservation action is necessary before use. When users request the material, perform the appropriate action, or ask that the user pay for the preservation action. This strategy might be appropriate for brittle rolls of paper, rolls of photographs, photographic negatives, original audio-visual material, floppy discs, etc.

Leave media materials where you find them. Rely on public service procedures to address usage.

- Do not routinely separate material from files based on media type. Exceptions: make separations if the media poses a significant physical threat to nearby material, to human safety, or has significant research or monetary value in its own right to the degree that separate housing, description, and management is a necessity for preservation, discovery, and use. (See section 4.E. on Photographs, for example.)
- If media has special handling needs, find efficient ways to communicate this to public services staff. For example:
 - Stamp folders or boxes with “Photographs Present” to alert desk staff to instruct users and provide gloves for photo handling.
 - Place a note in the finding aid indicating the presence of original archival audio tapes or video tapes. Note any restrictions on use.

4.A.4. Appraisal

Do not weed items from folders. “Weeding is for gardeners, not archivists.”¹⁸ Appraise at the series, subseries, or file level as appropriate.

Appraise collections before or during acquisition. Assist donors in appraising material before transfer.

4.A.5. Privacy Issues

Assess risk to determine appropriate level of review for restricted materials.

- Determine likelihood that the donor’s activities resulted in the production or retention of restricted records. The amount of effort used to look for restricted materials should be weighed against this.

Rather than investing in the labor required to do extensive restriction reviews up front, wait to do the review until a user requests the materials.

- For collections with pervasive privacy issues and lower likelihood of use, postpone the review for restricted materials until a user request is made.
- This strategy is especially appropriate for low-use materials in University Archives with scattered student records.

Whenever possible, reduce intake of problematic material by communicating to donors that certain materials should not be included.

4.B. Managing Multiple Accessions

Collections with multiple accessions pose many processing challenges. When processing a collection with multiple accessions, or when receiving additional materials for a collection you have already processed, you must consider to what degree you integrate materials physically and intellectually.

4.B.1. Processing a Collection with Multiple Accessions for the First Time

Level of Effort	Arrangement	Description	Example
Minimal	Keep accessions distinct.	For a collection-level record, briefly describe contents of each accession to help users select which accession is most appropriate.	
Low-Moderate	Keep accessions distinct. Do not integrate or interfile one accession into another.	Describe each accession separately. Use series/subseries or file level control as appropriate.	Peter Ackroyd Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale

¹⁸ Greene, p. 181.

	<p>Each accession might start over with “Box 1.”</p> <p>Identify and arrange series/subseries within each accession. Process at file level if appropriate.</p>		University
Moderate-intensive	Integrate all accessions physically.	Describe at the file level.	

4.B.2. Managing Additional Accessions to a Previously Processed Collection

Level of Effort	Arrangement	Description	Example
Minimal	Keep accessions distinct.	For a collection-level record, briefly describe contents of each accession to help users select which accession is most appropriate.	
Low-Moderate	<p>Keep accessions distinct.</p> <p>Do not integrate or interfile one accession into another. Each accession might start over with “Box 1.”</p> <p>Identify and arrange series/subseries within each accession. If appropriate, arrange each accession at file level.</p>	<p>Represent new accessions following the processed materials.</p> <p>Describe each accession separately. Use series/subseries or file level control as appropriate.</p> <p>Do not attempt to integrate description with the processed materials.</p>	AIDS Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University
Moderate	<p>Arrange additional materials in boxes at the end of a processed collection. Work at the subseries or file unit level.</p> <p>Make efforts to arrange new materials similarly to previous efforts.</p> <p>Do not interfile new materials into previously</p>	<p>Bring similar series or subseries together intellectually in the finding aid.</p> <p>Do not integrate description intellectually below the subseries level.</p>	Central Records Unit Records, UC Irvine

	processed materials.		
Moderate-intensive	When adding additional materials, arrange new materials in boxes at the end of a processed collection.	Integrate the folder descriptions intellectually. Sequential folders in the finding aid will be in different boxes.	Southeast Asia Resource Action Center Records, UC Irvine
Intensive-very intensive	Physically integrate the new accession, effectively reprocessing the entire collection.	Folder-level description	

4.C. University Archives

Collections of paper-based records in UC University Archives are well suited to MPLP approaches. Many of them are modern, subject to record schedules, maintained with some sort of filing system, and not intensively used. However, collections with frequent accruals pose challenges, as does our obligation as university employees to protect sensitive materials (particularly student records) and to provide timely access to public records. A few additional strategies are relevant:

Limit the scope of record groups, or increase the granularity of how you manage archival collections (e.g., use series, accessions, record units, etc. as the primary means of managing a collection in the University Archives instead).

- This will reduce the frequency with which you need to update existing finding aids and catalog records with new accessions. Some examples:
- Manage materials for each major figure in an office separately. For example, for the Chancellor’s records, maintain separate collections for each Chancellor, rather than one big record group for all Chancellors.
- Manage materials from each office, regardless of their division, separately. For example, if you receive records from multiple units with a division of student affairs, don’t group them all together in one record group for student affairs. Manage their records separately.
- Manage distinct series from the same office separately when appropriate. For example, University of California (System). Office of the President. Records: Permanent Files, 1952-1975; or University of California, Irvine, Office of the Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs Budget Records.
- Don’t be wedded to managing records based on the campus structure. For example, if you receive materials from a committee, individual, or a special topic of interest, manage the material at the level of granularity in which arrived, rather than trying to integrate it into an existing collection or structure. For example: Smith (Donovan) Files Relating to Space Utilization at the University of California at Berkeley, or Ariel (Joan) files on Women's Studies at the University of California, Irvine.

Refer to state, university, and campus policies about restricted classes of records. Each campus maintains these policies and procedures. (See also [Section 4.A.5 Privacy Issues](#).)

Shift some responsibility for appraisal, arrangement, preservation, and description to campus offices.

- Develop policies and procedures to guide transfers of records that limit the work the University Archives must complete to make these records available.
- Require that campus units follow the university record schedules.
 - Get the campus record manager involved.
 - Train staff in campus units to recognize archival records.
 - Do not allow transfer of restricted or non-permanent records. Return restricted or non-permanent records to office of origin for disposal and/or weeding.
- Require that campus units provide electronic inventories of materials they transfer.
 - Create a template so you may easily repurpose this inventory for a finding aid.
- Give campus units archival boxes to pack records, and train them to pack materials appropriately. If necessary, give them folders to use and instruct them in how to label appropriately.

4.D. 19th Century and Earlier Collections

Although MPLP was primarily intended for processing 20th century collections, repositories have successfully implemented MPLP's efficient processing techniques for pre-20th century material as well.¹⁹

The PACSCL project noted: "The age does not seem to deter us in being able to efficiently process an "old" collection. Age does, however, quite frequently deter us from describing the collections *well*."²⁰ They noted two main difficulties with description. First, the handwriting may be difficult to read and summarize efficiently. Second, in family collections, it is often difficult to untangle relationships or determine who is who, particularly if many have similar names. They also noted that arrangement can be time-consuming, particularly when parts of the collection may have received item-level attention in the past. They concluded that "every collection is different and unique and there is absolutely no way to say that one time will work even within a date frame or a type of record." In other words, some pre-20th century collections may be processed efficiently with low or moderate effort, while others require more intensive treatment. Nevertheless, they were able to process at efficient rates; they found it possible to process an 18th century organizational/corporate collection "in shambles" in approximately 5 hours per linear foot.

In sum, the same principles should apply for pre-20th century collections as for 20th century collections. Determine the value of the materials for your institution. Evaluate what processing efforts are required

¹⁹ For example, see Barbara Austen, "[Speed Reading in the Archives: Can Less Produce More?](#)" Common-place. (July 2010)

²⁰ Holly Mengel. "[The Decision to Minimally Process Should be a Collection-by-Collection Decision.](#)" *PACSCL Hidden Collections Processing Project: Revealing the Unknown Stories of the Philadelphia Region*. (January 2012).

to make the collection adequately usable. Only perform work that is appropriate to the value of the materials for your institution and expected patterns of usage. Just because material is old or fragile doesn't mean it deserves intensive labor.

4.E. Photographs

Photographic collections are often among the highest used and most valued in a repository. Photographs' value may be related to aesthetics, the richness of visual information, general human appeal, or monetary value. As such, photographic collections often warrant more processing labor than other materials. However, some kinds of photographs occur in great volume and have lower value than others: family snapshots and portraits; unidentified portraits; and voluminous and repetitive files of negatives and/or contact sheets. These are good candidates for efficient processing techniques.

Photographs also pose processing challenges for preserving various formats, describing imagery at a level to satisfy user interests and behaviors, and managing the relationships between originals and reproductions. These challenges have resulted in processing practices that differ from archival processing practices. For example, traditional processing of photographs often includes assigning unique item numbers to gain control over multiple manifestations. When efficient processing approaches are applied to photographs, they must take into account these different ways of managing photographs.

Processing activities for photographic collections

Level of Effort	Level of Control	Description	Arrangement	Preservation
Minimal	Collection Level	Collection level record in MARC or EAD (at least DACS single level minimum)	As is	Rebox if unserviceable in current housing. Identify locations of film-based media (negatives and slides) for separate storage and/or restriction.
Low	Series/ Subseries Level	Brief finding aid or more detailed MARC record with series/ subseries descriptions and/or box listings.	Put series and/or boxes into rough order.	Replace damaged boxes. House loose items. Replace folders, binders, or envelopes only if unserviceable. Remove film-based media (negatives and

				slides) for separate storage.
Moderate	File Level (expedited)	Succinct finding aid with abbreviated folder lists or simple inventories. Existing description repurposed. Brief reference to photographic process or format may be included.	Put folders in rough order. Preserve original order when usable. Perform rough sort of loose items. Note correspondence between negatives and prints in broad terms (container or folder level).	Replace boxes. Retain existing folders and labels when in good shape. House batches of physically similar material in sleeves of folders. Provide individual archival folders or enclosures only for a few exceptional items.
Intensive	Folder Level (traditional)	Finding aid includes detailed folder lists or item lists, scope and content notes, and/or historical notes at a folder or item level. Folder titles are refined and standardized. Physical descriptions such as photographic process and format are provided.	Put folders in order. Impose new organizational scheme or make significant improvements. Sort loose items into folders. Items may be given unique numbers. Record relationships between prints and negatives in as much detail as possible.	Replace boxes and folders. Provide archival folders or plastic enclosures for a significant percentage of items, individually or in small batches. Sleeve all negatives individually. Selectively perform preservation actions for fragile or valuable items.
Highly Intensive	Item Level (traditional)	Detailed finding aid includes item lists with image descriptions, physical descriptions of media, format, dates, and other explanatory notes.	Arrange items in order in boxes and folders. Assign items unique numbers, and match prints to negatives, giving them corresponding numbers, or cross-references.	Replace boxes and folders. Comprehensively address housing or preservation needs by providing archival folders or plastic enclosures for all items, individually. Reformat negatives to provide use copies

				(print or digital).
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4.E.1. Photographic Collections Managed Independently of Other Archival Materials

4.E.1.a Arrangement

Level of Effort	Level of Control	Arrangement Actions
Minimal	Collection Level	No action beyond boxing.
Low	Series/ Subseries Level	Put series and/or boxes into rough order. Create or note parallel series/subseries for material stored separately due to media or format type.
Moderate	File Level (expedited)	Put folders in rough order. Preserve original order when usable. Perform rough sort of loose items. Note correspondence between negatives and prints in broad terms (container or folder level).

Preserve original order.

- Avoid sorting photographs by subject if they occur in a provenance-based archive or collection. Subject sorting can result in physically similar items being inappropriately separated, obscuring evidence that they were likely from the same roll of film or developed/printed at the same time.

Avoid item-level arrangement.

- Matching of prints and negatives is not feasible in large collections, so arrange and describe as separate series. Use parallel descriptions between the two series to facilitate matching.

Avoid item-level weeding.

- Retain duplicates, unless voluminous. Duplicates may have unseen value. For example, the presence of numerous copies indicates a preferred, heavily used image, and this can be significant evidential information for public figures. Subtle differences in contrast or retouching may be apparent among numerous proof prints of an image, providing evidential value of the emphasis or “spin” sought by image creators.
- Retain unidentified images if volume is moderate. Note that researchers often know more about specific subjects or families than archivists can.

4.E.1.b Description

Level of Effort	Level of Control	Description
Minimal	Collection Level	Collection level record in MARC or EAD (at least DACS single level minimum)
Low	Series/ Subseries Level	Brief finding aid or detailed MARC notes (arrangement and scope & content) with series/ subseries descriptions and/or box listings. Document in notes any parallel series / subseries for material stored separately due to media or format type.
Moderate	File Level (expedited)	Succinct finding aid with abbreviated folder lists or simple inventories. Existing description repurposed. Note material stored separately due to media or format type at a more granular level.

Most photographs do not need to be described at the item level.

- Folder-level description is sufficient for discovery of most photographs.
- Family photographs of limited research value may be described at the collection or series level only. Scope and content notes need not mention all individuals, places or subjects present; only those represented voluminously or those of known importance.

Reserve item-level description and control for exceptional material such as:

- 19th century views (non-portrait documentary images.)
- Good quality portraiture of individuals of high research interest.
- Photographs with high value as artifacts (work of famous photographers, or valued as examples of photographic processes, or for their exceptional aesthetic quality.)
- Images central to your institution’s mission and the interests of users.

Describe relationships between negatives and prints in the most efficient way possible.

- When negatives and prints are stored separately, make the folder descriptions parallel to facilitate matching through the inventory.
- Describe clear correlations of prints and negatives when evident, rather than spending time matching item-by-item and assessing relationships.
- Clarify when negatives are known to be represented by prints. Standard phrases like “Prints available for some” or “No prints available” are helpful.

4.E.1.c Preservation

Level of Effort	Level of Control	Description
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Minimal	Collection Level	Material boxed and reviewed for presence of film (nitrate, early safety), with nitrate film isolated.
Low	Series/ Subseries Level	All film based media separated for appropriate storage. Rolled photographs and other material that can not be used without high risk of damage should be isolated and restricted. Basic steps taken to maintain associations between identifying annotations and related images.
Moderate	File Level (expedited)	Succinct finding aid with abbreviated folder lists or simple inventories. Existing description repurposed. Note material stored separately due to media or format type at a more granular level.

Isolate nitrate and acetate film, negatives, and transparencies, and store them properly.

- Nitrate film and acetate film both pose threats to people and material housed with them.

Rely on good storage environments for photographic material rather than providing the best storage material for all photographs.

- Deterioration can be slowed by cool or cold storage even if enclosures are not all archival.
- Color photographs (whether film or photographic prints) are unstable and must be stored in the best cold/moderately dry conditions possible for preservation, so separation of voluminous or highly valued color material is recommended when feasible.

Limit the housing of individual items. Rely instead on stricter policies in the reading room.

- Strictly limit polyester sleeving due to expense.
- Limit polyethylene sleeving to the most exceptional items.
- Limit interleaving paper or individual foldering.
- Good reading room handling policies protects material better than aggressive and expensive housing of items.
 - Require that users wear gloves when handling unsleeved photographs.
 - Instruct staff and researches in handling material, avoiding flexing and abrasion, etc.

4.E.2. Photographs in Manuscript and Archival Collections

4.E.2.a Arrangement

Do not routinely separate photographs found in chiefly textual archival collections.

- Leave them in place when:

- they are intrinsically related or physically attached to manuscript material (e.g. photo illustrations in a report, or photos enclosed in a letter that discusses them)
- they have little or no research interest outside the context of the manuscript material (and therefore do not merit separate description and subject or form/genre access points)
- there is no extreme preservation threat that can not be mitigated within the manuscript collection
- anticipated reproduction requests can be adequately met, and resulting surrogate images controlled, whether within the manuscript collection or managed as a separate collection
- Always make separations if the media poses a significant physical threat to nearby material, or to human safety.
- Consider separations if photographs have sufficient research or monetary value in their own right to justify separate housing, description, and management.
- Even when physical separations are necessary, retain the photographs as part of the archival collection, perhaps as a separate series or in another box. This is generally more efficient than creating a separate collection for the photographs.

4.E.2.b Description

Develop strategies to enable discovery of photographs by image researchers even if photographs remain in chiefly textual archival collections.

- Use simple and consistent standard terms in MARC records and finding aids, such as “photograph” or “photographs” to let researchers know where to find images.
- If a folder listing is created, append a note “includes photographs” at the folder level.

Example:

Series 1: Office Files, undated.

carton 1, folder 1: "A" miscellaneous, 1978-1987

carton 1, folder 2: Advertising Council, 1967

carton 1, folder 3: Allen, William and "Meffy" (with 13 photographs), 1987

carton 1, folder 4: Alphand, Herve and Nicole (with 1 photograph), 1975

carton 1, folder 5: Annual report (includes 6 photographs of sales staff), 1976

- For photographs of a high research interest in an archival collection, create a sub-unit MARC record in the Visual Materials format to improve discovery. This may be less labor-intensive than removal of photographic files to a separate photographic collection.

Example:

Creator: California, Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots.

Title: Photographs collected by the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots
2 boxes (ca. 590 photographic prints) : b&w ; 4 x 5 in.

Note: Forms part of the Records of the Governor's Commission of the Los Angeles Riots.

Subjects:

Riots -- California -- Los Angeles -- Photographs
Watts Riot, Los Angeles, Calif., 1965 -- Photographs
African Americans -- California -- Los Angeles -- Photographs

Describe photographs in the intellectually relevant place, even if stored separately.

Example:

Gruenther, Alfred M. (Alfred Maximilian), 1899-1983

carton 9, folder 37: Correspondence and Red Cross medals (with 5 photographs, 1 signed), 1956-1959

box 5, folder 2: 2 negatives with corresponding prints, undated

Gryphon (yacht)

carton 9, folder 38: Miscellany (with 10 photographs), undated

box 5, folder 3: 20 negatives, some with corresponding prints

Patron orders for photographic duplication (generally digital) must be accommodated. The database or other system used for managing orders will need to accommodate a variety of ways of noting the location of originals that have not been given item control numbers. (Location Note: "Original in: carton x folder y.")

4.E.2.c Preservation

Isolate nitrate and acetate ("safety") film, negatives, and transparencies, and store them properly.

- Nitrate film and acetate film both pose threats to people and material housed with them.

Minimize handling threats to photographs within paper-based archival collections by one or more of these strategies:

- Place them in archival plastic sleeves but leave them in the same folder with papers.
- Place them in a new archival folder adjacent to the folder of origin.
- Leave them un-sleeved and un-folded, but communicate to public services staff that researchers must use gloves (e.g., include note in the finding aid, or stamp "Includes Photographs" on the outside of the box.)

Rely on good storage environments for photographic material rather than providing the best storage material for all photographs.

- Deterioration can be slowed by cool or cold storage even if enclosures are not all archival.

- Color photographs (whether film or photographic prints) are unstable and must be stored in the best cold/moderately dry conditions possible for preservation, so separation of voluminous or highly valued color material is recommended when feasible.

4.F. Audio-Visual Material

Unique audio-visual materials pose many processing challenges. They are often underutilized due to a lack of description and insufficient resources to make access copies for researchers. The difficulty with AV materials are widely known. Repositories may not have equipment to play various formats. Older formats may be fragile, and a single use may inadvertently damage them. Some formats have short life-spans. Repositories may not have the expertise to duplicate audio-visual materials for patron use. Moreover, to identify and catalog material, archivists have traditionally wanted to listen to or view the entire item, especially if it is poorly labeled. This level of content analysis is time intensive.

Despite these challenges, efficient processing techniques may be applied to processing audiovisual collections may solve their descriptive challenges and significantly aid researchers in finding content of potential research value. Series-level work may not often be appropriate, but there are many ways to streamline the processing of AV materials that can result in better description and greater access to the content.

4.F.1. User-driven access and processing

Consider allowing use of some original audio-visual material.

- Most UC Special Collections have policies forbidding users from playing original, unique audio-visual materials. Due to the fragility of the media and danger of loss, duplication is required first, either subsidized by the repository or the researcher. A blanket policy may not be the best approach, and a case-by-case, decision-making process based on the importance and rarity of the content or fragility of the items in question may be more appropriate. These decisions don't need to be made at the time of processing, but can be made when a researcher requests items by appropriately trained staff.
- When audiovisual materials are requested, assess the risk in allowing users to view the original materials. Some formats are less prone to damage and still familiar to users (audio cassette tapes, VHS tapes) and some type of content (non-unique air checks) and it may be acceptable for patrons to use or view originals. Formats unfamiliar to patrons or with high potential of damage or needing difficult to replace equipment (U-Matic video, open reel audio and video) should not be used by patrons.

Delay reformatting activities until users request the material.

- Do not view or convert audio-visual material until requested by researchers. If necessary, have the researcher bear the expense of copying to digital formats both for themselves and the collection. A restriction note (such as a 540 note) can be included in the finding guide and MARC

record to alert patrons to library policy, such as “Service copies of audiovisual items may need to be made before viewing or listening. Please consult [Repository] staff for further information.

Develop projects to reformat high-use material after materials known to be of interest to researchers.

4.F.2. Appraisal

Appraise at an appropriate level.

- Determine an appropriate appraisal level (such as series or subseries), but avoid appraising individual items and weeding at the item level.
- Do not invest resources in converting, viewing, or listening to them as part of appraisal process
- It is OK to retain unlabeled or poorly labeled items without investing time in identification if it is likely that significant content may be on them.
- By default, this approach puts the onus on identification of important materials on the researcher. If they have hunch that an underdescribed tape may have interesting content, have a process in place to get them access to that content.
- Alternatively, discard suspected blank or unimportant tapes or discs unless the importance of the collection creator or subject would lead you to believe that unique and significant content may be on the tape.
- Be cautious about letting the cost of transfer or repair determine your appraisal decisions. Professional and unusual formats have a greater likelihood of having unique (and high quality) content on them. Blank or unlabeled VHS tapes or audio cassettes are much less likely to be important than an unlabeled 2” videotape, which likely was professionally recorded and saved for a reason. If the cost of transfer or repair is too high for your institution or you have no way to playback the format, you can take this into account during your appraisal, but don’t make it the determining factor.

Remove commercial recordings, if not highly relevant and integral to the collection.

- If relevant to your institution, separate the commercial recording (LPs, CDs, videotapes) from the collection and manage it as you would other commercial recordings in a circulating AV collection or a closed AV collection with viewing facilities.
- If widely held or out of scope, discard or deaccession.

Ask donors for playback equipment or funds to transfer recordings.

4.F.3. Arrangement

Devote staff resources to achieving a finer level of description at the expense of arrangement.

- Item-level descriptive information is more useful to a researcher than a careful hierarchical arrangement.
- While large AV collections (especially professionally created materials) may have good internal organization or existing descriptive information that should be retained, small AV collections in personal papers are often disorganized, poorly labeled. Unless the content is extremely

important, it is probably not worth the time to determine if there is an existing arrangement or if one can be imposed. Instead, focus on capturing existing descriptive information.

4.F.4. Description

Item-level description is often necessary to control AV materials, but it still may be done efficiently.

- Limiting description of AV materials to the series or subseries level may pose challenges. For example, a repository may segregate AV by format and house them in areas with different climate controls or shelving types. Furthermore, reformatting for access or preservation results in multiple copies in different physical or file-based formats. Item-level description is often the best way to control each copy.
- A simple item-level inventory, based exclusively on the labels on the tapes, may be sufficient for researchers to identify relevant content. There is no need to view the item to provide detailed descriptions or summary of the contents.
- Do not try to determine or describe the details about the format. Researchers care about content, no whether a videotape is VHS or U-matic . Details about the format may be important in the later stages in determining whether or not a patron can view the original, if the tape is an original or duplicate, but those determinations can be made when a patron requests access by appropriately trained staff

Series-level descriptions of audio-visual items with homogenous content may sometimes be appropriate.

- For example, recordings of board meetings that are chronological by date can be described as a group. Radio air checks of a weekly radio program can be found easily if original order is maintained.

4.F.5. Preservation

Do not routinely rehouse audiovisual items.

- The lifespan of the item is probably already shorter than the damage possible from inadequate housing.
- AV items should not be left totally naked in the stacks, so supply a protective enclosure if there is not one already.
- Exceptions: rehouse film on metal reels or in metal cans or lacquer discs in deteriorating sleeves.

Do not undertake routine conservation activities such as rehousing tapes in acid free containers, tying down open reel tape ends, or exercising tapes.

Store audiovisual items in an area with the best possible climate control.

- Proper climate control is probably your best insurance policy against premature deterioration of the format and loss of content.

Outsource large reformatting projects.

- Save in-house resources for patron initiated requests for research copies.
- Vendors give quantity discounts on volumes of uniform materials in similar condition, so save these for vendors to free up internal resources for the day-in, day-out preservation needed for patron access.

4.G. Born digital and digitized materials

To date, most archival materials made available on the web are described at the item level. While this practice might make sense for collections with very significant research value, it is not sustainable for digitizing large amounts of archival material or making born-digital archival materials available on the web.

To digitize archival collections efficiently, provide an equivalent level of access online as you might provide in the reading room.

- Use existing finding aids as the descriptive and structural guide for both physical and digital collections. If the finding aid points to materials at the folder level, then provide access to the folder at the lowest level of granularity.²¹
- Scan materials in the same order as their physical arrangement.
- If optical character recognition would not be effective (e.g., for handwritten documents), provide access to images only.

Best practices for processing and providing access to born digital materials are still emerging, but the archival approach for interacting with materials at various levels of granularity still applies. File-level or bit-level work might be automated, but work requiring human insight and judgment (e.g. description) can occur at higher levels. For example, you may achieve efficiencies by providing access to materials at the series level.²² Retain the original order of files, and rely on search functionality to support researchers' needs to identify or group materials. If working with floppy disks or other media, consider allowing each piece to serve as the lowest structural and descriptive level. If migration of files is necessary, automate the process (e.g., convert a batch of files to PDF). If a file-level inventory of files is appropriate, automate its generation with the files' existing metadata. Resist the impulse to open every file manually, or create new description for every file manually.

²¹ The Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art describe such an approach (<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/projects/terra>) and make available multiple collections this way (<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/online/>). For example workflows, see *Extending the Reach of Southern Sources: Proceeding to Large-Scale Digitization of Manuscript Collections* (Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009): http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/archivalmassdigitization/download/extending_the_reach.pdf.

²² For example, see Herman Miller Projects Subseries in the Peter Pollack Papers: <http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/89904>; or the Vincent Castagnacci Digital Reproduction series in the Vincent Castagnacci papers: <http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/86192>.

5. Case Studies

1. [20th Century Organizational Records \(UCB\)](#)
2. [20th Century Personal Papers \(UCSD\)](#)
3. [Accessioning as Processing \(UCI\)](#)
4. [Audiovisual collection \(UCSB\)](#)
5. [Corporate Records \(UCLA\)](#)
6. [Digitization Project \(UCSD\)](#)
7. [Donor-Assisted Processing \(UCI\)](#)
8. [Family Photograph Collection \(UCB\)](#)
9. [Oversize plans and drawings \(UCLA\)](#)
10. [Photograph Archive of 20th Century Newspaper Negatives \(UCB\)](#)
11. [Processing with Student Assistants \(UCD\)](#)
12. [University Archives Collection \(UCI\)](#)
13. [University Records, addition \(UCSD\)](#)
14. [Using Legacy Data \(UCD\)](#)

6. Appendices

6.A. Processing manuals inspired by MPLP

- The PACSCL [Surveying and Minimal Processing Manual](#)
- Minnesota Historical Society's [Physical Processing Manual](#)

6.B. UC processing manuals

- UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library
- UC Irvine Special Collections and Archives
- UCLA Center for Primary Research and Training

6.C. Processing manuals from other institutions

- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- University of Maryland
- Beinecke Library, Yale University
- University of Texas at Arlington

6.D. Impact of MPLP on Reference, Access, and Outreach: Bibliography

Crowe, S.H, and K Spilman. "MPLP @ 5: More Access, Less Backlog?" *Journal of Archival Organization*. 8.2 (2010): 110-133. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15332748.2010.518079>

This survey conducted in the fall of 2009 of subscribers to the Archives & Archivists (A&A) discussion list assesses the impact of the methodologies expounded by Greene and Meissner on processing and reference in the archival profession and explores the extent to which the MPLP principles generally decreased collection backlogs and increased researcher access to collections. The survey found that respondents were strongly inclined to believe that

implementing MPLP made assisting researchers easier and made it more likely that researchers would find what they were looking for.

Edmundson-Morten, Tiah. "Does Minimal Processing Mean Minimal Reference?" A Study of Northwest Digital Archives Users" paper presented in Session 307, "Reference Service and Minimal Processing: Challenges and Opportunities," Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, Chicago, 30 August 2007. Retrieved from <http://temarchivalmusings.blogspot.com/2007/09/saa-2007-session-307.html>

This case study tested users' responses to minimally processed collections, and found that users cared more about having a context for their materials than an item-level inventory. Under the working hypothesis that the future of reference services will be doomed without robust finding aids, the author inquired "How much detail do you expect when searching for historical or archival information online?" Responses included "as much as possible" across the board. However, the author discovered a variety in definitions of what "detail" meant: expectations ranged from a brief description of administrative information to full digitization of materials. Edmundson-Morten concludes that "as a profession, we need to determine what is important to us and determine whether minimal level processing is actually going to meet the needs of our users and our profession. All in all, I think it is too soon to tell what the real implications of this level of processing are, but by beginning this research now, and discussing the implications for reference services, we can both begin the dialog and have a base for discussion in the years to come as more institutions face the reality of their backlog."

Greene, Mark A. "Mplp: It's Not Just for Processing Anymore." *The American Archivist*. 73.1 (2010): 175-203. Retrieved from <http://archivists.metapress.com/content/m577353w31675348/fulltext.pdf>

Greene's article addresses the application of MPLP to appraisal and other aspects of archival administration, specifically preservation, reference, electronic records, and digitization. Pages 183-187 and Appendix A detail the findings of Shannon Bowen's 2008 researcher survey that examines the tradeoffs suggested by MPLP, including researcher rankings for processing priorities and opinion of detail versus availability. Greene states that "MPLP also maintains that minimal processing is a more efficient use of staff resources overall than traditional processing, even though minimal processing might shift somewhat more work onto reference staff. What the article lacks, however, is empirical evidence that reference work would not be either undermined or overwhelmed by the shift to less arrangement and description. The article also provides only limited evidence that users would accept the tradeoff of less processing of more collections rather than more processing of fewer collections. Recent evidence now supports these two contentions, and this essay presents some of that evidence."

Gorzalski, Matt. "Minimal Processing: Its Context and Influence in the Archival Community." *Journal of Archival Organization*. 6.3 (2008): 186-200. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15332740802421915>

Abstract: Providing access to records is a fundamental responsibility of reference archivists. In the wake of "More Product, Less Process," many have asked whether or not adequate reference can be provided with minimally processed collections. If finding aids have minimal description and various parts of series' are located in different boxes, how can efficient reference service be provided? More important, does a researcher really have a preference when it comes to detailed description at the item level as opposed to at the collection or series level? Available

literature has found that minimal processing has not negatively affected reference, and that reference itself can dictate how collections are being processed.

Maier, Shannon Bowen, Dean, Jackie and Archer, Joanne. *Society of American Archivists Reference, Access, and Outreach Section: MPLP Task Force Report. (2008)*. Retrieved from http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/rao/MPLPTF_survey_report.pdf

The MPLP Task Force of the Reference, Access, and Outreach Section (RAO) of SAA surveyed members of the section on feelings about basic processing, or MPLP, and its implications for reference. The report concludes that “respondents seemed supportive of MPLP concepts but reported a desire for more guidance about how to apply the principles of basic processing and how to “triage” collections for processing. The responses of survey participants reveal a relative comfort with the issues associated with provision of access to basically processed collections. Most comments and responses suggest more interest in the processing aspects of MPLP. Collaboration with the Description Section is recommended. The results of the survey indicate that many archivists do not have any policies in place to limit the amount of time that they spend on reference requests. A best practices guide should address this. While the survey does not address this issue, the Task Force feels that a best practices guide should propose the tracking of reference statistics using a relational database. The information tracked should include data regarding the nature of individual requests and specific collections used, in addition to the time required for answering, patron type, and other administrative information. This tool would help reference archivists to guide processing decisions in a more articulate and educated way.” Additionally, “institutions that provide a certain amount of research for free before charging patrons should consider the impact that MPLP may be having on the time that it takes to fill the presented information need.”

Maier, Shannon Bowen. “Unhidden Collections and the People Who Love Them: What We Know About Use and Users on Both Sides of the Reference Desk” RBMS Annual Preconference, Charlottesville, VA. (2009). From seminar panel “Public Services and ‘Un-Hidden’ Collections: What We Know and What We Need to Know.” Retrieved from <http://www.rbms.info/conferences/preconfdocs/2009/2009docs.shtml#seminars>

Shannon Bowen’s extensive collection of data on the effects of MPLP processing on both researchers and public service archivists and provides useful insight into the perspectives of reference staff and users when dealing with more minimally processed collections. The presentation is a summary of results from three studies: one that examines the impact of one MPLP technique on public services, one directed at understanding users’ views, and the 2008 SAA Reference, Access, and Outreach section survey on MPLP impact on public services. Bowen found that access to manuscript collections does not necessarily entail information discovery. As archival description moves from the intensive to the extensive in its methodology, so must the reference archivist. Additionally, “the results of these surveys also point up the need to maintain more detailed metrics around the use of our collections and how we answer individual reference queries.” Bowen looks forward to seeing more content management systems that facilitate reference work as well as they do accessioning, arrangement, and description and concludes that “the results of these studies point to the need for public services and arrangement and description to enjoy a more symbiotic relationship. The more responsive that processing work can be to the needs of users on both sides of the reference desk, the more likely it is that patrons will be able to successfully use the collections we have revealed through the implementation of MPLP.”

Maier, Shannon Bowen. "Mplp and the Catalog Record As a Finding Aid." *Journal of Archival Organization*. 9.1 (2011): 32-44. Retrieved from [10.1080/15332748.2011.577652](https://doi.org/10.1080/15332748.2011.577652)

Abstract: The cataloging of otherwise unprocessed collections is an innovative minimal processing technique with important implications for reference service. This article mines the existing literature for how institutions engaged in minimal processing view reference, the strengths and weaknesses of catalog records as finding aids, and information about user predilections and limitations. It describes the American Heritage Center's (AHC) experience with unprocessed collection cataloging, and it proposes a number of issues for future consideration.

Bowen concludes that "the literature and the AHC's experience with unprocessed collection cataloging point to the challenges involved in providing meaningful access to minimally processed collections and specifically to holdings described at the collection level only. These challenges can be overcome, but to do so will require additional reconceptualizations of our descriptive products and a retooling of the relationship between archival processes. A symbiotic relationship between the reference and the arrangement and description units must develop if minimal processing techniques are to remain sustainable after our backlogs have been eliminated."

McCrea, Donna E. "Getting More for Less: Testing a New Processing Model at the University of Montana." *The American Archivist*. 69.2 (2006): 284-290. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40294332>

Abstract: This paper presents a case study in backlog management. The author discusses how a new approach to both the philosophy and practice of archival processing, largely inspired by the recommendations of Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner in their article "More Product, Less Process," resulted in a decrease in both processing time and in the backlog of unprocessed collections at the University of Montana at Missoula.

This article provides general results of MPLP implementation; although the scope is not focused specifically on reference and public services impact, McCrea claims that "while [MPLP] may require us to retrieve more boxes for a researcher, or to spend more time on a question when doing reference work ourselves, this time is likely far less than that for the reordering of materials during processing."

Meissner, D, and M.A Greene. "More Application While Less Appreciation: the Adopters and Antagonists of Mplp." *Journal of Archival Organization*. 8 (2010): 174-226. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15332748.2010.554069>

Abstract: "In the five years since its publication, "More Product, Less Process" (MPLP) has received a great deal of attention within the archival community and this interest has more recently emerged in library and museum communities as well. In this article the MPLP authors reflect on the impact of MPLP among its adopters and its critics, examine some common misperceptions, and assess its growing impact within non-archival communities."

In relation to the impact of MPLP on reference and access, the article claims that "in general terms, as applied primarily to textual collections, MPLP shifts a certain burden from processing

to reference, because description is more likely to be at the collection and series level than even the file unit level. At a minimum this requires staff to retrieve more boxes to ensure satisfying the research needs of a patron. The MPLP argument is that this added retrieval burden is smaller in its impact on overall resources than is the traditional processing requirement to rename, refolder, and organize folders within series, much less the additional burden to arrange items within file units. Further, MPLP argues that evidence of research use of collections should be an important criterion in subsequently applying remedial processing at a more detailed level." Additionally, "some readers might object in principle to reference archivists having to shoulder some of the work of processors, when the reference staff surely have enough work to do already. To this there are at least two responses. One is that the reference archivists at the AHC would rather invest their efforts in this way than to have (as the repository once had) a huge backlog of uncataloged (much less unprocessed) collections inaccessible to users. If serving users is the sine qua non of archives administration, as we argued in the original MPLP article, then this "sacrifice" makes perfect sense. Second, having reference staff undertake certain processing tasks should be no more unsettling than the much more commonly accepted situation of processing staff taking regular reference shifts. In both instances, archivists are able to better comprehend the larger enterprise of which they are a part, as well as to more sympathetically relate to their colleagues in another department."

Weideman, Christine. "Accessioning As Processing." *The American Archivist*. 69.2 (2006): 274-283. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40294331>

Abstract: This article explores the application of new methods, including those recommended by Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner in their article "More Product, Less Process," to reduce the amount of time to accession and process collections. The methods were applied during the accessioning of two collections and the arrangement and description of a large collection of family papers. The author describes the work completed, the time it took, and the consequences for operations throughout the repository.

On the topic of MPLP impact on reference, Weideman explains, "from my years as a reference archivist, I realize that less arrangement and description could well impact the extent to which reference archivists can answer reference requests. I think we will have to adjust by putting more of the burden of answering those requests on the researchers themselves. Long distance researchers, in particular, may have to hire research assistants more frequently. It is another trade-off, but at least the collection will be available and usable. We will sometimes have to retrieve more boxes for researchers because our descriptions are not as detailed as they have been. For us, that is an acceptable cost for making the materials available for research more quickly and keeping them out of the backlog, but it might not be so acceptable for a small repository with limited staff."