



Cataloguing Standards for A2A

Descriptive Standards

The General International Standard for Archival Description, ISAD(G), 2nd edition, Ottawa, 2000, provides principles of multi-level description, definitions and rules for the application of elements of description and a proposed minimum set of data elements for international data exchange.

The International Standard for Archival Authority Records (Corporate, Personal and Family), ISAAR (CPF), Ottawa, 1996, gives general rules for the establishment of archival authority records that describe corporate bodies, persons and families named as creators in finding aids.

The National Council on Archives Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names, NCA Rules, London, 1997, give precise rules for the structure and content of authority records for personal, place and corporate names when used as access points in archival description, thus ensuring consistency and facilitating data exchange.

Long Term Intentions

The aim of the National Archives Network must be the delivery of consistent and appropriate archival descriptions and shared authority data. To reap the full benefits of retrieval and information exchange archivally and across domains we must, wherever possible, achieve full ISAD(G) conformity supported by ISAAR(CPF) compliant authority records contributing to National Name Authority Files. Such conformity, where it already exists, will be accommodated immediately in the network.

However it is recognised that individual repositories at present catalogue to a range of standards, that all are likely to have legacy finding aids that bear little obvious relationship to modern standards, that most are likely to have cataloguing backlogs and that all are very hard pressed. For all these reasons it is appropriate to plan for the minimum conformity necessary to achieve our common goals and to recognise that some aspects of conformity may more readily be put in place after retroconversion to electronic form than before.

Proposed Rules for Minimum Conformity

1. That we all produce multi-level archival description in accordance with ISAD(G)'s basic four rules:

- describe from the general to the specific
- provide information relevant to the level of description
- link each description to its next higher unit of description
- avoid redundancy of information in hierarchically related archival descriptions.

2. Local variations in naming levels of description will of course continue but we shall all abide by the common ISAD(G) terminology of:

Fonds		
Sub-fonds	}	
Series	}	with further subs as required
Sub-series	}	
File		
Item		

for data exchange purposes.

3. We shall identify those levels used in our archival descriptions according to the definitions laid out in ISAD(G)'s glossary of terms:

Fonds: the whole of the documents, regardless of form or medium, organically created and/or accumulated and used by a particular person, family or corporate body in the course of that creator's activities and functions.

Sub-fonds: a sub-division of a fonds containing a body of related documents corresponding to administrative sub-divisions in the originating agency or organisation or, when that is not possible, to geographical, chronological, functional or similar groupings of the material itself.

Series: documents arranged in a filing system or maintained as a unit because they result from the same accumulation or filing process, or the same activity; have a particular form, or because of some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt or use.

File: an organised unit of documents grouped together either for current use by the creator or in the process of archival arrangement because they relate to the same subject, activity or transaction. A file is usually the basic unit within a record series.

Item: the smallest intellectually indivisible archival unit, eg a letter, memorandum, report, photograph, sound recording.

Subgroups: when the creating body has a complex hierarchical structure each subgroup (sub-fonds, sub-series) has as many subordinate subgroups

(eg sub-sub-series) as are necessary to reflect the levels of the hierarchical structure of the primary subordinate administrative unit.

4. The highest level of entry in any archival description offered to the network will comprise, at a minimum, the data elements considered essential by ISAD(G) for international data exchange, supplemented by those submitted as equally essential by the Society of Archivists and/or the Public Record Office when its review took place in September 1998:

- Reference code
- Title
- Creator(s)
- Abstract
- Creation dates
- Extent and form
- Access conditions
- Level of description

5. That at file level reference code, title or abstract, creation dates and level of description shall be mandatory.

6. That level of description and at least one of the data elements named at 4. above be used at every level of description.

7. That the data elements defined as mandatory for the top level of description shall be employed thus:

Reference code; country code as specified in ISO 3166 followed by repository code as specified by HMC followed by local repository specific code.

Title: a formal or given title that encompasses all the records being described.

Creator(s): individual name(s) of the organisation(s) or individual(s) responsible for creating and accumulating the records being described, formulated according to the NCA Rules.

Abstract: a brief summary of the scope and content of the material being described.

Creation dates: the first and last date(s) of creation of the records being described (not predominant dates, not accumulation dates and not dates of originals if those being described are copies).

Extent: the number of records (or, at fonds level, the number of series) being described.

and

Form: the broad physical form(s) of the records being described (not record type). If appropriate at fonds level broad physical form can be replaced by series (thus, eg, 36 series rather than 10,333 files, volumes and discs).

Access conditions: any conditions that restrict or affect access to the records being described (not conditions that restrict use of the records once access has been gained).

Level of description: the hierarchical level, in ISAD(G) terminology, of the material being described.

8. That corporate and personal and family names, when included in archival descriptions as creator(s), immediate source of acquisition, place of deposit, location of originals or as access points, and that place names, when included as access points, shall be formulated according to the NCA Rules (the NCA Rules themselves are about to be reviewed with the aim of reconciling differences between them and AACR2, 1999 revision).

9. To ensure that the names formulated under 8. above shall form the basis of/conform to authority records making up National Name Authority Files, that the type of authority record each one is shall be noted together with the country code as specified in ISO 3166 and the repository code as specified by the HMC.

10. That subject terms when used as access points shall, whenever a potential match is found, be formulated in accordance with the UNESCO Thesaurus.