Finding Aid Guidelines
Revised 1-12-2013

Getting started
Before you begin arranging and describing the collection, you will want to become familiar with what you have. Information for the collection can be found in several forms. Most immediate is the material itself, but because we do not have the time or resources to look at every single item contained in the collection, there are other sources of information that may offer useful data:

- Box labels
- Folder labels
- Catalog record or inventory
- Accession records
- Provenance sheets
- Container lists
- Vertical files (located in Special Collections)

Some collections are cataloged and a print out of the record might be with the collection. You can search the AMNH Research Library Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) using the local call number search option. Open http://libcat.amnh.org/ in your browser then choose Local call number in the drop down menu.

Accession records, provenance sheets, and container lists may also be included in hard copy with the collection if they are available. Use these records to build a context and a framework for the material you have. Use these records as starting points. Later you may find some data to be updated, such as dates and extent.

Make notes of any relevant information you will want to include in your collection descriptions: personal and corporate names, dates, fields of study, expeditions, department names, etc.

Examining records and minimal processing
The collections we will be working with this semester are fairly well organized and may have gone through a first pass of processing. We will not be removing staples or paperclips and in general, very light processing such as refoldering and rehousing into archival boxes. Please see page 4 of the PACSL manual to see some action we may take for various situations.

While examining the records, look for information that may be relevant to a researcher. A collection of T. Donald Carter field notebooks may have dates, geographic locations, expedition names, and specimens acquired/studied. Take note of these in the provided worksheet or on a separate sheet of paper. You may also want to make note of gaps in dates, physical formats included, and conservation issues present.

As much as possible, leave the material in their original order. Society of American Archivists (SAA) defines original order as “The organization and sequence of records established by the creator of the records.” Maintaining that sequence may provide important insight as to how the creator used those records. However a haphazard structure is not helpful to a researcher and can be difficult to describe. If you feel strongly that a collection needs rearranging, please consult with Iris or Barbara.
Below is the full note regarding original order by SAA:

Original order is a fundamental principle of archives. Maintaining records in original order serves two purposes. First, it preserves existing relationships and evidential significance that can be inferred from the context of the records. Second, it exploits the record creator’s mechanisms to access the records, saving the archives the work of creating new access tools.

Original order is not the same as the order in which materials were received. Items that were clearly misfiled may be refilled in their proper location. Materials may have had their original order disturbed, often during inactive use, before transfer to the archives; see restoration of original order.

A collection may not have meaningful order if the creator stored items in a haphazard fashion. In such instances, archivists often impose order on the materials to facilitate arrangement and description. The principle of respect for original order does not extend to respect for original chaos.¹

**Finding Aid components**

Please follow the links to the section in the Finding Aid Template for more instructions.

- Title Page
- Collection Information
- Repository
- Collection
  - Creator
  - Inclusive Dates
  - Bulk Dates
  - Call Number
  - Extent
  - Physical Description
  - Condition
  - Prepared by/Date
- Biographical Sketch
- Historical Note
- Scope and Content
- Separated Material (if applicable)
- Related Material (if applicable)
- Access Conditions and Restrictions
- Custodial History
- Preferred Citation
- Source of Acquisition
- Subjects
- Container List
  - Series Title (if applicable)
  - Box Number
  - Folder Number
  - Folder Title

# Finding Aid Worksheet

| CALL NUMBER | Number: | ☐ OPAC record  
| ☐ Existing inventory |
|---|---|---|
| EXTENT | Beginning of processing: | End of processing: |
| CREATOR | | |
| TITLE | | |
| DATES | | |
| PERSONAL NAMES | | |
| CORPORATE NAMES | | |
| PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION | Various formats included in the collection. If it is a small amount, please quantify: 10 photographs. | |
| CONDITION | Briefly describe the condition | |
| CONSERVATION | Describe needs for conservation, if any. | |
| SUBJECTS | These can include fields of study, expedition names, topical headings, etc. | |
| RELATED MATERIAL | | |
| SEPARATED MATERIAL | | |
| SERIES? | | |
| SENSITIVE MATERIAL? | | |
COLLECTION INFORMATION

Repository:
American Museum of Natural History, Special Collections-Library
Central Park West at 79th Street
New York, NY 10024

Collection: The title of the collection

Creator: The name of the person who made the collection. If you can, look them up in the catalog and use the authority name.
   Example: Bean, Thomas E. (Thomas Ebenezer), 1844-1931

Inclusive Dates: 1879-1934
Bulk Dates: 1892-1930
How to Format Strange Dates:
  There’s a significant gap in the records: 1827, 1952-1963
  Not sure about the exact dates: approximately 1952-1978 or approximately 1897
  Just one exact date: 1906 August 17
  Can just pin it down to the month/months: 1975 August or 1978 March-August
  No earthly idea about the date: undated

Call Number:

Extent: You will probably have both the number of boxes and the number of linear feet. Do not abbreviate either ‘linear feet’ or the type of box.
   Example: .25 linear feet (1 box), 50 linear feet (34 boxes, 1 box of catalog cards)

Physical Description: Provide information about any important physical characteristics that affect the use of the collection (i.e. media [handwritten notes, photographs])

Condition: Fragile, etc.

Prepared by/Date: Your Name, Month and Year

Revised by/Date:
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
Include the following items if applicable. For a more guided worksheet, please refer to the PACSL manual, page 12.
• Genealogy
• Historical Background
• Chronology

HISTORICAL NOTE
For a more guided worksheet, please refer to the PACSL manual, page 13.

SCOPE AND CONTENT
Identify the subject matter and the form of the collection to enable users to judge its potential relevance. Highlight any other information about the collection that would useful to the researcher. For a more guided worksheet, please refer to the PACSL manual, page 14.

SEPARATED MATERIAL
Information about materials that are associated by provenance to the described materials but that have been physically separated or removed.

RELATED MATERIAL
Information about materials that are not physically or logically included in the material described in the finding aid but that may be of use to a reader because of an association to the described materials. Materials designated by this element are not related to the described material by provenance, accumulation, or use. Include a brief summary and call number(s).

ACCESS CONDITIONS AND RESTRICTIONS
• Restrictions pertinent to this collection (e.g., restricted for 10 years after the death of individual, particular items that are rare and require direct supervision)
• Requests to use the collection should be made in advance to the Senior Special Collections Librarian, who may be contacted at 212-769-5420 or at speccol@amnh.org

CUSTODIAL HISTORY (if necessary)
Provide information on changes of ownership and custody of the collection that is significant for its authenticity, integrity and interpretation.

PREFERRED CITATION
American Museum of Natural History, [title of collection].

SOURCE OF ACQUISITION
e.g. Gift of Jane Smith, Interdepartmental transfer. The interesting history goes in Custodial History - this is just a single sentence or so that says who the archives got the collection from and when.
SUBJECTS

List topical terms related to the collection. Also include personal names, expeditions and organizations that are important to the collection.
CONTAINER LIST

**Series I: Correspondence (or other series title)**

*Series Description* (if appropriate): This series consists of…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Folder title]. [Date].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Letter from Henry F. Osborn to Lucretia Osborn. 1930.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Et cetera…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Series II: Clippings**

*Series Description*: This series consists of clippings from various newspapers…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>[Folder title]. [Date].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Do not use a “ ‘” to note repeated box numbers: repeat the number. Format as [box number] [one tab] [folder number] [two tabs] [folder title] [period] [date] [period], just like it is in the examples above. Whoever is encoding this later will thank you!