StEPs-UT COLLECTIONS MODULE
Stewardship of Collections: Taking Control of Your Collections

HANDS-ON ACTIVITY #1 = 60 minutes
Accessioning Objects

INSTRUCTIONS:

1) Break into 5 groups and consider your group of objects (5 minutes).
2) Review sample museum mission and scope of collections below and decide in your group whether or not to accept these objects into your collection (10 minutes).
3) Complete attached ACCESSION form, CATALOG sheet, and incoming CONDITION report for each object selected for acquisition (20 minutes).
4) Reconvene larger group and discuss what came up (20 minutes).

SCOPE OF COLLECTIONS:

1. Mission Statement
The Utah Museum of Natural History (UMNH) illuminates the natural world and the place of humans within it.

As Utah's state museum of natural history, we:

- Foster an understanding of science as a journey of discovery and wonder.
- Promote the preservation of biological and cultural diversity.
- Preserve collections in trust for future generations.
- Encourage new perspectives on and inspire passion for the natural world.
- Celebrate Utah's native peoples and cultures.
- Showcase Utah's unique and extraordinary environments.
- Create knowledge through innovative research.
- Demonstrate the myriad links connecting the past, present and future.
- Transcend scientific disciplines to reveal the networks inherent in nature.
- Serve as a center for science literacy, acting as a bridge between the scientific community and the public.
- Empower people to make thoughtful decisions about the future.

2. Scope of Collections
In accordance with its mission statement, UMNH maintains permanent collections in the general fields of anthropology, biology, and geology.

Conceptual scope
Collections are not acquired haphazardly and must fall within the general framework of existing collections, or must otherwise strengthen their useful comparative nature.

Geographical scope
Collections follow general geographic priorities: firstly, the Intermountain West with particular emphasis on Utah; secondly, North America; thirdly, global, with special emphasis on research programs and comparative materials.

ACCESSION FORM

Accession Number:_____

Date: _____

Photograph:_____

Catalog Number(s):_____

_____

_____

Source: _____

_____

_____

Material(s): _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Locality: _____

Date Collected: _____

Date Received: _____

Collector or Maker: _____

Condition: _____

Value: _____

Correspondence: _____ Catalog Cards: _____

_____

_____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Remarks:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

DONOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of Donor: _____ Phone: _____ Fax:_____

Address:_____

Artifact: _____

1. Who first owned this item?
2. When did he/she live?
3. Where did he/she live?
4. About when was the object made or bought?
5. Where was it made?
6. Who made it?
7. Was the object used for a particular purpose?
8. What was the occupation of the owner? That of the owner's parents or spouse?
9. How did you get this object?
10. Is this object part of a set? If so, describe it.
11. Do you have any photographs of the object being used?
12. Do you have any other documents about the object? (letters, plans, receipts, instructions)
13. Do you have any other information about the object that might be useful for us to know?

CATALOG SHEET

Object name: _____ Accession Number _____

Category: _____

Maker/artist: _____

Date of object: _____

Designer: _____

Country: _____ State: _____ City:_____

Techniques: _____

Materials: _____

Colors: _____

Style, type or pattern: _____

Size: _____

Description (50 words or less): _____

_____

_____

_____

Source: _____ Association: _____

Gift, loan or purchase: _____ Date Acquired: _____

Condition : _____ Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____ Explain: _____

_____

Location (of object): _____ Entered by: _____

Date: _____

INCOMING CONDITION REPORT

Object name: _____ Accession Number _____

Owner: _____ Date: _____

Description: _____

Material: _____ Artist/Maker (if known): _____

Condition:

Overall
( ) excellent
( ) good
( ) fair
( ) poor

Object is
( ) complete
( ) incomplete
( ) broken
( ) missing pieces
( ) fragmented
( ) cracked

Stable ( ) yes ( ) no

Needs cleaning
( ) yes ( ) no

Needs intervention
( ) yes ( ) no

Structural
( ) weak area
( ) old repairs
( ) loose joint
( ) loss
( ) fractures
( ) tears
( ) brittleness
( ) warping
( ) distortions
( ) cockling/wrinkling
( ) red rot
( ) insect damagege
( ) infestation
( ) mold presence
( ) other

Surface
( ) abrasion
( ) scratches/gouges
( ) pitting
( ) dents
( ) flaking
( ) missing paint
( ) discoloration/staining
( ) foxing
( ) loss
( ) water damage
( ) oxidation
( ) corrosion
( ) fading/light exposure
( ) dust and dirt
( ) encrustations
( ) crizzling
( ) delaminarion
( ) other

Frame/Housing
( ) abrasion
( ) scratches/gouges
( ) dents
( ) old repairs
( ) discoloration
( ) oxidation
( ) corrosion
( ) loss
( ) other

Explanation/Comments:

DRAWING - front & rear views

Showing condition on arrival. Make a simple outline sketch of the object. Then show the locations of any areas that appear to be damaged. Connect the damage mark with a label describing the damage. (e.g., 2-inch jagged crack on neck of vase, black smoke mark).

Examiner / date:

How to:

Condition reports - a 'how-to' guide

Examination

Before you start prepare a good space to work in. A large, empty table with non-slip surface and cloth padding if items are fragile. It should have with good lighting and a lamp for detailed examination. You may like to use a loupe or magnifying glass.

Prepare your condition report sheet before commencing and ensure you know which information you want to record. Have an agreed layout and identify the keywords and their meanings before you begin. This keeps information consistent over time and different examiners.

Equipment

- Use pencil when working around objects to avoid permanent marks from pen ink
- A soft dressmaker's tape measure
- A metal extendible ruler for larger objects
- A magnifying lens or loupe can be useful for a closer examination of items
- A magnifying lamp can also be useful if one is available
- A light box can be used for examining paper or textile items; the light shining through the item will reveal any tears or weaknesses in the fabric
- A magnet can be useful for identifying if an item is constructed of iron or an iron alloy such as steel. If the surface is fragile use a barrier such as a piece of cloth between the magnet and the metal surface
- Fine tweezers can be quite useful in lifting fine layers of an item
- A torch can assist in focusing the eye and provides raking light
- Gloves (cotton or disposable) can protect items from damage and the handler from hazardous materials. Do not use cotton gloves when handling fragile or slippery items. Nitrile gloves are preferable in many cases
- Face masks with suitable filtration for objects containing mould, particle dust or unknown substances.

Before examining an object, think about your own safety, as some objects can be hazardous.

The following materials are known to be toxic and may now be in your collection.

What to look out for

- Taxidermy specimens (up until the 1970s toxic pesticides including arsenic, mercuric chloride and strychnine were in common use in taxidermy)

You might also like ...

Hazardous Materials in Museum Collections. M&G NSW, 2013

www.mgnsw.org.au

Hazardous Material Assistance & Advice Organisations, M&G NSW, 2013

www.mgnsw.org.au

Condition Reporting National Services Te Paerangi, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 2010

www.tepapa.govt.nz

- Corroding lead items (for example figurines on a ship model which have a powdery white surface)
- Mouldy items (some moulds can be toxic)
- Items containing asbestos (including hair dryers, lagging, tiles, sealants, old machinery)
- Medical kits (many early kits contain dangerous substances such as picric acid, arsenic and scalpels).

If you have any doubts, discuss the object with a specialist before handling it.

Describing damage

The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials website features a AICCM visual glossary of images and definitions used to describe the condition of an object.

Some terms commonly used when completing condition reports include:

- Abrasion – roughening or wearing away of an object's surface due to repeated friction or contact with other surfaces.
- Accretions- A solid piece of foreign matter attached to the surface of an object which is not part of the object.
- Acidic- often used in relation to paper items which become more acidic as they deteriorate, causing embrittlement and yellowing.
- Breaks
- Brittle/embrittled - – a loss of flexibility causing the material (e.g. paper, parchment, leather) to break or disintegrate when bent or curled.
- Cockled- wrinkling or puckering that occurs when paper, fabric, or any sheet of support material dries unevenly.
- Corrosion- chemical reaction between a metal and other substances leading to deterioration of the metal. Rust is a common form of corrosion.
- Cracks
- Crazed - fine hairline cracks through a glaze which often appear darker than the glaze due to discolouration.
- Creased - where a sheet material (e.g. paper) has been unintentionally bent over on itself.
- Dent - a defect in the surface caused by a blow; a simple concavity.
- Discoloured - overall change in the colour of a material, usually to a darker, more yellow or brown appearance.
- Distorted - a concave, convex or twisting change of form, used to describe stiff organic materials that have become misshapen, such as paper, card, plant fibres and wood.
- Dirty/dusty
- Faded - loss of brightness or intensity of a colour
- Flaking - where extreme cracking causes small, thin pieces of varnish, paint or other layers to become completely detached from the main support material.
- Fly specks- spots left by a fly on the surface of an object, generally small and black/ brown in colour
- Foxing - brown coloured spotting on paper induced by one or more of the following factors- fungus or mould, impurities in manufacture, dampness and airborne acids
- Frass – dust-like debris or excrement left behind by wood eating larvae or borers
- Frayed/fraying -ravelled or worn spot indicated by the separation of threads, especially on the edge of a fabric.
- Friable - loose and powdery. For example, coloured pigments which are not well bound to the surface (such as some Aboriginal artefacts or pastel drawings) will be friable.
- Grazed - where the uppermost surface of an item (particularly paper or textiles) has been eaten in patches by an insect, frequently silverfish.

- Holes
- Insect damage
- Lifting- one surface lifting away from another, such as a timber veneer or a plated metal item.
- Loose
- Loss - areas/small sections which are missing
- Mould/mouldy
- Odorous- having a distinctive smell, such as cellulose acetate which gives off acetic acid as it degraded, giving a vinegar type smell
- Powdery – see friable
- Rust stains – see corrosion
- Shredded - long splits through the body of fabric, most often used in reference to degraded silk.
- Slack canvas- a canvas which is on a stretcher/strainer and is loose in some areas.
- Split
- Stained
- Torn
- Warped
- Yellowed – discolouration that affects the whole surface of an item

You may also like:

Condition Reporting and Conservation Guidelines for Touring Exhibitions. Allen, Errol J, National Exhibitions Touring Structure for Western Australia, Perth, 1992

www.trove.nla.gov.au

reCollections-Caring for Collections Across Australia. Managing Collections, Heritage Collections Council pp 48-54, 1998

www.collectionsaustralia.net

Travelling Exhibitions- A Practical Handbook for Non-State Metropolitan and Regional Galleries and Museums. Kelly, Sara, National Exhibitions Touring Support for Victoria, Melbourne, 1994

www.netsvictoria.org.au

Hazardous Materials in Museum Collections. M&G NSW, 2013

www.mgnsw.org.au

Hazardous Material Assistance & Advice Organisations, M&G NSW, 2013

www.mgnsw.org.au

Condition Reporting National Services Te Paerangi, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 2010

www.tepapa.govt.nz

Condition Reporting Form Template National Services Te Paerangi, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 2010

www.tepapa.govt.nz

Exhibitions: a practical guide for small museums and galleries. Rouette, Georgia

www.mavic.asn.au