

Transcript of the video Collections documentation - Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN)

Video length: 5:21 minutes

[Music plays throughout the video. Basic animation is used throughout the video to illustrate the narrator's text.]

[Text on screen: Canadian Heritage Information Network. Introduction to museum collections documentation standards, part 1. Why and how do we document collections? Why is collection documentation important to heritage institutions?]

Narrator: "Adequate documentation promotes sound management of the collection, and facilitates use of and access to the collection.

Heritage institutions have two responsibilities that make the documentation of collections important:

Responsible collection control & the interpretation and communication of knowledge.

Responsible collection control requires the identification, management and preservation of collections.

Interpretation and communication of knowledge requires access to information and access to collection objects."

[Text on screen: How do we document collections?]

Narrator: "When undertaking a collection documentation project, you must determine the most appropriate method: basic inventory or cataloguing."

Each method has its own purpose and requirements.

A basic inventory will identify what is in the collection, tell you how many items there are, and identify where each item can be found. At the very least, institutions should have such an inventory of their collections in order to fulfill their mandates with respect to the management of public collections. However, this basic information is quite often too limited for the collections to be properly understood and promoted. Which brings us to cataloguing.

Beyond the basic inventory information, museums will need to do some additional documentation or "cataloguing" of the collection. Some of the information is intrinsic – meaning the physical characteristics of the object. On the other hand some of the information is extrinsic – meaning the context and history of the object. Sometimes both "physical" and "contextual" information is collected and recorded at the same time.

"Physical" or "Intrinsic" information can be deduced by an examination of the item itself. It may consist of: the materials of which the object is made and the technique used to make it; the

object's size or dimensions; the object's decorative motifs; inscriptions found on the object, or the condition of the object.

The process of documenting the intrinsic information, which provides more detailed physical descriptions of objects, allows us to better understand the collections, anticipate storage and preservation needs more precisely, and obtain photographs of the objects.

"Contextual" or "Extrinsic" information can be derived from investigation and research. It may consist of: the history of the object – for example, who owned it? How was it used? Or, what has happened to it since being acquired by the museum? Where and when was it created or manufactured? Who created it? What was the cultural context in which it was created or used?

The advantage of cataloguing the "extrinsic" information is that it provides much more detailed information on the collections, and thus fosters both efficient management and in-depth knowledge of the collections. It also requires a significant investment in both time and resources to do this type of cataloguing – so sometimes museums reserve this type of in-depth contextual research for objects that are considered major pieces of the collection.

Basic inventory is essential – but how much documentation is required beyond that? The nature and quantity of the information collected during a collections documentation process must be based on: the desired objectives and goals of the documentation process being carried out, the nature of the collection, the accessibility and reliability of the information already available, and the resources that we have at our disposal to carry out the work.

We have seen how adequate documentation enables sound management of and access to the museum collection. We have also reviewed the main methods used for collections documentation.

Thank you for watching and be sure to keep an eye out for other videos in this series that will introduce the various types of standards used for museum documentation and provide advice on planning a collection development project."

[Text on screen: Are you ready to learn more about collections documentation?

Follow the link in the description box to access CHIN's free online course [Introduction to Documentation of Heritage Collections](https://www.canada.ca/en/heritage-information-network/services/collections-documentation-standards/documentation-heritage-collections.html).

For more information, please contact the Canadian Heritage Information Network.

Email: [pch.RCIP-CHIN.pch@canada.ca](mailto:pch.RCIP-CHIN.pch@canada.ca)

Telephone: 613-998-3721

Toll-free: 1-800-520-2446 (Canada and United States)

Teletypewriter (toll-free): 1-888-997-3123]

[Canadian Heritage signature and Canada wordmark]

**Commented [AC1]:** Link to:  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/heritage-information-network/services/collections-documentation-standards/documentation-heritage-collections.html>