



A2A - Guidelines for New and Revised Cataloguing

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

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Introduction

Phase 1 of A2A (April 2000 to March 2002) consisted solely of the conversion of existing catalogues to standardised electronic form. Phase 2 (April 2002 to March 2004) of the programme includes catalogue improvement and new cataloguing as well as retroconversion and it is for those projects undertaking such work that these guidelines are aimed.

Contributors undertaking retroconversion projects should consult *Cataloguing Standards for A2A*.

Contributors undertaking collection level description projects should consult *A2A – Guidelines for Collection Level Description*.

These guidelines are not concerned with other aspects of archival administration such as accessioning or space management.

These guidelines are also not concerned with the technical process contributors use to prepare new cataloguing for submission to A2A. There are a number of options here, such as export from a proprietary database system, such as CALM, or EAD files and there will be related technical guidelines for each.

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Main considerations

- **Access to Archives:** When preparing cataloguing descriptions for A2A the most important thing to remember is the underlying purpose of the Programme – Access to Archives. All descriptions need to be a complete and accurate enough reflection of the original records to enable A2A users to decide if they wish to see them.
- **Data exchange and standards:** Descriptions created now also need to be fit for use in contributors' cataloguing systems. Data exchange demands that descriptions achieve certain levels of consistency and this is only achieved by conformance to standards. The underlying standard for A2A is the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G) - 2nd edition, Ottawa 2000).
- **Depth of description:** While collection level descriptions will be accepted for A2A, there is a preference for multi-level descriptions as users are mainly interested in descriptions of records they can actually see.
- **Rules for minimum conformity:** While descriptions prepared for A2A may use all 26 ISAD(G) data elements, other factors such as resources, local policy and the nature of particular records may necessitate a more skeletal approach. There is a minimum level of description to which all contributors to A2A must conform. To this end it is necessary to adhere to a few basic rules in terms of both structure and content.
 - As A2A usage statistics suggest that a large proportion of new users have never used an archival catalogue before; descriptions should be as clear and straightforward as possible. For example, they should avoid over complexity in terms of structure as well as technical language and abbreviations.

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

- Descriptions may contain any combination of levels but there may be no sub-division of a level without a parent: there cannot be a sub-fonds without a fonds, a sub-series without a series or an item without a file.
- The following elements are mandatory at every level represented: level, reference, and dates. Access conditions are mandatory where they apply. Extent is mandatory at all levels except file and item. Title and scope and content are also mandatory at every level except at file and item levels where it is mandatory to use either title or scope and content.
- At the uppermost level creator, and administrative or biographical history, are also mandatory.
- At file and item levels information should be given about any languages used in the records other than English and of any physical conditions affecting the use of the records.
- The main descriptive elements, whether title or scope and content, should be as full as necessary to give the user a sense of what a particular record or records contain. In particular attention should be drawn to the people, bodies, places, events, activities and subjects with which records are mainly concerned.
- The content of the date element should at all times be that of the dates of creation of the record(s). In order to provide clarity for the user the content of the date element should be expressed simply as the year at levels above file. Days and months may also be given at file and item. Uncertainty can be used if necessary but other forms of dating (regnal years, feast days, law terms etc) should not be used.
- Creator names should conform to the NCA's *Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names* (1997).

Structure

Descriptions may contain any combination of levels, although it should be remembered when arranging a fonds that over complex structures can cause confusion. Complex collections may include fonds, some sub-fonds, series, sub-series, files and items. There is, however, no need for all parts of the hierarchy to be present (bearing in mind the rule against orphan levels). Small collections may be represented best by a brief description at fonds level followed by the description of individual documents at file level.

The designation of levels for a description must respect the ISAD(G) usage of the terms. Briefly and relative to each other, these are as follows:

- Fonds and its sub-divisions: The upper levels of a description, which give the user contextual information about the creator(s) and origination of the records being described.
- Series and sub-divisions: The central levels of a description describing groupings of actual records. These are likely to include more specific information about the purpose and use of particular types of record.
- File and item: The lowest levels of a description, which describe individual documents and their parts.

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory Data Elements

In order to conform to these guidelines the following elements are mandatory. All other ISAD(G) elements may be used.

The level element (3.1.4) is mandatory at all levels. ISAD(G) terminology should be used:

- fonds; sub-fonds etc
- series; sub-series etc
- file
- item

The following elements are also mandatory at all levels (the ISAD(G) reference is given in brackets):

- Reference (3.1.1)
- Title (3.1.2) (except at file and item levels if scope and content is preferred)
- Dates (3.1.3)
- Extent (3.1.5) (except at file and item levels)
- Access conditions (3.4.1) (where a negative condition applies)
- Scope and content (3.3.1) (except at file and item levels if title is preferred)

At file and item levels the following are also mandatory if applicable:

- Language of material (3.3.3)
- Physical characteristics (3.4.4)

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at fonds and sub-fonds levels

Element: Reference

ISAD(G): 3.1.1

Content Guidelines

Give a short code that is unique to the fonds (or sub-fonds) being described within a repository. Follow your own repository's normal practice in assigning a reference. If you are not tied to any particular scheme, the following notes should help:

- At these levels it may be best made up of letters, perhaps based on the title of the collection, although numbers may be used as well.
- Uppercase should be used in preference to lowercase and a mixture of cases should be avoided.
- There should be no punctuation and the forward slash (/) should be used as an indicator of a change in level.

For A2A, there is no need to include the country and repository codes as these are automatically inserted into catalogues on the A2A database.

Examples

EHR	[fonds]
EHR/B	[sub-fonds]

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at fonds and sub-fonds levels

Element: Title

ISAD(G): 3.1.2

Content Guidelines

Give a brief natural language statement that uniquely identifies a fonds (or sub-fonds). It should be made up of two elements: the name of the creator in natural language order, and an indication of the nature or form of the collection. This should be a basic description, such as 'archives', 'papers' or 'records'; detail about specific types of records can be given in scope and content.

Examples

Political Papers of Stanley Baldwin, First Earl Baldwin of Bewdley

Grenfell Family Archives

Records of CF Casella and Company Ltd	[fonds]
Personnel Department Records	[sub-fonds]

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at fonds and sub-fonds levels

Element: Creation dates

ISAD(G): 3.1.3

Content Guidelines

Give the date(s) of the creation of the records as a year or span of years. For copies this means the date of the copy rather than the date of the original, which should be included in the title or scope and content.

At these levels only an indication of period covered is needed by the user and precision is unnecessary. Detailed dates with days and months should, therefore, not be given. If the simple date is likely to mislead the user then explanation can be given in scope and content.

While inference and uncertainty indicators (such as square brackets, c, or ?) may be used at this level there is really no need to do so. First and last dates should be separated by a hyphen and no other punctuation should be used.

Examples

1234

1763-1925

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at fonds and sub-fonds levels

Element: Extent

ISAD(G): 3.1.5

Content Guidelines

This element is necessary to give the user a general indication of the size of collection being described. There can be two types of entry at this level. The most useful is an estimation of the number of units in a collection. Most appropriate for small fonds is the actual number of records. It is better to give generic types of record than use either precise definitions of record types (such as minute book or deeds) or simple phrases such as documents or items.

For larger fonds the precise number of actual documents may not be known or be so large as to be meaningless to the user. For such collections, it may be more appropriate to give the number of series.

Second, a linear or cubic space measurement may be given. Render units in full to avoid confusion.

Examples

25 files and volumes

16 series

2.21 linear metres

124 cubic metres

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at fonds and sub-fonds levels

Element: Creator(s)

ISAD(G): 3.2.1

Content Guidelines

Give the name(s) of the corporate bodies, person(s) or families that created or originated the records in the fonds (or sub-fonds) being described. If the creator of a sub-fonds is the same as that for the fonds, rather than a functional sub-division of it for example, then an entry need not be made.

Each separate name should be formed in accordance with the NCA' s *Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names* and *A2A – Authority Controlled Terms and minimum conformity*.

These names are included in the special interest searches in the A2A database and when a name already exists in the database it is this form of the name that should be used.

Examples

Delph Women's Institute, Lancashire

Gale family of Worth, Sussex

Rice, Alexander Hamilton, 1875-1956, explorer

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at fonds and sub-fonds levels

Element: Administrative / biographical history

ISAD(G): 3.2.2

Content Guidelines

Give a concise narrative statement of the administrative or biographical history of the creator(s) of a fonds (or sub-fonds) designed for the better understanding of the material by the user. If the creator of a sub-fonds is the same as that of the fonds, rather than a functional sub-division of it for example, then an entry need not be made.

Record information that relates to the period covered by the records, such as official name, date of existence, enabling legislation, functions, purpose and development, administrative hierarchy, changes of name for corporate bodies; full names and titles, dates of birth and death, pertinent activities, occupations and offices, significant achievements for individuals.

Examples

The York Union comprised the City of York and three rural out-relief unions, Flaxton (North Riding), Escrick (East Riding) and Bishopthorpe (West Riding).

Under the Public Health Act, 1872 the county guardians formed themselves into a single York Rural Sanitary Authority covering all three out-relief unions.

In 1895 each became independent Rural District Councils, though remaining constituent parts of the York Union for poor law purposes until the 1930 reorganization.

Under the Local Government Act of 1929, the functions of the York Union Board of Guardians were transferred to the City of York, which formed a Public Assistance Committee in December of the same

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Mandatory data elements at fonds and sub-fonds levels

year. From 17th July 1947, this committee was known as the Social Welfare Committee. It retained its earlier functions until the National Assistance Act was passed in May 1948.

Poor Law and related functions within the three out-relief unions of the former York Union became the responsibility of the appropriate county Public Assistance Committees.

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Mandatory data elements at fonds and sub-fonds levels

Element: Scope and Content

ISAD(G): 3.3.1

Content Guidelines

Give a terse narrative statement designed to enable a user to judge whether a fonds (or sub-fonds) is worthy of further investigation. The names of the people, bodies, places, events, activities and subjects most associated with a fonds (or sub-fonds) should be included. More detail can be given about the form and period covered by documents, if the simple statements in title and dates might mislead. In complex finding aids it is useful to indicate the structure of sub-fonds and series below, but this should not consist of a listed table of contents, which may be more appropriate in the arrangement element (ISAD(G) 3.3.4).

Examples

The important estate and family papers of the Tipping, Wroughton and Norris families of Woolley Park, Chaddleworth, and of Sussex and Buckinghamshire, relate mainly to a compact estate in southwest Berkshire, of which there are a number of maps, 1741-1862. The title deeds include a small but important group relating to Thatcham, c 1290-1366.

There is important matter on private and parliamentary inclosure in a number of parishes in the 17th and 18th centuries.

There are manorial records for three Sussex manors, Bassetts Fee in Billingshurst, 1433, 1468, Billingshurst, 1590-1633, and Netherfield, 1683. Stray parish records from Brightwaltham, 1653-1861, Chaddleworth, 1717-1869, Farnborough, 1840, Fawley, 1861-1865, and Winterbourne, 1759, are also of interest.

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at fonds and sub-fonds levels

Title deeds, sale particulars and related documents of various properties in Balcombe, Ardingly, Cuckfield and Keymer, all part of the Balcombe Estate.

The collection includes records of the World Education Fellowship's central administration, including officers' correspondence, constitutional papers, minutes and committee papers, 1929-1970s; files relating to individual regional sections worldwide, 1930s-1970s; records of international conferences, 1921-1972; files concerning special projects, 1942-1968 and relations with UNESCO, 1948-1973; audio-tapes, including of conferences and personal reminiscences, 1959-1971; publications, pamphlets, and newsletters, including the journal The New Era.

[fonds]

Original lists of officers and general history and activities of each regional section, c1936-8; international HQ visitors book, 1937-60

[sub-fonds]

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at fonds and sub-fonds levels

Element: Access conditions

ISAD(G): 3.4.1

Content Guidelines

Give a general statement of any access conditions affecting the fonds (or sub-fonds) as a whole or a large part of it. This is only necessary where access is restricted and there is no need to have general statements that access is available to records, such as 'All records are open'.

Examples

All records under 30 years old are unavailable for consultation

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at series level and sub-divisions

Element: Reference

ISAD(G): 3.1.1

Content Guidelines

Give a short code that is unique to the series (or sub-series) being described within a repository. Follow your own repository's normal practice in assigning a reference. If you are not tied to any particular scheme, the following notes should help:

- These levels are best represented by numbers separated by a forward slash (/). Such references may become unwieldy, however, if there are many subdivisions causing confusion to the user and the incorrect citing of references. In such cases characters may be used as well.
- Uppercase should be used in preference to lowercase and a mixture of cases should be avoided.
- The parent reference(s) should precede each reference.

For A2A, there is no need to include the country and repository codes as these are automatically inserted into catalogues on the A2A database.

Examples

EHR/B/2 [series]

EHR/B/2/1 [sub-series]

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at series level and sub-divisions

Element: Title

ISAD(G): 3.1.2

Content Guidelines

Give a brief natural language statement that uniquely identifies a series or sub-division of it. It should be contained in a single sentence. It should usually be made up of two elements: the name of the creator in natural language order, and the specific type of records making up the series or sub-series.

Examples

Somerset Half Year's Meeting Draft Minutes

Files of the Divisional Nursing Officer

Publications by Lord Avon and related Correspondence
[series]

General Files relating to Publications by Lord Avon
[sub-series]

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at series level and sub-divisions

Element: Creation dates

ISAD(G): 3.1.3

Content Guidelines

Give the date(s) of the creation of the records as a year or span of years. For copies this means the date of the copy rather than the date of the original, which should be included in the title or scope and content.

At these levels only an indication of period covered is needed by the user and precision is unnecessary. Detailed dates with days and months should, therefore, not be given. If a span date is misleading, as a result to large gaps in a series for example, explanation should be given in scope and content.

While inference and uncertainty indicators (such as square brackets, c, or ?) may be used at this level, there is no need to do so. First and last dates should be separated by a hyphen and no other punctuation should be used.

Examples

1872

1547-1728

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at series level and sub-divisions

Element: Extent

ISAD(G): 3.1.5

Content Guidelines

This element is necessary to give the user a general indication of the size of the series (or sub-series) being described. There can be two types of entry at this level. The most useful is an estimation of the actual number of records. It is better to give generic types of record than use either precise definitions of record types (which should be given in title) or simple phrases such as documents or items.

Second, a linear or cubic space measurement may be given. Render units in full to avoid confusion.

Examples

10 files and volumes

1.5 linear metres

14 cubic metres

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at series level and sub-divisions

Element: Scope and Content

ISAD(G): 3.3.1

Content Guidelines

Give a terse narrative statement designed to enable a user to judge whether a series (or sub-series) is worthy of further investigation. In complex catalogues it is useful to indicate the structure of sub-series below, but this should not consist of a listed table of contents, which may be more appropriate in the arrangement element (ISAD(G) 3.3.4).

The names of the people, bodies, places, events, activities and subjects most associated with a series (or sub-series) should be included. If the broad period given in dates gives a misleading impression, due to significant gaps in a series for example, then detail should be given here. More detail may also be given about the specific types of documents found.

Examples

The Letter Books consist of copies of letters written by the East India Company to its trading posts in the East (India, China, Persia, Mocha, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Siam, West Africa, St Helena) and to its agents in Europe and the Levant, with occasional copies of Home Correspondence. The books begin in April 1626 but few letters survive before 1 April 1653, from which date they are more or less complete.

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at series level and sub-divisions

Element: Access conditions

ISAD(G): 3.4.1

Content Guidelines

Give a general statement of any access conditions affecting the series (or sub-series) as a whole or a large part of it. This is only necessary where access is restricted and there is no need to have general statements that access is available to records, such as 'All records are open'.

Examples

All records under 100 years old are closed

Element: Reference

ISAD(G): 3.1.1

Content Guidelines

Give a short code that is unique to the file (or item) being described within a repository. Follow your own repository's normal practice in assigning a reference. If you are not tied to any particular scheme, the following notes should help:

- These levels are best represented by numbers separated by a forward slash (/).
- Characters and roman numerals should not be used.
- The parent reference(s) should precede each reference.

For A2A, there is no need to include the country and repository codes as these are automatically inserted into catalogues on the A2A database.

Examples

EHR/B/2/1 [file]

EHR/B/2/1/2 [item]

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at file and item level

Element: Title

ISAD(G): 3.1.2

Content Guidelines

A title is not mandatory at these levels if scope and content is used as the main descriptive element. Both elements may, however, be used.

If the document has a formal, given, title then it should be used. If it is misleading or unclear then explanation should be given in scope and content. Otherwise, supply a brief natural language statement that uniquely identifies the document. It should in most cases be contained in a single sentence with detailed information being placed in scope and content. The type of descriptive information to include will depend on the particular nature of the document and may reflect record type, activity, function, topic, location or period.

Examples

Court Roll of Manor of Beddington

Air Raid Precautions - Special instructions for the working of railways

Roll of Subscribers to Madras Military Fund	[file]
Entry for Charles Harvey Powell, 1820	[item]

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at file and item level

Element: Creation dates

ISAD(G): 3.1.3

Content Guidelines

Give the precise creation date as given in the document in terms of days, months and years if possible. For copies this means the date of the copy rather than the date of the original, which should be included in the title or scope and content.

Square brackets may be used for derived dates. If there is any doubt as to the precise year it can be preceded by '?' or 'c' depending on the degree of uncertainty. Some approximation of date should always be possible and 'undated' or 'no date' should not be used on its own. 'nd' should not be used.

Examples

31 January 1872

6 May 1934-8 April 1963

c 1936

[1324-1401]

1896-?1915

Undated [?1955]

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at file and item level

Element: Scope and Content

ISAD(G): 3.3.1

Content Guidelines

Scope and content is not mandatory at these levels if title is used as the main descriptive element. Both elements may, however, be used.

Give a terse narrative statement designed to enable a user to judge whether particular documents are worthy of investigation. The names of the people, bodies, places, events, activities and subjects most associated with a document should be included. Bearing in mind Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation it is important that descriptions of individuals are unambiguous and in no way defamatory.

Explanation of any dating issues should be given. More detail may also be given about the form of documents and their status, whether they are copies or drafts for example.

Examples

Circuit Mission Committee minute book. Includes a list of collectors and accounts of contributions, 1869-1871.

Certified copy of the Privileges of the Hospital of St. Lazarus, Jerusalem. The original document is dated from Naples, 31 August 1536. There is a notarial certification by Joannes Bernardus Malfitanus, with his special paraph, and this is itself attested by Bernardus de Bucceriis, attorney and magistrate at Naples, under the date 19th October 1553.

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at file and item level

Element: Access conditions

ISAD(G): 3.4.1

Content Guidelines

At these levels give a precise statement of any access restriction to a document. For closed records it is better to indicate when a record will be open than simply state that it is closed for a period of years.

Examples

Closed until 2004

Not available for consultation. Please use microfilm Z/20/381

Unavailable as awaiting conservation

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at file and item level

Element: Language of material

ISAD(G): 3.3.3

Content Guidelines

If the document is wholly or in part in a language other than English then state the language(s).

Examples

Latin

French and English

German

French, English and Latin

Guidelines for multi-level description in A2A

Mandatory data elements at file and item level

Element: Physical characteristics

ISAD(G): 3.4.4

Content Guidelines

If there is anything about the physical nature or condition of an item that affects use, then state this briefly.

Examples

Fragile

Largely illegible