THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Cataloguing physical records: guidance for government departments

How to catalogue physical records for transfer to The National Archives

20 July 2023

Contents

1. What responsibilities and statutory obligations apply to cataloguing records?

1.1. Statutory obligations of transferring bodies

Information on statutory obligations	The following information references statutory obligations in regard to record keeping practices. These obligations originate in section 3 of the Public Records Act 1958 (c. 51). See The National Archives' Legislation and regulations pages for further information.

Under section 3 (Selection and preservation of public records) of the Public Records Act 1958 (1958 c. 51) public records selected for permanent preservation shall be transferred not later than 20 years after their creation either to the Public Record Office or to such other place of deposit appointed by the Secretary of State under the Public Records Act 1958 as the Secretary of State may direct.

Furthermore, under section 3 (Selection and preservation of public records) of the Public Records Act 1958 (1958 c. 51) every person responsible for public records of any description is obliged to follow the guidance provided by the Keeper of Public Records.

1.2. Advisory practice for cataloguing records for transfer to The National Archives

Information on advisory practices	The remainder of this guidance covers advisory practices regarding cataloguing records for transfer. Transferring bodies and DROs are advised that following these practices will support the fulfilment of a transferring body's statutory obligations under the Public Records Act 1958.

After records at government departments and agencies have been selected for permanent preservation and reviewed for sensitivity, staff at government departments must catalogue the selected records. When records are transferred, the catalogue descriptions are added to The National Archives' online catalogue, Discovery. A huge number and wide variety of users (including UK civil servants, journalists, researchers, academics and members of the public) use this catalogue to find records of interest to them.

This guidance explains the current Cataloguing Template produced by The National Archives in 2017. Government cataloguers must use this template, available to download from The National Archives' website, to catalogue records for transfer. The template is designed specifically to enable cataloguing data relating to individual pieces and items to be loaded onto Discovery.

Work done by government cataloguers must reach a standard acceptable to The National Archives before the transfer of records can take place. This ensures that descriptions on Discovery are accurate and understandable, and can be searched and browsed easily.

This guidance deals with cataloguing conventional physical records at the level of individual pieces (files, volumes, reports, etc.). Understanding and following this guidance will save government cataloguers from wasting time and effort.

This guidance does not cover description of paper records at ‘Department’, ‘Division’ or ‘Series’ level, or the description and transfer of digital records. Further guidance on these topics can be found on The National Archives’ website.

1.3. Further guidance resources and training

Anyone unfamiliar with cataloguing public records should contact the Transfer Team for advice in the first instance.

The National Archives offers a cataloguing e-learning module for staff at government departments and other public record bodies who transfer records to The National Archives. This is also available to third party suppliers that might be engaged to carry out cataloguing work.

2. How should you prepare to catalogue your records?

2.1. The value of preparation

Going wrong at an early stage of the cataloguing process and having to redo work at a later stage can be extremely time-consuming.

To produce better results, and to save time and effort, time should be spent:

- understanding this cataloguing guidance and the requirements of the template;
- undertaking brief preparation work prior to cataloguing;
- consulting with the Transfer Team over potential problems or the need for 'tailored' guidance for specific records;
- checking work regularly and thoroughly.

2.2. Understanding your records

It is always advisable to undertake brief preparatory work in order to have a clear idea of the cataloguing task.

Firstly, survey the records you will catalogue.

Cataloguing survey checklist
☐ Check that all the records are present. If there are more records to transfer into the same series in the near future, it is usually advisable to wait and catalogue all the records together. ☐ Ensure that the record selection has been approved by your Departmental Records Officer. ☐ Check records (especially copies of reports) do not duplicate records already held at The National Archives. ☐ Confirm with the Transfer Team that the records are being put into the right series, or that you have provided the information required to set up a new series if necessary. ☐ Check whether the records have been reviewed for sensitivity, and whether you need to apply to close or retain material.

2.3. Preparing to begin cataloguing

Secondly, ensure you are ready to begin cataloguing. Cataloguers should consult the Transfer Team before commencing cataloguing work about any major issues on which there is any uncertainty, for example, the starting piece number, most suitable order, use of subseries, level of detail required, or whether to continue in the same style as an earlier part of Discovery.

In the case of large collections of case files and maps, agreeing an appropriate format at the start is vital (see section 7).

Inexperienced cataloguers, or cataloguers dealing with records of a type they are unfamiliar with, should list just a few records at first, and then submit this sample to the Transfer Team to agree their proposed approach and applicable standards.

If necessary, and if resources allow, 'tailored' guidance can be produced by The National Archives for specific records.

Cataloguing preparation checklist
☐ Read any background information on the series, including the information on The National Archives' catalogue, Discovery. This will help in understanding the structure of the series and any technical language which may need to be explained. ☐ If more records are being added to an existing series, check how earlier parts of the series were catalogued on Discovery. This can make future cataloguing easier, as well as ensuring consistency. However, do not imitate earlier cataloguing if it has been done poorly or does not conform to current standards. ☐ Check the piece number the first record should have – particularly important if the series is shared with another government department. If in doubt check with the Transfer Team. ☐ If subseries have been used before, and it is agreed with the Transfer Team that this should continue, ask for a list of the subseries and their numbers, as already used on the catalogue.

2.4. Final stages

When the listing is finished, the cataloguer or a colleague should proofread it carefully for accuracy, understandability, consistency and spelling. The listing should conform to the editorial and technical guidelines provided in this document.

3. What are the principles of cataloguing?

3.1. What sort of cataloguing does The National Archives require?

The overall aim of cataloguing is to produce data that will enable researchers to get to the records they need – a signpost rather than a detailed summary of the contents. The description should tell researchers if this is a record they are likely to be interested in. It is not a replacement for researchers studying the record themselves.

The National Archives looks for the following five qualities in the catalogue data produced by government departments, and most of the points in the following sections of this guidance relate to these:

Accuracy of the data	So that incorrect and false information does not appear on The National Archives' online catalogue, Discovery.
Understandability of the data	So that a researcher (who is not always an expert) can understand the data fairly easily, without having to look things up elsewhere.
Simplicity of the data	So that government departments do not waste their time and resources on unnecessary detail, and the researcher can quickly decide if a record might be of interest or not.
Reasonable consistency of the data	The data within a series should be reasonably consistent when the records are the same or similar, but consistency should not be pursued at the expense of accuracy, understandability and simplicity.
Correct use of the template	The data is put in The National Archives' cataloguing template in the correct fields and using the correct formats, so that it can be successfully loaded onto Discovery.

Examples of each of these qualities can be found in Annex 1.

3.2. The seven levels of the National Archives’ catalogue and the referencing system

Discovery, has seven levels available for the description of records:

Level	Name of level	Purpose	Type	Template code
1	Department	Provides researchers with a summary of a government department, executive agency or other government body (such as Home Office or Ministry of Defence) and the records it created, accumulated or inherited.	Mandatory Written by transferring departments with the support and guidance of cataloguing staff at The National Archives	D
2	Division	Provides information about a directorate or other high-level business unit within a government body, or business activities relating to particular functions (for example, Establishment Division, Prisons Division). Used only when the division has created a number of series grouped together on The National Archives’ catalogue.	Supplementary Written by transferring departments with the support and guidance of cataloguing staff at The National Archives	Not on template
3	Series	Provides information about a particular set of records produced by a department, agency or division with a common history and purpose.	Mandatory Written by government departments with amendments suggested by The National Archives	S
4	Subseries	Provides information about subsidiary series or groups of records within the departments’ series. Used only when it is desirable to make clear the major distinct groupings of records within the series.	Supplementary Written by government departments Consult with the Transfer Adviser before using	SS

Level	Name of level	Purpose	Type	Template code
5	Subsubseries	Provides information about a group of records within a subseries grouping. Used rarely, only when it is necessary to make clear the minor groupings of records, at a lower level than subseries.	Supplementary Written by government departments Used only in exceptional circumstances	SSS
6	Piece	Provides information about an individual record, for example, a file, a report or a volume.	Mandatory Written by government departments	P
7	Item	Provides information about separate parts of a piece: ▪ when the piece has been split into two or more parts because of its thickness; ▪ when an extract has been made which is closed because of its sensitivity; ▪ when it is useful to describe individual reports or subfiles within a piece.	Supplementary Written by government departments	I

Three of the levels are mandatory for every record: Department, Series and Piece. The other levels are 'supplementary' (they are useful and even necessary on certain defined occasions, but are often not required and can even be detrimental to use).

Of the three mandatory levels, two – Department and Series – are written by transferring departments with the support and guidance of cataloguing staff at The National Archives.

Most of the time departmental cataloguers will only need to use Piece level – occasionally they may have to use Subseries level for subsidiary series or Item level for parts of pieces.

3.3. Generating The National Archives' unique record reference number

Every record transferred to The National Archives has a unique reference code based on the three mandatory levels of description.

For example, the reference code CM 6/57 consists of the department code, CM; the series number, 6; and the piece number, 57. The next piece is CM 6/58. An item has an additional item number after the piece number, for example: CM 6/57/1

CM is the department code for 'Property Service Agency' (PSA)

CM **6** is the series number for the 'registered files of the PSA Directorate of Defence Services'

CM 6/**57** is the relevant piece number for one of these files

CM 6/57/**1** is the item number of part of that file

These references would be written in the template as follows:

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I
CM	6			57	
CM	6			57	1
CM	6			58	

3.4. Assigning piece numbers and associated information

The first step in cataloguing a set of records within a series is to ensure they are arranged in the required order. This will normally be the original order. See section 5 for more information about the order of pieces.

Once this has been done piece numbers can be assigned to each record. The cataloguer then supplies the following information for each piece:

Piece number information checklist
☐ its covering dates; ☐ a brief summary of its subject matter, known as scope/content; ☐ its Former reference; ☐ its public access conditions, if it varies from the default status of open;

Piece number information checklist
☐ if appropriate, certain additional information contained in the Note field, Comments field, and Related digital material field.

The next sections of this guidance deal with these elements of piece level description (sections 5-15). The final sections give a more detailed explanation of when and how to use the supplementary descriptive levels: Subseries, Subsubseries and Item (sections 16-18).

4. Understanding The National Archives cataloguing template

The cataloguing template consists of the following columns:

Column	Description of element
D	Department code
S	Series number
SS	Subseries number
SSS	Subsubseries number
P	Piece number
I	Item number
First Date	Start date of the record
Last Date	End date of the record
Scope/Content	Description of the contents of the record; a brief summary of its subject matter
Former Ref	Departmental code or number used for the record before it was assigned The National Archives' catalogue reference
Closure	Number of years the record is closed, or 'S' if retained under section 3(4), or 'T' if temporarily retained
C/R	FOI Exemption Schedule (enter 'C' for closure) or Retention Schedule (enter 'R' for retained)
Schedule Number	Number of FOI Exemption Schedule or Retention Instrument
Note	Specialised information which does not belong in other fields on The National Archives' catalogue – usually statements about how the record has been catalogued or processed
Comments	Communications of various types between the departmental cataloguer and the Transfer Adviser
Related Digital Material	Cross-referral to digital record, used in transfers of hybrid (paper and born-digital) material

5. Order of pieces

5.1. How should records be ordered?

One underlying principle in the arrangement of historical records is to preserve the system of arrangement employed when the records were in use, and not to rearrange them differently (for example by subject). It is important for both researchers and official users to preserve the links between the records that existed while the records were being used for business purposes.

Therefore the original order of records should be maintained as far as possible. If there is no original order, the records should be arranged in a sensible, logical order, appropriate to the series. This may be by former reference, chronologically, alphabetically, geographically or by creating organisation, depending on the series.

5.2. Records with former references

Normally records should be catalogued in order according to their former references (the registration reference codes or numbers with which registered records were marked when they were created). This method of arrangement has the following benefits:

- it preserves the original arrangement of the records
- it is the most simple and logical, yet least labour-intensive, method of arrangement
- it helps researchers to locate records of interest more easily (this is a standard method of arrangement, and researchers are familiar with it)
- it is much harder to maintain consistency if records are rearranged on the basis of subject matter, especially when further records are added to the series

The order might look like this in the template:

Example 1	**Example 2**	**Example 3**
Former Ref	*Former Ref*	*Former Ref*
BY 2	134/2	7/BD 115/1983
BY 3	134/3 PART A	8/BD 100/1984
BY 5	134/3 PART B	8/BD 101/1984
BY 6	134/3 PART C	6/BD 99/1985
BY 9	134/3 PART D	7/BD 120/1985

Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
BY 10	134/3 ANNEX	8/DB 130/1985

[Note: in the third example, the year element of the former reference has taken precedence over the other numbers in arranging the records.]

5.3. Records without former references (unregistered records)

If a set of records is unregistered (i.e. it does not have former references) and it is not possible to preserve the original order, it should usually be catalogued in date order, by start date, with the earliest record first.

5.4. Series containing additional series or groups of records

Normally, The National Archives' series will contain a single specific series or group of departmental records, but occasionally a series may have been created to hold more than one group of records. In such cases, each of these subsidiary series ('subseries') or groups should be catalogued in turn, in a logical order. For example, if The National Archives' series contains a series of earlier registered files and a group of later unregistered papers, the registered files would be catalogued first, in former reference order, followed by the unregistered papers in chronological order.

5.5. Series containing records in alphabetical order

If the series of records consists of case files which were kept in alphabetical order (for example, by surname), this arrangement should be preserved in the catalogue.

5.6. Committee records

A series of committee records should be arranged in a logical and consistent order, for example:

- main committee, followed by sub-committees, followed by working groups
- minutes, followed by papers

5.7. Pieces out of order

If pieces are found to be out of order once cataloguing has begun, rows in the template can simply be cut and pasted into the right place, with the piece numbering amended as necessary.

5.8. Numbering pieces

The numbering of pieces should be consecutive. Gaps in the piece numbers can lead to confusion or even accusations by members of the public that records have been deliberately suppressed.

There may be occasions when no record is allocated to a certain piece number, but it would be too labour intensive to set this right. In such cases 'Number not used' should be written in the scope/content of the piece, but the date, former reference, note, closure, comments and related digital material fields should be left blank. Use of 'Number not used' must be agreed with the Transfer Team.

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content
Fj	20			54				Number not used

Piece numbers should not be written in chinagraph pencil on records until the first number and the order of the records have been agreed with the Transfer Team.

6. First date and Last date of pieces

6.1. Including date ranges

Each piece description should include the date range of the piece when it was created. These dates are called 'First Date' and 'Last Date' on the cataloguing template. Accuracy of the date range is important, as it is a key piece of information in helping users decide on the likely relevance of a record and understand its access and closure status.

The date range should be the dates of the composition of the record when it was in active use for departmental business.

Establishing the date range of a file
☐ quickly browse the file, as papers are frequently filed out of order; ☐ ignore attached, background papers (e.g. copies of earlier papers attached as background information to correspondence dealing with 'current' business). Such background papers can give a misleading impression of when the file started; ☐ ignore later notes dealing with the administration of the file when it was no longer in active use (e.g. notes on closing and retrieving the file, registry notes and review notes). Such notes can give a misleading impression of when the file ended.

6.2. Formatting date ranges

First and last dates must be written in one of these formats:

- yyyy
- mm/yyyy
- dd/mm/yyyy

For example:

First date	Last date
2004	2007

First date	Last date
04/1985	06/1986
16/06/1987	08/06/2016

The vast majority of the records should be dated at year level using the format "yyyy". This is because:

- year level is fully adequate for researchers for the vast majority of records;
- it can be extremely time-consuming and difficult to establish accurate first and last day and month dates, since frequently pages are not filed in chronological order, later notes may have been added to existing pages, etc.

Occasionally there may be records which merit the use of more precise dates, so the cataloguing template also allows records to be dated at month (mm/yyyy) or day (dd/mm/yyyy) level. For example, in the case of Cabinet minutes and papers, it is of historical importance to know what the Cabinet was considering from day to day, and therefore these records should be dated to the precise day. If you are thinking of dating records other than at year level, consult with the Transfer Team.

When months (mm/yyyy) are entered into Excel as numbers they will automatically change into text, for example: '02/16' becomes 'Feb-16'. Ensure that the relevant cells are pre-programmed not to automatically change the data. To do this:

- Highlight the cells that you will enter the numbers into
- Press Ctrl + 1 to open Format Cells
- Select Text, and then click OK

If you are browsing records on Discovery, you may notice that the dates have been converted to a different format (e.g. 1987 Jun 16) as part of the loading process. This is an internal process undertaken at The National Archives after the catalogue data has been supplied in the approved format set out in the table above.

6.3. Undated records

Sometimes a piece appears to be undated. In this event it is usually possible to establish a date from circumstantial evidence – for example, its relationship to other records in the series, office holders named in the record, external events mentioned, dates of printing, dates of use, etc. If the date remains doubtful, estimate the date, and add the term ‘Date estimated’ in the Note field. As a last resort, ‘Undated’ can be used in the date fields, but avoid this wherever possible.

First date	Last date	Scope/Content	Former Ref	Closure	C/R	Schedule number	Note
1997	1998						
1999	1999						Date estimated
Undated	Undated						

6.4. Records containing multiple dates

Frequently records are composed at a certain date but their contents deal with a different period in the future or the past. Examples are annual reports, histories, reviews, forward plans, forecasts, and statistical tables. In such cases the start and end dates will be the dates at which the record was composed; the dates of the period dealt with by the contents should appear in the scope/content (e.g. 'Annual report 1973/1974'; 'Statistics on the road haulage industry, 1933-1973'; 'Five-year business plan 1974-1979').

First date	Last date	Scope/Content
1974	1976	Statistics on the road haulage industry, 1933-1973

7. Scope/content of pieces: general approach to different types of records

7.1. Describing different record types

The scope/content description of a file should be a good summary of the main overall subject of the file. This section is displayed as the 'Description' on Discovery. The general guidance below covers describing the contents of different types of records: registered file series; report series; collections of committee records; case files; and maps and plans. Departmental cataloguers should aim to produce scope/content descriptions that are simple, accurate, understandable and reasonably consistent.

7.2. Utilising cover titles

Piece descriptions are usually based on the title on the cover of the file. The cover title should not be altered unnecessarily, but because cover titles vary in quality, the title should always be checked against its contents and improved if necessary.

To check whether the cover title is an accurate summary of the file, briefly examine the contents of the file, paying particular attention to the headings of correspondence, reports, meetings and other papers in the file, especially any headings which recur frequently. As a result of this examination, you can judge whether:

- the cover title is a good description as it stands. Perhaps only punctuation, capitalisation and spelling need to be amended;
- the cover title needs to be made more accurate or understandable. For example, the title of a piece of legislation may need to be cited correctly, a committee may need to be identified by its formal title, an acronym may need expansion, and so on;
- the cover title needs to be made either more specific or more general to be a true summary of the contents, requiring it to be amended or expanded. If this is the case, it is best to add or reuse a phrase from within the file;
    - For example, 'Iran-Iraq' may become 'Iran-Iraq War'; 'British tea plantations in Sri Lanka' may become 'Conditions of workers in British tea plantations in Sri Lanka'; and 'Extradition of terrorists from the USA to the UK' may become 'Extradition of terrorists from the USA to the UK: draft Supplementary Extradition Treaty 1985';

- the cover title is misleading and needs to be completely rewritten. This is rare. If it is necessary, again it is normally best to reuse phrases from within the file.

7.3. Writing short scope/content descriptions

Scope/content descriptions should be simple and to the point. Aim for a good overall description which sums up the file as a whole, not a list of various topics and developments within a file. Avoid superfluous details and overcomplication.

Usually the scope/content can be 15 words or less. It is quite acceptable for a scope/content to be one or two words long if appropriate, for example: 'Freeports' or 'Harwell computers'.

Avoid repeating information already given at series level about which department created the files and what sort of files they are.

If a cover title states what type of papers are in the file (e.g. 'correspondence', 'minutes of meetings and circulated papers'), retain this information in the scope/content; but otherwise do not add details of the types of papers. Nearly all files contain a mixture of correspondence, memoranda, meetings, reports, submissions, etc., and there is little point in stating this for individual pieces.

If the cover title is written in key word order, normally keep the scope/content in key word order. If the cover title is written in natural order, normally keep the scope/current in natural order (see section 9.1). Trying to write the cover titles in a different word order is usually a time-consuming and unnecessary task.

A scope/content should normally be written as a single line or paragraph, not multiple paragraphs. Often it will be 15 words or less – though it can be longer.

7.4. Preserving accuracy

Factual information within the scope/content (names and titles of Bills, Acts, committees, people, places, dates) must be accurate. They should be checked within the file or on the internet.

7.5. Ensure descriptions are understandable

The scope/content description must be understandable. Acronyms and other things which might be puzzling for users of the catalogue need to be explained.

7.6. Preserving consistency

The scope/content should be reasonably consistent. Files with the same former reference (except that they are different 'PARTS') should have the same or very similar scope/content. Conversely, files with different former references should have different scope/content. For example:

Scope/Content	Former Ref
Rate Support Grant (RSG) settlement for 1984-1985	SFE C/1320/1605/04 PART A
Rate Support Grant (RSG) settlement for 1984-1985	SFE C/1320/1605/04 PART B
Rate Support Grant (RSG) settlement for 1984-1985	SFE C/1320/1605/04 PART C
Rate Support Grant (RSG) settlement for 1984-1985: paper on local authority current expenditure	SFE C/1320/1605/04 PART ANNEX
Department of the Environment: Consultative Council on Local Government Finance	SFE C/3309/01

7.7. Report series

Normally it is sufficient to write down the title of the report as the scope/content. There is usually no need to include the name of the author or section which produced the report.

The scope/content of reports should be reasonably meaningful. Important acronyms, abbreviations, codenames and operation/exercise names should be explained to make the descriptions more understandable and searchable on Discovery. For example, the report title ‘Human factors comments arising from Exercise Van Dyke II’ would be rewritten in the scope-content as ‘Human factors comments arising from Exercise Van Dyke II, hovercraft trials in Norway’, or the title ‘The habitability of FV 4201: part 2, cold chamber trials’ would be rewritten as ‘The habitability of FV 4201 (Chieftain tank): part 2, cold chamber trials’. However, it is recognised that sometimes reports are so technical and specialised that it is not feasible to explain everything.

The scope/content of annual reports should include the name of the establishment e.g. write ‘Army Personnel Research Establishment: annual report 1977-1978’, not merely ‘Annual report 1977-1978’.

7.8. Committee records series

7.8 Each scope/content should begin with the name of the committee, sub-committee and working party, written accurately and in full. When dealing with a sub-committee, include the name of the parent committee. In dealing with a working party, include the name of the parent committee and sub-committee. It is usually best to divide the different elements with colons, as follows:

Scope/Content
Committee on Animal Welfare
Committee on Animal Welfare: Veterinary Sub-Committee: Working Group on Tuberculosis in Cattle

7.9. Describing meetings and associated document types

Each scope/content should finish with the details of the specific meeting/s or with details of the specific type of documents in the piece.

Frequently committee records consist of a series of files, each containing the documents (agenda, papers, minutes) for one specified meeting. Such records should normally be catalogued as follows:

Scope/Content
Committee on Animal Welfare: meeting 1
Committee on Animal Welfare: Veterinary Sub-Committee: meeting 16

There is no need to mention the agenda, papers and minutes in such descriptions. The details of the meeting can be in the form ‘meeting 1’, ‘meeting 2’ or ‘first meeting’, ‘second meeting’.

In other cases, describe the type of documents held in the piece as precisely and concisely as possible, for example:

Scope/Content
Road Signs Committee: minutes of meetings 1-10

Scope/Content
Road Signs Committee: Roadworks Sub-Committee: papers 7-31
Committee on University Examinations: agendas and minutes
Committee on University Examinations: minutes signed by the Charmain
Committee on Promotion of Exports: minutes of meetings 8-12 (1978), 1-7 (1979)
Committee on Promotion of Exports: Secretary's correspondence and final report

Details of paper numbers, etc., should be expressed in a simple format e.g. papers '1-15', not 'RSC(79)P1 to RSC(79)P15'.

7.10. Describing individual missing papers

Normally there is no need to mention individual papers which were never issued or are now missing.

7.11. Case files

Case files are series of files, each containing identical, or very similar, administrative information about separate but related subjects, e.g. individual people, ships or towns. They do not contain policy papers. One example is HO 405, where each file deals with a separate application for naturalisation as a British citizen. Another example is ADM 53 – each file is a logbook of a separate Royal Navy ship. Case files often come in huge collections of thousands of pieces. Cataloguing them can be very time-consuming, and should be treated as a distinct project.

The key to cataloguing case files successfully is rigorous planning at the start. It is vital to make the right decisions about arrangement and format of descriptions before actually beginning to catalogue. Making wrong decisions at the start may result in many hours of wasted work, putting the successful completion of the project at risk.

The cataloguer should therefore always consult with The National Archives' Transfer Team before starting to catalogue case files, and an appropriate format for cataloguing, with examples, should be discussed, agreed and written down.

This format should be reviewed at an early stage once work has actually begun and regularly re-reviewed at later stages.

One major aspect of this planning is to decide what data should be mentioned in the piece-level scope/content and what information might be explained in the series-level description only.

For example, a series of criminal case files may include the following information about individuals:

- full name;
- gender;
- full date of birth;
- marital status;
- physical appearance;
- place of residence;
- occupation;
- place of birth;
- offence;
- place of trial;
- sentence.

After considering the usefulness of this information for likely searches on Discovery it may be decided that, out of these eleven pieces of data, it will be sufficient to include only two in the scope/content, e.g. full name and offence. Including more information would be too time-consuming, with minimal benefit to researchers. Excluding more information would make the catalogue much more difficult to search.

In this instance, the series level of Discovery would be the appropriate place to record what other information is typically found in each file i.e. the series description would explain that each file also contains the eight other data elements.

7.12. Formatting names

Names of individuals should be written in normal order e.g. John Smith (not Smith, John). When writing the initials of an individual, use spaces, not full stops, between the initials e.g. A J P Taylor, not AJP Taylor or A.J. P. Taylor.

7.13. Map series

As with case files, the key to successfully cataloguing large series of maps or plans is rigorous planning at the start.

There is often a wide range of data which may be recorded about a map, for example:

- the type of 'map' (map, plan, elevation, drawing, etc.)
- the subject or title of the map
- the creator or author of the map
- what the map was subsequently used for
- details of the 'base map'
- details of annotations
- the dimensions of the map
- the scale of the map
- the material the map is made from, and its physical state

Before starting to catalogue, consider whether some of this data is information which is common to all, or nearly all, of the maps. Such common information will probably be best explained at series level, rather than in each piece description. For example, if the information is common, series level may be the most suitable place to explain who created the maps, what scale they are, what they are made from, what their general physical state is, etc. If in doubt consult the Transfer Team.

Also consider at the start what data is essential information, and what is relatively unimportant – at least with regard to searching the catalogue. For example, the subject or title of the map will always be vital for helping researchers decide whether they wish to order a map or not. Information about the base map and annotations may be relatively insignificant – details researchers can find out for themselves once they have the map before them.

After considering these matters, a format for cataloguing the maps should be agreed with The National Archives' Transfer Team.

The scope/content of maps can often be short, e.g. just a place name. But it must include vital information, and adequately explain the subject of the map. For example:

Scope/Content
Walton-on-the-Naze
Map of Canterbury and East Kent, with transparent overlay showing possible routes for transporting coal from Snowdown and Betteshanger collieries to Canterbury
Snowdown and Betteshanger collieries to Canterbury
Plan of National Coal Board Offices, 17 London Road,
Map of Turco-Greek boundary 1832, subsequently marked to show post First World War boundary

7.14. Scale and dimensions

If scale is recorded at piece level, it should be given in the Comments field, in order to facilitate it being moved to the 'Map scale number' field when the data is transferred to Discovery. Scale should normally be expressed as a representative fraction, e.g. 1:50000.

Dimensions of maps (if worth recording) should also go into the Comments field, for moving to the 'Dimensions' field once the data is transferred to Discovery. They should normally be recorded in centimetres, e.g. 22cm x 12cm.

7.15. Foreign language titles and codenames

If the title of the map is written in a foreign language, this should be translated into English. If the title involves acronyms or codenames, they should be explained, as usual.

8. Scope/content of pieces: accuracy and understandability

8.1. Accurate factual information

All names and titles of legislation, committees, government departments, publications, people, places etc. in the scope/content should be checked and cited accurately.

Acts must always include the year of the Act, for example, 'Dangerous Dogs Act 1991', as the year forms part of the name of the Act.

However, a year is not compulsory for Bills, except if there is likely to be confusion. For example, there were numerous 'Social Security Bills' and it is necessary to differentiate them by year.

Usually the best places to check such factual information are within the records themselves and on the internet. For example, use www.legislation.gov.uk to confirm names of Acts. Some printed sources may also be useful for specific types of information e.g. 'The Civil Service Yearbook' is a good source for information on government departments and roles of ministers and officials.

8.2. Committees and reports

Committees and their reports are often referred to in file cover titles by the name of their chairperson, rather than by their formal name. For example, a committee may be called 'The Bennett Committee' and a report called 'The Bennett Report'. However, these formats give no indication as to what subject the committee or report were considering, and therefore should be expanded to include the official name of the committee or report.

The usual methods of expansion are as follows:

- 'Bennett Committee on Police Interrogation Procedures in Northern Ireland' OR 'Committee of Inquiry into Police Interrogation Procedures in Northern Ireland (Bennett Committee)';
- 'Bennett Report on Police Interrogation Procedures in Northern Ireland' OR 'Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Police Interrogation Procedures in Northern Ireland (Bennett Report)'.

8.3. Acronyms and abbreviations

Acronyms and abbreviations often appear in the cover titles of records. Most of them would be incomprehensible and confusing to users of Discovery if simply written down as they stand. Their original meanings are no longer well known, or different acronyms can have different meanings in different contexts. Therefore, most acronyms should be expanded to include the full explanation of what they stand for.

The method for expanding acronyms is to write the full version first followed by the acronym within round brackets – for example: ‘Commercial Fast Reactor (CFR)’.

Do not use full stops or spaces when writing the acronym (write CFR not C.F.R. or C F R).

Exceptions

There are a few exceptions where acronyms and abbreviations do not require this treatment, but can instead be left unexplained. This occurs when the acronyms and abbreviations are as well known – or sometimes better known – as the full versions, such as:

- names of organisations and countries, for example, BBC, NATO, RAF, EEC, USA, UK, USSR
- common forms of address (Mr, Mrs), personal honours, titles and qualifications (HM The Queen, OBE, MP)
- other words that are well known in their shortened form, for example, ‘No.’ meaning number; HMS and SS for ships; Ltd and PLC/plc for companies, UFOs, etc.)

Another exception is the name of a department when it occurs within that department’s record series. For example, it is acceptable to use ‘FCO’ without expansion in Foreign and Commonwealth Office file series, or ‘AWE’ in Atomic Weapons Establishment record series – but the acronyms would need expansion if used elsewhere.

8.4. Notable individuals

If an individual is named, add the post which they held whenever this is significant to understanding the description of the record. For example, ‘with comments by Captain H R Keane, Director of Naval Signals’ is more meaningful and useful than ‘with comments by Captain H R Keane’. Be careful that the information is correct in the context of the record, because ministers and officials often changed their job titles over the years.

8.5. Place names

Place names should be written in their standard modern English spelling.

If a place name is obscure or ambiguous, it needs to be identified further by adding the UK county or the country it belongs to.

Note that county and even country names and boundaries can change over time. For example, local government in the UK was reorganised in 1974 and again in 1996. Ensure you use the county or country name contemporaneous with the record (i.e. where the place was at the time of the record). This can usually be found by looking inside the record itself.

When adding these identifiers, use commas in most instances. Use round brackets if there are several place names and commas might be confusing. Use square brackets if the additional information has been derived externally – for example, when adding an identifier to a quoted title.

Original Scope/Content	**Improved Scope/Content**
Silver Street, Buckden	Silver Street, Buckden, Cambridgeshire
Poissy	Poissy, France
Newport	Newport, Isle of Wight
Newport	Newport, Rhode Island, USA
Eastwood, Leadenham, Docking and Norton	Eastwood (Nottinghamshire), Leadenham (Lincolnshire), Docking (Norfolk) and Norton (Suffolk)
Comments on a report entitled ‘Radon levels at South Terras mine’	Comments on a report entitled ‘Radon levels at South Terras mine [Cornwall]’

In some instances, when places are known by a different name nowadays, it can be useful to add the new name in round brackets after the name found in the record.

Scope/Content
Bombay (Mumbai)
Peking (Beijing)

8.6. Authoritative sources for checking spelling and location of place names online

- FCDO Index of Geographical Names
- NCA Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names
- Ordnance Survey
- A Vision of Britain
- The Columbia Gazetteer of the World

9. Scope/content of pieces: general style and conventions

9.1. Key word order and natural word order

There are two standard ways of writing a scope/content at piece level:

- key word order (for example: 'Bank of England: security measures; alleged failures of security');
- natural word order (for example: 'Security measures at the Bank of England, including alleged failures of security').

In key word order the most important element of the description is placed first and the other information is added in one or more phrases following this. Usually a colon follows the first element and semi-colons separate subsequent elements.

Natural word order is the same as the normal order of spoken or written English.

If the cover title is written in key word order, normally it is best to write the scope/content in key word order; if the cover title is written in natural word order, normally it is best to write the scope/content in natural word order. Changing the order of the words can be difficult, time-consuming, and usually improves the description very little and can even make it worse. For example 'Debts owed to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company' becomes more ambiguous if rewritten as 'Mersey Docks and Harbour Company: debts'.

9.2. Photographs, maps etc. within records

The Scope/content field should be used to indicate the presence of the following within records: original photographs, maps and plans; significant drawings and diagrams; notable seals; useful alphabetical indexes; posters, samples and other important objects.

Copies of photographs (printed photographs), graphs, newspaper cuttings, booklets, leaflets and computer printouts should not normally be mentioned. The information should be added at the end of a scope/content, after a full stop and the word 'With', for example:

Scope/Content
UK aid to Kenya. With photographs

Scope/Content
Miners' strike 1984. With photographs and map
Judicial Committee of the Privy Council: minutes of meetings. With index. Orderable at item level

[Note: if a file consists entirely of photographs, plans, etc., the word 'With' is not used, for example: 'Plans of Richmond Park', 'Prototype civil defence shelters: photographs'.]

Always bear in mind that if the information regarding photographs, maps, etc., is common to all or most pieces, it may be better to mention it once at series level on Discovery instead of constantly repeating it at piece level. For example, some types of records consistently contain such material:

- most Crown Estate records contain plans
- most Boundary Commission records contain maps
- scientific reports frequently contain drawings, diagrams and photographs

In such instances, inform the Transfer Team. Phrases such as 'Most pieces contain maps' can be added at series level, which means that this information doesn't need to be repeated at piece level

9.3. Missing at transfer and missing parts of records

If a piece is missing at the time of transfer to The National Archives, 'Missing at transfer' should be added to the end of the scope/content after a full stop (as shown below) so that the fact is immediately apparent to researchers. Similarly, if a significant part of a record is missing, this information can be added in a similar way.

Scope/Content
UK contributions to the European Community. Missing at transfer
Airworthiness reports 500-750. With index. Reports 569-701 missing at transfer

9.4. Capital letters

Use capital letters as in standard English: at the beginning of the scope/content, for initials and significant words in names and titles, and for acronyms. Here are some examples: General de Gaulle; New York; HMS *Valiant*; House of Lords; The Times; Committee on Financing the BBC; Working Party on Pay; Industrial Relations Act 1971; White Paper on Proposals for Earnings Related Social Security (Cmnd 3883).

Sometimes titles on file covers use too many capital letters. Do not copy inappropriate use of capitals. For example, write:

- 'Welfare Committee: minutes of meetings 1-20'

NOT

- 'Welfare Committee: Minutes of Meetings 1-20'

and;

- 'Reorganisation of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF): veterinary aspects'

NOT

- 'Reorganisation Of the Ministry Of Agriculture, Fisheries And Food (MAFF): Veterinary Aspects'

9.5. Spelling

Spelling should be standard modern English spelling, unless quoting a foreign language or archaic English spelling.

9.6. Punctuation

Keep punctuation simple, light and consistent. As stated in section 9.1 above, when a scope/content is in key word order, a colon follows the first element and semi-colons divide subsequent phrases. Otherwise punctuation should be in normal English – commas, semi-colons, round brackets, apostrophes, single quote marks, hyphens, dashes and slashes can all be used. However, a few things should be avoided (see section 9.11).

A full stop should not normally be put at the end of a scope/content, but is required if extra information, such as 'With photographs' or 'Orderable at item level' is added at the end (see section 9.2).

9.7. Avoid verbs

Normally, avoid verbs (for example write ‘Police investigations of’ rather than ‘The police investigated’).

9.8. Dates in scope/content

Write dates in a scope/content in the format: 18 November 1974. Do not use other formats such as: 18/11/74, 18 Nov 1974, 18th November 1974, November 18 1974.

9.9. Things to avoid

Some punctuation and processing of text is incompatible with eventual transfer of the data from the cataloguing template to Discovery.

For this reason, do not use the following: double quote marks, tabs, paragraph marks, line breaks or page breaks; underlining, italics or bold; superscript or subscript; Greek or other non-Roman scripts.

Only use ampersand (‘&’) if it is a recognised part of a name (e.g. in ‘P&O’). Change ‘&’ to ‘and’ in most cases.

10. Scope/content of pieces: sensitive descriptions

10.1. What is sensitive content?

Very occasionally a scope/content contains words and details that are too sensitive to be revealed to the public on Discovery, usually for national security or data protection reasons. The National Archives has a number of ways for dealing with this, and departmental cataloguers should consult with the Transfer Team about which is the most appropriate to use. Usually the scope/content is either rewritten or the public version is redacted.

10.2. Information about named living individuals

Under the Data Protection Act 1998, information about a named living individual which is inaccurate or misleading, or would cause the individual substantial distress or damage, should not be released. The information might be unsubstantiated allegations about an individual or sensitive personal data which is not, and should not be, in the public domain, such as details of the individual's physical or mental health. A scope/content should not appear to imply that an individual is guilty of an offence when he or she may in fact be innocent.

Some methods for dealing with this are:

- to omit the names of the individuals if there is no value in having the names in the scope/content;
- to add extra information so that the full and correct facts (for example, of guilt or innocence) are established;
- to be explicit where mere allegations are not proven facts, for example, by adding a standard sentence to the Note field which states that guilt or innocence is not implied by the description: 'The naming of an individual within this catalogue does not imply guilt'.

10.3. Exemptions under FOI

It is recognised that on rare occasions a catalogue description may be considered exempt under FOI and should be redacted until the record becomes open. In cases where a scope/content is to be withheld in full or in part, the government department should supply The National Archives with the full scope/content, and indicate clearly in the Comments field and the e-Transfer (AA2) form which elements are to be withheld.

The National Archives will remove the sensitive elements and store them in secure conditions until the records become open, when they will be added to the catalogue. The scope/content may be redacted either partially or in full: the preference of The National Archives is for partial release, so only the sensitive information is not available.

Scope/Content
[Name withheld]: charged with incest
Non-destructive testing of [information withheld]

If a catalogue description is to be retained, then an alternative, less sensitive version should be supplied and agreed with the Transfer Team. The access conditions for the piece will indicate that this is not the full version of the scope/content. The full version should be supplied with the piece when it is no longer sensitive and transferred.

10.4. Sensitive titles in descriptions

Sometimes titles on file covers (about matters such as race, disability, sexuality or gender) use terms which today would be considered offensive or pejorative. Two approaches to mitigating this problem are:

- to include the term present on the file title but put it into single quotation marks to make it clear that it is a direct quotation from the record, not a statement of fact;
- to use an alternative but equally meaningful and accurate term. This option should be used when the offensive terms are not present on the file titles but the inclusion of an alternative word would be useful for descriptive purposes.

More information about The National Archives' approach offensive terminology in the catalogue is available on our website.

11. Public access conditions

11.1. Open status

The normal status of pieces is ‘Open’, that is, open to the public under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. If a piece is open leave the closure field blank.

11.2. Closure and retention variations

However the following four variations can occur:

`Closure under the Freedom of Information Act`

Records will come to The National Archives but remain closed for a specified number of years. This requires inclusion on an FOI Exemption Schedule agreed by the Advisory Council on National Records and Archives or the responsible Director at The National Archives, depending on which Exemptions are cited.

`Retention of specific records under section 3(4) of the Public Records Act`

Departments may retain records that are more than 20 years old if they are still required for administrative purposes or ought to be retained for any other special reason, for example, if the records are classified above Official-Sensitive. This requires inclusion on a Retention Instrument signed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, on the advice of the Advisory Council on National Records and Archives. Until 2015, approval was provided by the Lord Chancellor by means of inclusion on a Lord Chancellor’s Instrument (LCI).

`‘Blanket’ retention of a certain category of record under section 3(4) of the Public Records Act`

The most common ‘blanket’ retention instrument is the Security and Intelligence Instrument (RI 146). Under this, the Secretary of State gave permission in advance for security and intelligence records to be retained, removing the need for departments to make applications for individual records.

`Temporary retention`

This is used for retention of records under 20 years old, and does not require approval by the Secretary of State. Temporary retention can be used when sensitivity issues have not been settled at the point of transfer.

11.3. Cataloguing closed records

If a piece is closed under the Freedom of Information Act:

- the Closure field contains the number of years of closure e.g. ‘40’ or ‘84’);
- the C/R (Closure/Retention) field contains ‘C’ for Closure;
- the Schedule number field contains the number of the approved FOI Exemption Schedule.

Closure	C/R	Schedule Number
40	C	24

11.4. Cataloguing specific and blanket retentions under section 3(4)

If a piece is retained under section 3(4), either as a specific entry on a Retention Instrument or under a ‘blanket’ retention instrument:

- the Closure field contains ‘S’ (for retention under section 3(4))
- the C/R field contains ‘R’ for Retention
- the Schedule number field contains the number of the Retention Instrument

Closure	C/R	Schedule Number
S	R	85

11.5. Cataloguing temporarily retained records

If a piece is temporarily retained write ‘T’ in the Closure field:

Closure
T

11.6. Including C/R and Schedule numbers

The C/R and Schedule number fields are required on the cataloguing template to demonstrate that closures and retentions have been properly authorised and are valid. This enables the Transfer Team to process the data more quickly.

11.7. Closed and retained pieces examples

The following are examples of closed pieces and extracts, and retained pieces:

P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content	Former Ref	Closure	C/R	Schedule Number
408		1975	1977	Reserve for losses in lieu of insurance: policy, correspondence	ACCTS 504/7(ii) PART 4	58	C	63
409		1976	1977	Radioactive waste management and related studies: finance	F/01/20 PART 4			
409	1	1976	1977	Closed extracts: Folios 3, 5 and 7		40	C	63
410		1981	1982	Inspection of reactor circuits, including Inspection Validation Centre	F/01/29 PART 3	S	R	106
411		1976	1977	Select Committee on Science and Technology: evidence, briefs. Orderable at item level	F/09/24 PART 3	90	C	17
411	1	1976	1977	Part 1 of 2		90	C	17
411	2	1976	1977	Part 2 of 2		90	C	17
412		1974	1977	Past costs of civil research and development	F/11/02 PART 3			
412	1	1974	1977	Closed extract: Folio 15		70	C	63
413		1981	1982	UKAEA’s approach to repayment work. Orderable at item level	F/21/13	S	R	120
413	1	1981	1982	Part 1 of 2		S	R	120
413	2	1981	1982	Part 2 of 2		S	R	120
413	3	1981	1982	Closed extracts: Folio 13; two photographs		63	C	63
414		1974	1974	Euratom programme on plutonium recycling	F/31/17 PART 1			
415		1975	1976	UKAEA’s contribution to National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) costs	F/33/01 PART 4	T		

12. Former references

12.1. What are former references?

Former references (sometimes referred to as 'departmental references' or 'file references') are the departmental codes or numbers used for the records before they were assigned The National Archives' catalogue references. Usually they were marked on the covers of the records when they were created by a registry, often in accordance with a subject classification scheme. Most often, former references consist of a letter prefix followed by a number code and a part number or letter.

12.2. How to record former references?

Record former references accurately. They are a major means by which researchers pursue a line of research from one record to another, and by which official users identify the documents they need to order back for administrative purposes.

The correct arrangement of pieces also depends on the accurate transcription of former references.

Maintain consistency in spacing, punctuation and capitalisation. Former references consisting of a letter prefix followed by a number code and a part number or letter are usually written in the cataloguing template in this way: XXX 111 PART 1 (where XXX stands for the letters, 111 for the numbers; PART is written in capitals; and a space separates each of these elements). In the template they might look like this:

Former Ref
COM 2
COM 7
COM 19 PART A
COM 19 PART B
COM 19 ANNEX
COM 42

Remove ‘leading zeros’ which were not part of the original former reference. Leading zeros mean zeros added to the former reference after the file was no longer in use (e.g. XY 0027/002/0001 – which should become XY 27/2/01).

12.3. Annexes to earlier or later files

If a file contains an earlier file annexed to it, it may be useful to researchers to know this. Record such information in this form: XXX 111 PART 1 (ZZZ 222 annexed). However, if there are numerous annexures from the later files of an old series to the early files of a new series, point this out to The National Archives for inclusion at series level and omit it at piece level.

13. Note field

13.1. What should be put in the Note field

The Note field should be used to accommodate information which does not belong more appropriately to any other field of Discovery.

This will ensure that data about photographs, maps, plans, indexes, etc. inside records is stored in the correct field from the start of the cataloguing process, safeguarding against the risk of losing the data when transferring it to another field.

The type of information which should appear in the Note field will most commonly be

- statements about how the record has been catalogued or processed, for example:
- 'The naming of a defendant within this catalogue does not imply guilt' (used for data protection purposes when cataloguing court records);
- 'Date estimated' (when a first or last date has been assigned, but there remains significant doubt about it);
- 'Photocopy: original destroyed because of asbestos contamination' (used when the original could not be transferred and a photocopy was transferred instead).

14. 9.2Comments

14.1. What is the comments field for?

Comments should be used for communications of various types with the Transfer Team. Information in the Comments field is not loaded onto Discovery, and will not be seen by the public unless it is moved by The National Archives' Transfer Team to another field on Discovery.

Communicating cataloguing queries

The first use of the Comments field is to enable a departmental cataloguer to communicate cataloguing questions and issues to the Transfer Team while drafting piece descriptions, for example, 'Unable to discover the meaning of acronym EDCR', 'File contents appear very different from file cover title'. The Transfer Team may reply using this field or in another way.

Indicating unresolved physical preparation issues

The second use of the Comments field is to indicate unresolved physical preparation issues which the Transfer Team will need to inspect or advise on. Examples are: 'Lots of sellotape in the file', 'Many damaged pages', 'Many newspaper cuttings glued onto pages', 'Oversize plan enclosed in file', 'File contains 2 microfiche and a CD'. Mentioning these issues will help the Transfer Team to identify issues with physical preparation more quickly, speeding up the transfer process. Problems still unresolved at transfer (e.g. sticky tape) will need to be noted in the Physical Condition section of the e-Transfer form (AA2), for the attention of the Collection Care Department at The National Archives.

Communicating cataloguing data to be moved to specific fields in TNA's catalogue

The third use of the Comments field is to communicate certain types of cataloguing data which will need to be moved after transfer to certain specific, dedicated fields on Discovery. These fields do not exist on the cataloguing template because they are used comparatively rarely. This includes data about foreign languages, medium, size and scale of maps, significant cross-references and severe physical damage.

<u>Foreign languages in a piece</u>

A foreign language should only be mentioned if there is a substantial amount of text (20% or more). The language should always be mentioned if the piece is written entirely in a foreign language. The data should be written in the Comments field in this format – ‘Language: English and French’, ‘Language: Dutch, English and German’ or ‘Language: Spanish’ (the last example means everything is written in Spanish, with no English). This information will be moved to the ‘Language’ field on Discovery.

If English is the only language used, this does not need to be recorded. The only exception to this is for Welsh Government records where ‘Language: English’ should be used when a record is in English only but the scope/content contains a bilingual description.

Medium of the piece

If the piece is not paper, this should be mentioned, e.g. ‘Piece is a microfilm’, ‘Piece is a microfiche’. The National Archives does not generally accept records in these formats but if necessary this information may be moved to the ‘Physical description form’ field on Discovery.

Size of a map

If the piece is a map (not merely a piece containing a map), write down the size of the map in centimetres, in the format ‘Map size 90cm x 30cm’. This information will be moved to the ‘Dimensions’ field on Discovery.

Scale of a map

If the piece is a map (not merely a piece containing a map), write down the scale of the map, if possible in the format ‘Map scale 1: 63360’ rather than ‘1 inch to 1 mile’. This information will be moved to the ‘Map scale number’ field on Discovery.

Cross-references to related material other than related digital material

Cross-references to related material other than digital material (see Section 15) are not normally necessary, since all related records can easily be found by carrying out searches on Discovery. However, cross-references can be added in the Comments field if required. They should only be added for links between records which are obscure and difficult to find, and are usually in the format ‘See also MT 500/172’. Such cross-references will be moved to the ‘Related material’ field on Discovery, and a reciprocal cross-reference will be created from the cross-referenced material.

Severe physical damage of a piece

If a piece has severe physical damage which may limit its use by the public, this should be explained in the Comments field, for example by writing ‘Many pages extremely fragile’, ‘Rolled map which tears if any attempt made to unroll it’. This information may be moved to the ‘Restrictions on use’ or ‘Physical condition’ field on Discovery if the problem cannot be resolved.

Indicating sensitive content

The fourth use of the Comments field is to alert the Transfer Team that a scope/content is sensitive and is to be withheld from the public in full or in part (see section 10). For example: 'Name is to be withheld', 'Closed scope/content'.

14.2. Exceptions for information shared across a series

Remember that if the information is common to all or most of the pieces in a series, it may be better for the information to be recorded at series level, rather than being continually repeated at piece level.

15. Related digital material

15.1. What is the related digital material field

This field deals specifically with hybrid records which contain both paper and digital components. A cross referral from the paper component to the related digital component should be entered in this field. A corresponding referral from digital to paper will be created for the digital component.

Related Digital Material
See also – Digital component of this record – [Welsh Language Board – Progression Project – Meeting Minutes and Papers – 2007]

The use of this field will develop as The National Archives acquires increasing numbers of digital records. Please consult the Transfer Team for further guidance.

16. Subseries level

16.1. What are subseries?

Subseries are a comparatively rarely used supplementary descriptive level used to indicate, separate and describe distinct, subsidiary series or groups of records within a single series.

They should be used with caution. Overuse of subseries can make catalogue data in Discovery difficult to compose, use and maintain.

Usually, a series on The National Archives' catalogue contains a single homogeneous series of departmental records. In such a case subseries are unlikely to be useful. However, a series at The National Archives occasionally contains more than one series or group of departmental records. For example it might contain:

- several series of records from different senior officials;
- several different file series, with different file prefixes;
- records from more than one scientific establishment.

In such cases it makes sense to indicate and explain the different departmental series by using the subseries level.

16.2. Approval for using a subseries

The use of subseries requires the approval of The National Archives so consult the Transfer Team at an early stage if you are thinking of using subseries.

16.3. Formatting a subseries

A subseries consists of a title, usually in upper case, written in the scope/content, and an associated number written in the subseries (SS) column in the rows containing the subseries title and all the pieces and items which belong to that subseries. The number is what enables the subseries title and the pieces and items to be linked together in Discovery.

When using subseries you must follow certain technical rules:

- Each subseries title must have its own number. The first subseries of a new series will be subseries 1, the next subseries 2, the next 3, and so on;
- A subseries title must always be written in exactly the same way whenever it is used, and the same associated number must be used with it. Unless

there is strict consistency, the data will not load or function properly on Discovery;

- When cataloguing an accrual to an existing series, refer to a list of the subseries and subsubseries and associated numbers which have already been used in the series, in order to maintain the strict consistency necessary. The Transfer Team can supply this list. If you think any of the existing subseries needs to be changed, tell the Transfer Team. If a new subseries is required, government departments should consult the Transfer Team before creating it to ensure it is appropriate. The new subseries will use the next available number;
- Subseries titles do not have first and last dates, former references, closure information, notes, comments etc. All the fields in the subseries title line should be blank except for D, S, SS and Scope/Content.

16.4. Example: Using a subseries

The following is an example of using subseries. FCO 55 contains several different departmental series. Subseries 7 is used for SME files (which deal with Environmental Problems) and subseries 8 for SMF files (Scientific Relations):

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content	Former Ref
FCO	55	7						ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS	
FCO	55	7		1023		1973	1976	Preservation of wild birds	SME 7/6
FCO	55	7		1024		1973	1973	Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat 1971 (Ramsar Convention)	SME 7/324/1
FCO	55	8						SCIENTIFIC RELATIONS	
FCO	55	8		1027		1973	1973	International Institute for the Management of Technology (IIMT)	SMF 2/579/1 PART A
FCO	55	8		1029		1973	1973	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)	SMF 2/1 PART A
FCO	55	8		1029	1	1973	1973	Closed extract: Folio 1	

17. Subsubseries level

17.1. What are subsubseries?

Subsubseries are a very rarely used supplementary descriptive level. They are used to provide information about groups of records within a subseries.

For example, a department's series may contain records from more than one scientific establishment which may be divided into subseries, and the records of the scientific establishments may divide into distinct groups of Reports, Technical Notes and Technical Memoranda to form subsubseries.

Subsubseries are hardly ever used because they make composing, maintaining and searching the catalogue unnecessarily complicated. Consult the Transfer Team about approval at an early stage if you are thinking of using subsubseries.

The technical rules for adding subsubseries to the cataloguing template are similar to the rules for subseries.

17.2. Example: Using a subsubseries

Here is an example from series KV 2 – the only 'live' series currently using subsubseries due to some unusual cataloguing conventions:

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content	Former Ref
KV	2	2						WORLD WAR II	
KV	2	2	13	1023		1973	1976	Subjects of Security Service Enquiry	
KV	2	2	13	4094		12/02/1941	30/12/1965	Viorel Virgil TILEA: Romanian. TILEA was a diplomat, most noted for his ambassadorship in the United Kingdom during the Second World War. He became a key representative of Romania's monarchist regime in exile	PF 53105 VOLUME 1

18. Item level

18.1. What is the Item descriptive level?

Item level is a supplementary descriptive level used to provide information about separate parts of a piece:

- When the piece has been split into two or more parts because of its thickness; and/or
- When extracts or redactions have been made from the piece because of their sensitivity, and these extracts are closed under the exemption provisions of the Freedom of Information Act; and/or
- When it is useful to describe individual reports or subfiles within a piece.

18.2. When to create items

Create items where a very thick, unwieldy file or other record is split into parts (items) for conservation and handling purposes. Such splitting is usually only necessary when a file is more than 4-5cm thick (see The National Archives' Physical Preparation guidance).

It is comparatively rare for such splitting to be necessary provided that a suitably long tag is run through the file and the file is tied around with cotton tape.

When creating such items, describe the whole piece as usual, but add the phrase: '. Orderable at item level' at the end of the scope/content.

Then create numbered items under the parent piece. The first item will be item 1; the next item 2 and so on. The dates and closure status of each item should be the same as for the piece.

If there are two items, the scope/content of the first item will be 'Part 1 of 2' and the scope/content of the second item will be 'Part 2 of 2'. If there are three items it will be 'Part 1 of 3' and so on. Give the former reference at piece level only, not item level.

Supplementary information such as 'With photographs' (see section 9.2) and 'Date estimated' (see section 13.4) is normally entered at piece level, rather than at item level, unless there is a particularly strong reason to add the information at item level. The same supplementary information should not be repeated unnecessarily at both levels.

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content	Former Ref	Closure	C/R	Schedule Number	Note
MAF	369			334		1987	1992	Farm Animal Welfare Council report on the welfare of livestock at markets. Orderable at item level	AJ 4441B				Photocopy: original destroyed
MAF	369			334	1	1987	1992	Part 1 of 2					
MAF	369			334	2	1987	1992	Part 2 of 2					

18.3. Items created to allow management of extracts subject to closure under FOI exemptions

Create a numbered item on the template where an extract or group of extracts is closed under the exemption provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, as authorised by an FOI Exemption Schedule. The creation of an item with its own reference will enable the closed extract to be managed separately from the open parent piece.

The item should contain all the extracts closed for the same period and for the same reason (the same section or sections of the Freedom of Information Act and the same justification) and authorised by the same FOI Exemption Schedule.

The item number and extract details should match the details given on the FOI Exemption Schedule. If there is any problem or discrepancy, consult with the Transfer Adviser to find a solution.

When creating such an item, describe the parent piece as usual and create an item under it. This will be item 1 unless there are other items. The date of each item should have the same date as the parent piece.

The scope/content of each item should read ‘Closed extract(s):’ along with details or identifiers of the extracts in that item. For example: ‘Closed extract: Memorandum dated 13/12/1984’ or ‘Closed extracts: Enclosures 2, 3, 5A, 17; note on file cover’ or ‘Closed extracts: 17 pages’.

[Note: if you are recording how many pages have been closed, this should be the number of physical pages regardless of how much text is redacted, i.e. one page equates to one physical sheet, whether it has one word or print on both sides.]

Leave the Former reference field blank.

The Closure field should contain the number of years of closure; the C/R field should contain 'C'; and the Schedule number field should contain the number of the FOI Exemption Schedule. For example:

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content	Former Ref	Closure	C/R	Schedule Number
EG	14			8		1970	1977	Possible commercial explorations for mineral resources in the Antarctic. With maps	CIP 1006/6 05/01 PART 1			
EG	14			8	1	1970	1977	Closed extracts: Folios 106, 110, 112, 116		40	C	120

When not to create items

Do not create items for extracts and redactions that are being retained as opposed to closed. This applies whether the extracts are being temporarily retained or retained under section 3(4) of the Public Records Act. The main reasons why retained extracts are not entered on the cataloguing template are:

- Retained extracts do not need to be managed by The National Archives through its catalogue, as they are in the custody of the government department;
- The time and effort required in creating items for retained extracts far outweighs the usefulness of this information to researchers.

18.4. Items created to allow more detailed description

On rare occasions it may be appropriate for departmental cataloguers to use items to describe a number of distinct reports or subfiles which comprise a single piece. Consult the Transfer Adviser before cataloguing in this way, as it may be unnecessarily time-consuming and complex.

When creating such items describe the whole piece as usual and add '. (Described at item level)' at the end of the scope/content. Then create items under it. The first item will be item 1; the next item 2 and so on.

The date of each item should be the particular date of the report or subfile comprising the item, not the piece date (if the report or subfile date is unknown, use the piece date). Each item will have its own distinct scope/content – a description of the individual report or subfile.

The Former reference field should either contain the item's own distinct former reference (the report or subfile's own unique reference) if this is useful to researchers, or else be left blank. It should not contain the piece's former reference.

The closure status of the items should normally be the same as the piece.

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content	Former Ref	Closure
COAL	100			212		1989	1991	Fuel and Appliance Testing (F&AT) Branch Reports 3941. (Described at item level)		40
COAL	100			212	1	1989	1989	Report on tests carried out on a small sample of pellets made from Bolsover Froth Flotation Fines by the Komarec Process	F&AT 39	40
COAL	100			212	2	1990	1990	Smoke emission from pine mountain logs. With photographs	F&AT 40	40
COAL	100			212	3	1991	1991	Report on the investigation of moisture ingress	F&AT 41	40

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content	Former Ref	Closure
								to the insulation of a Selkirk Ceramic Chimney Section		

19. Annex 1: Examples of cataloguing qualities

Below are listed examples of each cataloguing quality, as outlined in section 3.1.

19.1. Accuracy

- Words should be spelled correctly and capital letters used appropriately, as in standard English;
- Names of legislation, organisations, committees, people and places should be referred to by their correct titles and names;
- An accurate description of the record as a whole should be produced;
- Dates and former references must be correct;
- Closure and retention information on the template must match the entry on the relevant Freedom of Information or Retention Schedule.

19.2. Understandability

- Scope/content descriptions should be meaningful within itself (self-contained, self-evident);
- Acronyms, abbreviations and 'jargon' should be explained;
- Avoid ambiguity. For instance, it can be helpful to clarify a place name by adding the county or country name;
- The meaning of the scope/content should not be difficult to understand (e.g. because of omission of small words or altering the order of words).

19.3. Simplicity

- Records should be arranged in their original order where possible, otherwise they should be arranged in a logical order;
- Subseries should not normally be used; subsubseries are almost never used;
- Covering dates should usually be given as years (not days or months);
- The scope/content should normally be based closely on the title on the record cover without unnecessary changes;
- Unnecessary details should not be included in the scope/content;
- If most records contain maps or photographs this might be mentioned at series level rather than the information being repeated for each record;

- Details of retained extracts should not appear on the list.

19.4. Consistency

- The same format should generally be used for each record in series of case files, reports and committee papers;
- Former references from the same series are all usually written in the same format;
- Consecutive parts of files with the same former reference should usually have the same or very similar scope/content;
- When the title of a record is written in 'natural word' order, it should normally be written in the scope/content in natural word order. When the title is written in 'key word' order, the scope/content should normally be written in key word order (see section 9.1).

19.5. Correct use of The National Archives' cataloguing template:

- The template should not be altered as changing the format will result in the cataloguing data failing to load onto Discovery;
- The various elements of the cataloguing data should appear in the correct fields of the template and in the correct format.

20. Annex 2: Examples of the cataloguing template

[Note: the following examples are partially artificial, designed to illustrate elements of the guidance.]

20.1. Example 1

Acronyms; Comments field; Note field; temporary retention; piece split into parts (due to thickness); missing at transfer; with maps

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content	Former Ref	Closure	C/R	Schedule Number	Note	Comments	Related Digital Material
T	538			172		1985	1985	British Steel Corporation (BSC): long-term borrowing from the National Loans Fund (NLF)	PTS B/1089/03	T				File contains 2 microfiche and a CD	
T	538			173		1981	1985	British Iron and Steel Consumers' Council (BRISCC) report on government policies and the effects on the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) steel industries and other	PTS E/566/1327/01				Date estimated	Language: English, French and German	

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content	Former Ref	Closure	C/R	Schedule Number	Note	Comments	Related Digital Material
								BRISCC papers							
T	538			174		1985	1985	British Steel Corporation (BSC): coal related matters. Missing at transfer	PTS F/287/0 1					Sellotape on cover	
T	538			175		1980	1985	British Steel Corporation (BSC): privatisation. With maps. Orderable at item level	PTS F/822/1 295/01	T					
T	538			175	1	1980	1985	Part 1 of 2		T					
T	538			175	2	1980	1985	Part 2 of 2		T					

20.2. Example 2

Subseries; closure under FOI (closed pieces and items); retention under section 3(4); with photographs; Comments field; Related digital material field

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content	Former Ref	Closure	C/R	Schedule Number	Note	Comments	Related Digital Material
FCO	33	12						ICELAND							
FCO	33	12		7215		1984	1984	Invitation to Margaret Thatcher, UK Prime Minister, to address the Icelandic National Convention of Junior Chambers, May-June 1984	WRC 314/3					Many pages extremely fragile	See also – Digital component of this record – [Meeting Minutes and Papers – 1984]
FCO	33	12		7216		1984	1984	Diplomatic representation of Iceland in the UK	WRC 400/1	S	R	110			
FCO	33	12		7217		1984	1984	Diplomatic representation of the UK in Iceland	WRC 400/2	60	C	64			
FCO	33	13						DENMARK							

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content	Former Ref	Closure	C/R	Schedule Number	Note	Comments	Related Digital Material
FCO	33	13		7218		1985	1985	Leading personalities in Denmark. With photographs	WRD 10/1						
FCO	33	13		7218	1	1985	1985	Closed extracts: Folios 24, 30		40	C	63			
FCO	33	13		7219		1984	1984	Internal political situation in Denmark	WRD 14/1						
FCO	33	13		7220		1984	1984	Denmark: annual review for 1983	WRD 14/2						

20.3. Example 3

Committee records; exact dates for Cabinet Committee records; retention under section 3(4); temporary retention; Comments field

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content	Former Ref	Closure	C/R	Schedule Number	Note	Comments	Related Digital Material
CAB	134			4952		28/01/1986	23/12/1986	Official Committee on Anglo-Irish Relations: meetings 1-2, papers 1-11	AI (86)						
CAB	134			4953		04/02/1986	05/11/1986	Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development: meetings 1-6, papers 1-21	ARD (86)	S	R	110		Should I include acronym ACARD?	
CAB	134			4954		24/04/1986	12/06/1986	Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development: papers 22-40	ARD (86)						
CAB	134			4955		03/07/1986	18/12/1986	Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development: papers 41-61	ARD (86)	T					

D	S	SS	SSS	P	I	First Date	Last Date	Scope/Content	Former Ref	Closure	C/R	Schedule Number	Note	Comments	Related Digital Material
CAB	134			4956		18/02/1986	19/12/1986	Civil Contingencies Unit: meetings 1-11, papers 1-13	CCU (86)						

21. Annex 3: Further guidance and training

The National Archives provides further guidance and training on records management practices through supporting the development of the Section 46 Code of Practice on the Management of Records, the Information Management Assessment toolkit and the GKIM Skills Framework.

21.1. The Section 46 Code of Practice on the Management of Records

Section 46 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (c. 36) supports the development and publication of a Code of Practice for the management of records issued, which was last revised by The National Archives in 2021. The latest version can be accessed here: FOI Act Section 46 Code of Practice.

The Code of Practice provides a framework to guide authorities throughout the lifecycle of the records they hold. It sets out the principles of robust information management so that authorities understand their responsibilities and are enabled to discharge them.

Conformity with the records management Code of Practice will be monitored via self-assessment by public authorities using tools provided by The National Archives. Our Section 46 Self-assessment tool is being developed as part of our Information Management Assessment toolkit and is available through our pilot programme. If you would like to join the programme, please contact the Government Help Point at GovernmentHelpPoint@nationalarchives.gov.uk.

The guidance in this document relates in particular to the requirements listed below from the Code and covered by the Self-assessment tool.

Paragraph number	Question
2.3	**Keeping, finding and using information**
2.3.6	Authorities should take action to conserve physical records if there are signs of damage according to best practice. Digital information should be subject to the appropriate active digital continuity.
2.3.7	Authorities should make reasonable efforts to recover or preserve physical records and digital information that is found to be damaged or unusable, including their technical and contextual information, keeping a record of any action taken.
2.3.8	Authorities should make reasonable efforts to recover contextual information for ‘orphaned information’ which they judge to have value, keeping a record of any action taken.
2.6	**Disposition**
2.6.1	Authorities must decide how to dispose of information that no longer has value. Authorities can dispose of information by destroying it, transferring it to another body or by transferring it to an archive.
2.6.2	Authorities must take disposition decisions in line with their policy and the security classification of the information. Disposition decisions must be recorded. Those taking disposition decisions must be properly authorised to do so.
2.8	**Responsibilities where information is shared**
2.8.1	Where the authority works jointly with another authority, body or contractor, a lead or commissioning authority should be agreed which will remain responsible for ensuring that information is managed in accordance with the Code throughout its life.

Paragraph number	Question
2.8.2	The authority and its partner authorities, bodies or contractors should set out their responsibilities in an information sharing agreement.This includes where information in separate authorities' systems is integrated by technical means. The agreement should specify: • the obligation to record decisions, particularly in relation to the transfer or destruction of information; • obligations under copyright, data protection legislation and FOIA; • record management controls and any special requirements for the security and handling of personal information; • the ownership of any copyright.
2.8.3	Authorities should ensure that information sharing arrangements enable them to comply with the requirements of the PRA or the PRA(NI) where at least one authority is subject to the legislation.

21.2. Developing related skills through the Government Knowledge and Information Management (GKIM) Skills Framework

The Government Knowledge and Information Management (GKIM) Skills Framework supports information managers to develop new skills to assist them in identifying and resolving information management issues and ensuring their department is fulfilling its statutory obligations.

More information about the GKIM Skills Framework can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service-government-knowledge-information-management-profession/about#the-gkim-profession-skills-framework

The information in this guidance relates most closely to:

Skill code	Skill description
OR07	Applying relevant legislation
OR11	Strategy and planning
OR16	Lifecycle
OR21	Categorisation and taxonomy
CE02	Collaboration across government and the sector
IA03	Effective information sharing practices
GC01	Complying with FOI retention rules in relation to archiving records
GC02	Complying with the DPA in relation to archiving records
RM01	Records Management responsibilities
RM02	Retention and disposition
RM04	Physical archives
RM10	Permanent preservation
RM12	Records lifecycle

Monitoring GKIM Skills development

The dynamic online version of the GKIM Skills Framework tool (Comaea) is provided by the Department for Education and will allow you to:

- map your progress in developing skills in real time
- keep a record of your learning and development in the profession
- discuss your development with your manager
- understand what you need to do to reach the next attainment level in a particular skill

Comaea allows managers to produce reports detailing the skill gaps in the six job families across their organisation. You can sign up for the dynamic version of the tool by emailing this address.