Harvard-wide Archival Processing Levels

Processing levels outline the basic intellectual and physical tasks to undertake for each collection depending on a collection's descriptive and rehousing needs as well as its anticipated level of use.

These levels provide one way to expand the notion of what a "processed" collection looks like. Using such a framework gives flexibility and allows for more intensive intellectual and physical work to focus on the collections with the highest demand for use. By introducing a shared language, we can be more transparent to users and to our successors about why we did the level or amount of work we did.

Agreeing to use a framework of basic processing levels allows technical services staff to make decisions about the appropriate processing level for each collection. Evaluate each collection at the point of accessioning and/or at the point of processing. An ideal accessioning process would include a preliminary recommendation of each collection's processing needs.

The possibility of a collection containing materials in need of restriction is one factor to consider in determining the appropriate processing level. Technical services staff should work in conjunction with collections/curatorial colleagues to understand the potential for restricted material to be present, assessing this risk based on information from donors, knowledge of the types of records, any container lists provided for the materials, and/or a preliminary survey of the collection. If restrictions are necessary, the level at which those restrictions are placed should align with the processing level. For example, if the nature of a collection warrants that it be evaluated for restrictions at the folder level, that collection is not a good candidate for Level I "Standard" processing.

Unprocessed Collections

Including "unprocessed" as an option here is an acknowledgement of legacy material, and a recognition that there are sometimes reasons to close collections or parts of collections to access until they are processed or until a period of restricted access has elapsed.

Level I "Standard

The vast majority of collections coming into our repositories can and should be described at this level at accessioning. There are many collections for which this level of processing is the best and most appropriate level. See examples below for several of these.

	Unprocessed		Level I "Standard"	Level II "Optimum"	Level III "Value Added"
	A	B			
Access	CLOSED	CLOSED. Mediated access may be possible.	OPEN. Some parts of collections may be restricted or need mediated access depending on types of records	OPEN. Some parts of collections may be restricted or need mediated access depending on types of records	OPEN
Discoverability	None. Truly hidden from researchers	HOLLIS record	HOLLIS record, possible online finding aid or link to description in another format	HOLLIS record, online finding aid	HOLLIS record, online finding aid
Description level	None	Collection-level	Collection-level	Series or file-level	File or item-level
Description elements		**Required**: MARC record with DACS single-level required elements	**Required**: MARC record with DACS single-level required elements **Optional**: MARC record with DACS single-level optimum elements **Optional**: Finding aid with DACS single-level elements **Optional**: Archival authority work performed	**Required**: MARC record with DACS single-level optimum elements **Required**: Finding aid with DACS single-level optimum elements Material is described at the collection-level, inventory with box and/or file list may be used **Optional**: Finding aid with DACS multilevel optimum elements. Material is described at the series-level or file-level; inventory with file listing is recommended **Optional**: Archival authority work performed	**Required**: MARC record with DACS single-level optimum elements **Required**: Finding aid with DACS multilevel optimum elements **Required:** Archival authority work performed

Preservation		Physical material rehoused at a high level if necessary	Rehouse physical material at a high level, as necessary. Possibly other preservation measures as needed to make collection usable for users.	Physical materials rehoused at a high level, and at lower levels, as needed	Rehoused in archival boxes and folders; preservation work done to mitigate rust, mold, fragility
Physical arrangement		None	If necessary to support use	If necessary to support use	Many collections processed to this level will have physical arrangement that matches intellectual arrangement.
Appraisal and assessment for restrictions		Collection-level appraisal required to determine closure.	Collection or series-level	Series-level or subseries level if needed	File level; item level assessment may be appropriate
Types of Collections	Legacy and some university records	Collections with time-bound restricted material, such as university records, student records, patient records, or other donor-stipulated restrictions. Collections that cannot be safely and effectively used, for example large	Collections for which only a basic level of access is required, as determined by each repository	Large collections with anticipated moderate research use	Collections with anticipated heavy use; that require extensive screening for restrictions at the folder/item level; or that arrive in a physical state that requires the archivist to establish order at the folder/item level. Item-level appraisal and/or description may be appropriate for audiovisual media (in some cases); significantly rare material; or visual material. Collections for which "value

		collections received in no discernible order or collections with fragility concerns and/or other format concerns			added" processing is included in the donor agreement. Collections for which processing to this level will surface otherwise hidden individuals and groups, particularly those historically underrepresented
Examples (Note: more examples are available at https://sites.harvard.edu/joint-processing-guidelines/processing/guidelines/processing-levels/)		http://id.lib.harvard.edu/aleph/008258347/catalog	http://id.lib.harvard.edu/aleph/014813912/catalog https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/14/resources/7137 http://id.lib.harvard.edu/aleph/008524695/catalog	https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/14/resources/6666 http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL.Hough:hou02662 https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/resources/6782	https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/11/resources/6352 https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/5/resources/6521 https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/7/resources/6798