

Processing an Archival Fonds

From Acquisition to Dissemination: Archival Processing in Eight Steps



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INTRODUCTION

What is an archival fonds?

An archival fonds refers to all documents, regardless of their date, form, or medium, produced or received by an individual or organization in the course of their activities.

The principle of respect for archival fonds

Foundation of archival science: preserving documents in their original context.

Origin: do not mix documents from different producers.

Integrity: preserve the fonds in its entirety, without dismembering it.

Original order: respect the organization established by the producer.



The main stages of processing

A continuous process, from the entry of the fonds to its availability.

01

Acquisition

Entry and management of the fonds.

02

Evaluation

Assess the values and the retention period.

03

Sorting

Select the documents to keep.

04

Cataloguing

Organize the fonds, both intellectually and physically.

05

Search tools

Make the fonds accessible to users.

06

Description and indexing

Standardize information on documents and locate them effectively.

07

Preservation

Preserve documents over time.

08

Communication

Provide access to researchers and the public.

STEP 01

Fonds acquisition and entry

The archivist takes charge of the fonds and keeps track of it from the moment of its arrival.

- Methods of acquisition: payment, donation, bequest, deposit, or purchase.
- Secure handling and transport of documents.
- Formalization through a deposit slip, contract, or agreement. This provides an overview of the documents and their contents.
- Condition assessment and recording: origin, dates, classification, linear metres.
- Storage in appropriate and secure spaces to slow document deterioration before processing.



STEP 02

Evaluation: judging the value of documents

Documents are evaluated throughout the processing stage to determine what is worth keeping, and for how long.

PRIMARY VALUES

For the producer, during normal use

- Administrative – useful for daily management
- Legal – proof of rights and obligations
- Financial – accounting and supporting documents

SECONDARY VALUES

For search and memory

- Testimony – evidence of the producer's activity
- Information – data about people, events, and places
- Heritage – lasting historical interest

Preferred tool – a retention schedule sets the retention periods and final disposition of documents. If there is no schedule, establish a sorting policy or base your decisions on the following criteria:

BAnQ EVALUATION CRITERIA

Representativeness · Rarity · Credible Evidence · Communicability · Exploitability · Organizational Context

STEP 03

Sorting: selecting what to keep

Reducing the volume of documentation while preserving the essence and meaning of the fonds.

- Preliminary sorting: identifying duplicates and unimportant documents.
- Final sorting: reasoned decision to retain or discard.
- Selection: qualitative choice of the most significant files.
- Sampling: retention of a representative set of large series.
- Disposal is governed by a signed and traceable disposal form.



Critères d'évaluation à appliquer aux documents
gouvernementaux et privés

ARCHIVES
NATIONALES



STEP 04

Cataloguing: organizing the fonds

Giving the fonds a logical, intellectual and physical structure, faithful to its producer.

- Application of the principle of respect for fonds.
- Development of a logical and hierarchical cataloguing plan.
- Grouping of documents by function, activity, document type, mixed, or chronological order.
- Reference system: assignment of a unique reference number to each unit for identification and citation (e.g., F29/S1/SS6/D125/P28) (JPM-038) (001-X3450-01).

Fonds: the entire collection produced by a producer

Series: documents related to the same function/activity

Subseries: a subdivision of a series

File: documents gathered for a specific purpose

Item: the document itself

From the most general to the most specific

STEP 05

Search instruments

Paper or computerized tools that describe the fonds in order to make it known and accessible

Fonds status and guide

Overview of the fonds held by the institution.

General

Directory

Description, either item by item or file by file.

Intermediate

Inventory

Detailed, summary or analytical description, down to the individual item.

Detailed

Index

Cross-access by name, place and subject.

Cross-access

From the general level to the detailed level — the user moves from the overview to the specific item.

Archival description and indexing

Presenting and identifying the physical characteristics of documents, their content and their context, in order to identify and find them.

- A multi-level description (from fonds to item): from the general level to the specific level.
- Information is not repeated from one level to another.
- Various types of documents: textual, iconographic, cartographic, architectural, technical, sound, electronic, microform, philatelic, objects, moving images, and isolated items.
- The context of production takes precedence over the content alone. (Meaning changes depending on the author; the content can be misleading, but not the context; an isolated document loses its value. When it is linked to another, its context of creation becomes clear.)
- In Canada, the Rules for Archival Description (RAD) govern the practice of description.
- The Record in Contexts (RIC) is a new international standard developed by the International Council on Archives (ICA). It was designed to succeed and modernize the RAD by integrating new technologies. It replaces ISAD(G), ISAAR(CPF), ISDF, and ISDIAH. Instead of classifying documents solely in isolated files, RIC creates a network of links. The aim is to place context (people, places, and events) at the heart of research.

Description areas — RAD

- 1. Title and statement of responsibility**
- 2. Edition**
- 3. Class of material specific details**
- 4. Dates**
- 5. Physical description**
- 6. Publisher's series**
- 7. Archival description of documents**
- 8. Notes**
- 9. Standard number**

STEP 06

Indexing

Facilitating retrieval through indexes

- Vocabulary selection: controlled (RVM), semi-controlled, free.
- Heading identification: natural or legal persons – subjects – places – cross-references – metadata.
- The index is added to the search instrument.
- Information is entered into a database.

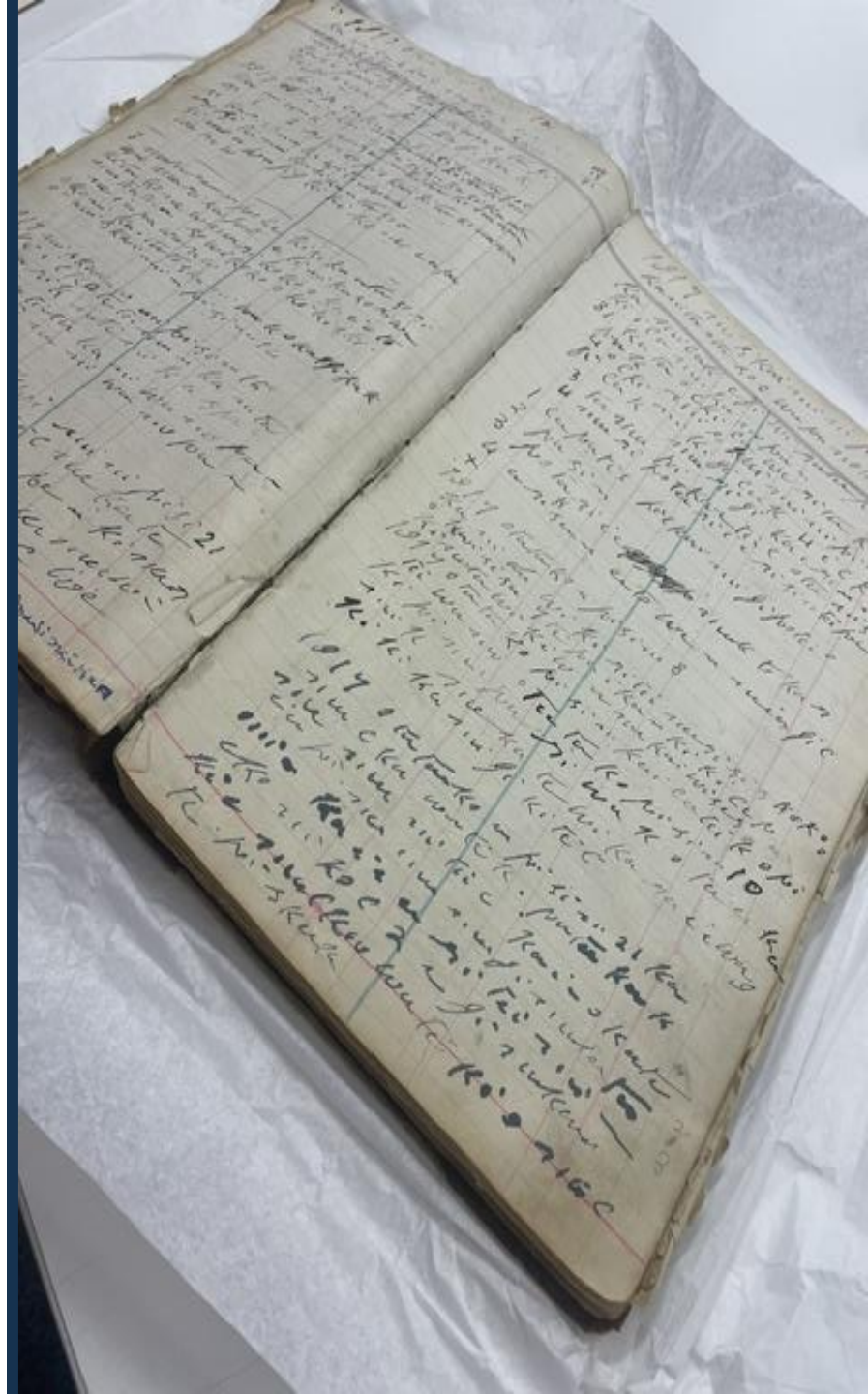
<i>Subject headings</i>	<i>Reference, see</i>	<i>Reference, see also</i>
Maliotenam (community)	Mani-Utenam (community)	
Manawan (community)		
Manicouagan (region and river)		
Mani-Utenam (community)		
Manouane (river)		
Maria (municipality)		Gesgapegiag (community)
Maricourt (community)	Kangiqsujuaq (Inuit community)	
Maritime (province)		
Mashteuiatsh (community)		
Matawin (river)		
Materials		
Educational materials		
Matimekosh (community)	Matimekush (community)	
Matimekush (community)		
Mauricie–Bois-Francis (region)		Haute-Mauricie (region)
Mégiscane (river)		
Mercury		Pollution
Weather forecasting	Meteorology	
Meteorology		
Methodology		
Mexico		
Micmac (nation)		
Mine	Mining region	
Mingan (archipelago)	Archipel-de-Mingan	
Mingan (community)	Ekuanitshit (community)	
Mingan (region)	Minganie	
Mingan (river)		
Minganie		Mingan Archipelago

STEP 07

Document preservation

Preserving the physical integrity and accessibility of documents over time.

- Preventive preservation: temperature and humidity control, prevention of fluctuations, and quality of storage facilities.
- Appropriate conditioning and careful handling of documents.
- Risk prevention: water, fire, light, dust.
- Preservation and restoration of damaged documents.
- Digital issue: long-term preservation and regular migration of media.



Communication and access

Making archives accessible, in compliance with legal frameworks.

- Accessibility: public or private archives (from private organizations or businesses).
- Retention periods: protect privacy, confidentiality, and security.
- Consideration of applicable legal frameworks: federal, provincial, or Indigenous laws.
- Access methods: reading room, reproduction, online access.
- Promotion: exhibitions, publications, and cultural outreach.



SUMMARY

A common thread: preserving the context to guarantee access

Good practices to remember

- Respect the fonds and its production context.
- Track each operation (acquisition, sorting, disposal).
- Standardize descriptions (RAD, RIC).
- Ensure long-term preservation and controlled access.

Need assistance?

- Contact the archivist representing the BAnQ in your region (seven offices).
- Contact the Association des archivistes du Québec (AAQ).
- Contact the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA).
- Contact the Canadian Council of Archives (CCA) – ARCAN-I.
- Contact the community of practice of the Indigenous Advisory Circle.



Bibliography

Link to download certain documents: <https://partage.atikamekw.sipi.com/public/7bfa2345b4e4>

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Thank you!
Mikwetc!