

Discussion Group Guide

American Archivist Special Section on Accessioning

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Overview

This document is intended to help guide reflections on the themes in the [*American Archivist* Special Section on accessioning](#) published in 2025, and to continue pushing accessioning theory and practice forward.

Discussion group facilitators are encouraged to create and maintain a welcoming and productive space for conversations. We recommend the Anti-Oppressive Resource & Training Alliance (AORTA) resource ["Making Meetings Awesome for Everyone"](#) in this regard.

Host a Discussion, Join a Discussion

We encourage folks to self-organize discussions, whether that be within their workplaces or across the profession.

If you are interested in facilitating or attending a discussion outside of your institution, please add your name/email address to the ["Self-Organizing Discussion Groups" spreadsheet](#). Facilitator responsibilities are outlined in the spreadsheet.

Discussion Questions

The questions below are intended as potential prompts, but should not be viewed as exhaustive.

Davis, Rosemary K. J., Audra Eagle Yun, and Rachel Searcy. "Accessioning: The Always-Already Function of Archival Practice." *The American Archivist* 88, no. 1 (2025): 10–16. <https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-88.1.10>.

1. How is the experience of reading case studies about accessioning in a journal different from hearing about practices or projects in a conference presentation?
2. How has your view of accessioning changed in your time as an archivist? Did you learn about its importance during your school or training?
3. Of the [Guiding Principles from the Archival Best Practices](#), which are most relevant to your work? Which one resonates with you the most?

Garfunkel, Amanda, Chiyong Han, and Nicole J. Milano. "Aspirational but Realistic: Reimagining Accessioning Workflows in a Medical Archives." *The American Archivist* 88, no. 1 (2025): 17–39. <https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-88.1.17>.

1. The authors in this piece discuss addressing legacy practices at their institution. What is one aspect of your accessioning legacy practice that you'd like to improve upon at your institution?
2. This piece builds upon discussions on access-driven accessioning, which often assumes a default academic setting. How did this article change your thinking about the relationship between access and accessioning?
3. Restricted or sensitive materials can pose additional challenges in accessioning. How did the authors' expertise in this area help you understand the needs of these types of materials?

Higgs Kopin, Emily, Jessica Hutchison, and James Truitt. "Building Capacity for Born-Digital Archives Through Accessioning Workflows at the Friends Historical Library." *The American Archivist* 88, no. 1 (2025): 40–56. <https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-88.1.40>.

1. The authors discuss efforts to bridge gaps between their current practices and the recently published *Archival Accessioning Best Practices*. What is one way you'd like to improve your born-digital accessioning, and did this article give you any ideas on how to do so?

2. This piece discusses the labor required for digital preservation, with particular emphasis on making a program sustainable beyond the efforts of an individual. Did this resonate with you? Do any of your workflows or practices feel overly dependent on a single person?
3. See question #4 in the [“Questions Relevant to Multiple Articles”](#) section for another prompt about born-digital accessioning.

McPhee, Laurel, Tori Maches, and Marlayna Christensen. "Ctrl+Alt+Archive: Navigating Born-Digital University Records and Publications." *The American Archivist* 88, no. 1 (2025): 57–77. <https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-88.1.57>.

1. The authors in this piece emphasize not letting perfect be the enemy of the good. Is this something that shows up in any of your workflows? How do you and/or your colleagues handle this tension?
2. One of the major themes in this piece is the importance of collaboration and relationships with regards to digital stewardship. Why is it important that conversations about technology center human actors?
3. See question #4 in the [“Questions Relevant to Multiple Articles”](#) section for another prompt about born-digital accessioning.

Dundon, Kate, Stephanie E. Bennett, and Jasmine Larkin. "More Than a Project: Case Studies on the Practice of Retrospective Accessioning." *The American Archivist* 88, no. 1 (2025): 78–105. <https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-88.1.78>.

1. Have you done retrospective accessioning before? What made it difficult? What made it necessary or impactful?
2. The authors of this piece offer different options for retrospective accessioning. What specific models, approaches, or considerations might be helpful at your institution?
3. What is the relationship between backlogs and retrospective accessioning at your institution? What does this say about the holistic impact of accessioning?
4. Each case mentions (re)appraisal in their retrospective accessioning projects. How is appraisal done at your institution? Could it be improved to further sustainable stewardship?

Gathings, Jennifer, and Catherine Dayrit Mayfield. "An Individual Approach: A Case Study on Oral History Accessioning." *The American Archivist* 88, no. 1 (2025): 106–124. <https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-88.1.106>.

1. This article explores the tension between the item-level needs of oral histories with the much larger scale of a systematic accessioning workflow for all acquisitions. Do you accession different collections or formats to different levels of granularity?
2. The legal implications of access for oral histories can complicate how or whether materials can be accessed. How might this impact accessioning workflows?
3. Would you consider implementing this kind workflow for some of your items? What factors might you consider?

Questions Relevant to Multiple Articles

1. How would you like to improve accessioning practice at your institution? Did the article(s) in this special section give you any inspiration for changes you might implement? What are some steps you might take to make one or two small improvements?
2. Thinking about its place within the archival profession (e.g., graduate education, continuing education, scholarship, conference presentations), in what ways does accessioning theory and/or practice need to continue growing? What are some ways we can support that growth?
3. Authors across multiple articles discuss how to do more with less. Did any of these choices resonate with you? What might you consider trying to incorporate into your own workflows?
4. Multiple authors share what baseline accessioning for born-digital looks like at their institutions. Where are your pain points with this area of accessioning work? Did the pieces in this section give you any ideas for ways forward?
5. Several authors altered their projects based on donor/creator needs and concerns. Do you interact with donors/creators often? What adjustments have you or your colleagues made for donors/creators?
6. Authors in this section used a variety of tools to document and track their progress, and also stressed the importance of documentation for future work. How do you document your current workflows and how do you plan to maintain them for iteration and longevity?

Special Section Content

Davis, Rosemary K. J., Audra Eagle Yun, and Rachel Searcy. "Accessioning: The Always-Already Function of Archival Practice." *The American Archivist* 88, no. 1 (2025): 10–16. <https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-88.1.10>.

Garfunkel, Amanda, Chiyong Han, and Nicole J. Milano. "Aspirational but Realistic: Reimagining Accessioning Workflows in a Medical Archives." *The American Archivist* 88, no. 1 (2025): 17–39. <https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-88.1.17>.

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Resources

Archival Accessioning Best Practices.

<https://accessioning.gitbook.io/archival-accessioning-best-practices>