

Guidelines for Preparing Archaeological Collections for Curation at the Burke

The Burke Museum curates archaeological collections in accordance with federal standards set forth by the National Park Service's 36 CFR Part 79. This document provides a general introduction to the basic process of preparing the most common elements of collections and associated archives for curation at the Burke Museum in compliance with this standard.

Given the variation in real-world archaeological collections and archives, this document cannot comprehensively address all situations and materials (it excludes, for example, collections with special housing needs, oversized documents/objects, or audio/video materials), and ultimately it is the responsibility of the collection/archive depositor to ensure materials have been appropriately prepared. Additional case-by-case guidance on preparing collections can be obtained by contacting the Burke Museum Manager of Archaeology Curation Services at burcuration@uw.edu or at 206-543-7696. Burke staff members are also available to help prepare collections for a fee (although for small private collections this fee may be waived at the discretion of Burke staff¹); contact us to discuss this service.

Please note that materials which do not meet the Burke's standards (in terms of both preparation and collection integrity) may be refused outright, or an additional service charge may be invoiced after time of transfer to support any rehousing, re-labeling, cataloging, etc. which Burke Archaeology staff deems necessary.

Please also note that this document assumes the preparer has already secured a curation agreement with the Burke Museum; please contact us to secure a curation agreement prior to collection preparation, and preferably prior to permitting and fieldwork. We can also discuss the overall process of transferring materials to the Burke at that time.

Cardinal Rules for Preparing Materials

The following two rules apply to all collections to be deposited at the Burke.

- 1) Archives must accompany collections of artifacts. These documents should detail the full process of systematic recovery executed by permitted professionals. The Burke will accept archival documents without collections, but it will not accept collections without archival documents.
- 2) Only archival-quality materials may be used for artifact and records preparation and housing. This means that:
 - a. All paper and cardboard products used must be acid-free and lignin-free.
 - b. All plastic products used must be inert polyethylene or polypropylene.

¹ Fees for transferring archival materials will still apply. These fees are the responsibility of the archaeologists performing fieldwork and analysis, and cost estimates for curation of archival materials should be included in the bidding process. Contact us at burcuration@uw.edu to discuss these fees.

- c. All bags used must be clear (no white labeling strips), re-sealable, and 4-mil thickness (with the exception of bags containing labels only, which may be 2-mil thickness).
- d. No added dyes, colored inks, or adhesives may be used. Printing must use a laser printer. Any handwriting (e.g. photo labeling) must be done in pencil.

As a result any paper mentioned in this document implies acid-free, lignin-free paper by default, any plastic mentioned implies inert plastic by default, *et cetera*. A few exceptions apply; these are specifically noted.

To help preparers meet these materials requirements, this document includes hyperlinks to examples of products discussed in the text. The use of these products is highly recommended. If a provided link no longer works, please contact Burke staff for an updated version of this document.

Part 1: Preparing Archival Materials

Archival materials typically consist of one or more small boxes of archival documents and images, DVDs or a USB flash drive containing digital files, and other media as applicable. Each component is discussed separately below.

Part 1.1: Archival Documents (Two Hard Copies and One DVD/USB Flash Drive Copy Needed)

Archival documents should include all materials relevant to collections, including all background materials, permits, correspondence, field and laboratory records, analysis data, reports, publications, etc. Simply put, if a document helps tell the story of a collection, it belongs with the archives.

If artifacts were collected but are not being transferred to the Burke with archival documents, a complete catalog of artifacts (see Part 2.2 below) and comprehensive photographic documentation of artifacts should be included with transferred archival documents.

Part 1.1.1: Preparing Hard Copies of Archival Documents

Two hard copies of all documents are needed to help prevent loss due to disaster. Original documents may constitute one set of hard copies, even if these are not archival-quality. The other set of hard copies must be legible, single-sided copies laser printed on [archival paper](#). If originals are not transferred to the Burke, both sets of hard copies must be legible, archival-quality single-sided copies.

Part 1.1.2: Preparing Digital Copies of Archival Documents

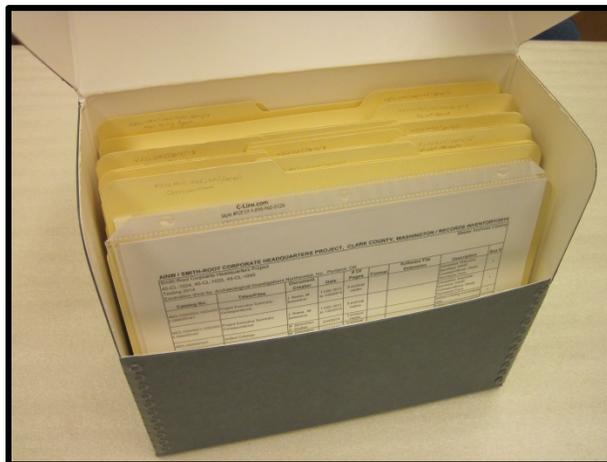
One digital copy of all archival materials must also be submitted on new, PC-formatted archival [DVDs](#) or a USB flash drive. Please do not zip or otherwise compress files to save space on DVDs/USB flash drives. Place DVDs/USB flash drives in the first box at the front of archives.

Part 1.1.3: Organization, Inventories, and Packaging of Archival Documents

Hard copies of archival materials should be organized by document type (e.g. correspondence, excavation forms, reports), with each type enclosed within a separate [3-tab folder](#). Folder tabs should be staggered for maximum visibility, and the tab of each folder should be labeled in pencil with the site number, year(s) of document creation, and document type enclosed in each folder. Backup copies should be contained in separate folders from originals.

A hard-copy inventory detailing all folders submitted should be presented in tabular form and included with archival documents. Each submitted box of archival documents should contain an inventory specific to its enclosed contents. A Microsoft Excel copy of any archives inventory tables must also be included on submitted DVDs or USB flash drive.

Once organized and inventoried, archival documents and inventories should be enclosed in a 5-inch thick archival [clamshell document box](#). (If documents are oversized, please contact us to discuss other options.) This box need not be labeled. DVDs should be enclosed in photographic binders as described in Part 1.2.3 of this document.



An archival document box prepared to the Burke's standards. Document inventory is at front, and documents are separated by staggered 3-tab folders labeled in pencil.

Part 1.2: Archival Images and Other Media (One Hard Copy and One DVD/USB Flash Drive Copy Needed)

Archival materials should include all relevant photos, slides, prints, proof sheets, and negatives; these should be housed in a special binder dedicated exclusively to images. As stated above, if any artifacts are withheld from the Burke Museum for any reason – whether culled, retained by

the landowner, or donated elsewhere – images of these artifacts must accompany the archives submitted to the Burke.

At minimum, two copies of each image – one digital, the other physical – must be submitted. Each copy must be identical in terms of content and must meet standards detailed below.

Part 1.2.1 Preparing Digital Images (One DVD or USB Flash Drive Copy Needed)

Digital images submitted with collections and archives must be saved on archival-quality DVD-R discs or on a USB flash drive. Use only new, PC-formatted DVDs. Image files may be included on DVDs (or a USB flash drive) containing other archival documents (e.g. site reports, publications, etc.). DVDs should be housed in polypropylene corrosion-intercept 3-ring album pages which fit into archival binders described below.

Uncompressed TIFF or RAW formats are preferred for image formats; if JPEGs are submitted, please ensure images are saved in the highest-resolution possible. Do not submit images saved to proprietary file types (e.g. .psd, .psp, etc.), as they are not readable across multiple platforms. Do not include files which must be uncompressed to open.

Each digital image's filename must match the unique image number specified on the photo log included with hard copies of images. A digital (Microsoft Excel) version of this photo log must also be included on the submitted set of DVDs or USB flash drive.

Part 1.2.2 Preparing Hard Copies of Images (One Hard Copy Needed)

Printed photos must be archival-quality photographic prints of at least 3.5" x 5" in size. Self-printed photos are almost never of sufficient quality, and finding professional services which are verifiably archival-quality can be extremely difficult. We therefore recommend using Costco Photo Center, since we have verified that Costco's default paper and printing method meet standards shown empirically² to provide for long-term preservation. Costco's service is available [online](#)³, shipping options are available, and their photo printing prices are economical. Printing of large numbers of archival-quality photos can be costly, so we also recommend culling any redundant or poor-quality images prior to printing and transfer to the Burke.

On the upper-left corner of the back of each photo, write the site number, year, and image number (matching both the photo log and the digital filename) using pencil.

Part 1.2.3 Packaging Prepared Images

Image hard copies submitted to the Burke must be enclosed in a [photographic 3-ring binder](#). DVDs should be housed in polypropylene [corrosion-intercept 3-ring album pages](#) within this

² See "IPI Guide to Preservation of Digitally-Printed Photographs" by Daniel Burge of the Image Permanence Institute at RIT (http://www.dp3project.org/webfm_send/739)

³ Please note that Costco's minimum print size is 4" x 6".

binder. Enclosed hard copies of photographic materials should be held in [3-hole polypropylene album pages](#) befitting the dimensions of submitted media; prints may be placed back-to-back in pockets, with a maximum of 2 prints per pocket. Pages containing photographic materials of different types (e.g. prints, slides, negatives) should be separated by [dividers](#).

The first page(s) of this binder should provide a complete photo log of images included in the album. This photo log must include a unique number (matching both the digital filename and the hand-labeled image number for each image) for each image and a description of image contents. The site number, project name, year, and log page number should be included on every page of the photo log.



An archival photograph album prepared to the Burke's standards.

Part 2: Preparing Artifacts

Archaeological collections transferred to the Burke typically consist of standard-sized bankers boxes housing bagged, labeled, and cataloged artifacts and samples. All materials submitted as artifacts must be organized, cataloged, housed, and labeled in accordance with Burke standards. Each of these requirements is detailed separately below.

Part 2.1: Organizing Artifacts

Proper organization facilitates easy access to the wide array of collections held at the Burke. To this end, please organize the collection so that:

- 1) Materials from different sites (even if collected on the same project) are separate.
- 2) Within a site, materials of similar composition are grouped together.
- 3) Within groups of materials of similar composition, objects are organized by provenience, then by catalog number.
- 4) Fragile or heavy objects are kept separate from other objects which may damage them or which they may damage.

Part 2.2: Artifact Catalog (Two Hard Copies and One Digital Copy Needed)

A master artifact catalog must be submitted with each collection⁴. Distinct sites should be cataloged separately, even if multiple sites were examined as part of the same project. Each catalog must account for all artifacts collected from the site, including those presented for curation and any culled, missing, loaned or transferred objects no longer present in the collection. Artifacts no longer present must be given a catalog number and listed as culled, missing, loaned or transferred in the “box number” field of the catalog.

The artifact catalog must include (but is not necessarily limited to) the following fields: site number, year of collection, artifact catalog number, object name, material type, additional material data, provenience information (unit, level, and stratum in separate fields), feature, collector name, date of collection, field bag/specimen number, weight, quantity, box number, and comments. Cataloged object name and material type must be described using the Burke’s lexicon so that incoming collections are congruent with the Burke’s master archaeology collections database. Burke staff have produced a catalog template with example data and lexicon; please contact us for this document.

A unique catalog number must be assigned to each object or group of like objects (e.g. a bag of debitage from a feature). To ensure incoming collections can be integrated into our current systems, the Burke requires that catalog numbers are concatenated following the format of Site/ Year/Catalog #, where “Catalog #” refers to a sequential catalog number. Thus artifact 5 from 2010 work at 45KI100 would receive a catalog number of 45KI100/2010/5. Other strategies for assigning catalog number are possible; contact us if you would like to discuss alternatives. If artifacts from multiple sites are submitted, sequential numbers should reset for each site.

Two hard copies of the artifact catalog must be included with submitted archival documentation. One Microsoft Excel digital copy of the artifact catalog must be included on submitted archival DVDs or USB flash drive.

Part 2.3: Housing Artifacts

When possible⁵, all artifacts should be housed in 4-mil thick re-closeable polyethylene [plastic bags](#) which are well-fitted to artifact dimensions.

Bagged objects should be placed in archival-quality reinforced [bankers boxes](#) with handles, with similar objects grouped together. For large collections comprising multiple boxes, each box should house a distinct material type. For smaller collections, [trays](#) inserted into boxes can help

⁴ If all or part of a collection is retained by the landowner, a master catalog must still be submitted to the Burke as part of archival documentation.

⁵ Oversize or unusual objects may require special housing. Contact us to discuss options in these cases.

group like objects together within boxes. When used, trays of artifacts should be arranged so that artifacts bear no weight; various sizes of trays exist for this purpose and can be flexibly used as needed. Inserted trays should have [cotton twill tape](#) handles installed for ease of removal from boxes. Distinct groups of objects within trays should be separated by dividers cut from [card stock](#).

Materials from distinct sites should be housed in distinct boxes. Finished boxes should weigh no more than 30 pounds, including contents.



A collection prepared by Burke staff. All artifacts are housed in archival bags, trays, and a bankers box. Distinct material types are separate by archival card stock labeled in pencil.

Part 2.4: Labeling Artifacts

Each bagged artifact must be labeled. Labels should use 10 point font and should be laser printed on archival paper and cut to 2" x 3" in size. Catalog number assigned to artifact labels must be concatenated as above and must match numbers listed in the submitted artifact catalog. We recommend using the "Label Mail Merge Template" Microsoft Word document created by Burke Archaeology staff; this tool has accompanying instructions for automated importation of label data *en masse* from a Microsoft Excel catalog, and is available upon request.

