

PUTTING ARCHIVAL AV MEDIA INTO CONTEXT: AN ARCHIVAL APPROACH TO PROCESSING MIXED-MEDIA MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

Megan McShea, *Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, USA*

I. Introduction

The Archives of American Art is a research unit of the Smithsonian Institution that has been collecting archival materials documenting the history of Art in America since 1954. Like many organizations in the “manuscript repository” category, the Archives does not collect audiovisual material as its primary collecting focus or mission, but it does collect it in substantial quantity and variety nonetheless. It comes into the archives in the papers of artists who experimented with media, galleries who recorded events, art historians who made recordings as part of their research, journalists who produced radio and television programs about art, and many other sources that used audiovisual media as it became available to consumers in the twentieth century. At the latest count, there are about 15,000 analog and digital audiovisual objects in about 800 of approximately 5,000 total collections. Recordings exist in nearly 40 different audio, video, and motion picture film formats. Approximately 90% of these materials are in analog, not digital, audiovisual formats.

The Archives also has an oral history collection, which consists of an additional 2,000 interviews with artists and art world figures, comprising over 5,000 hours of audio created on open reels, cassettes, minidisks, and SD cards. The Archives’ oral history program is well documented. Most interviews have been transcribed, and each interview is individually cataloged. There has always been a sense of responsibility at the Archives for making these recordings, created by the organization, accessible for research. In contrast, the moving images and sound recordings that were among the collections of personal papers and business records that were being collected from other sources did not receive the same careful attention. The state of intellectual and physical access to these collection materials varied, but in general, they were poorly understood, and have been inconsistently and often inaccurately documented and described over the years, through several generations of archives staff. This was as true for collections considered processed¹⁶⁴ as it was for those that were considered part of the processing backlog. Indeed, even in collections considered processed, often the audiovisual material in them was still just as poorly understood, inaccurately documented, and inconsistently described. As such, they constituted a sort of insidious, hidden backlog of inaccessible material within collections that were no longer considered part of the Archives’ processing backlog.

To address this issue, the Archives undertook a three-year project to investigate methodologies for processing mixed-media collections; that is, collections in which archival audiovisual documents and paper documents exist together.¹⁶⁵ The project’s goal was to devise strategies to make analog audiovisual materials found in manuscript collections more accessible via traditional processing workflows. The project’s approach was to process a group of media-rich collections that represented a range of content, format, and condition of material, and to refine existing guidelines for arrangement and description along the way, with the overarching goal of better addressing the needs of the audiovisual material through the processing workflow. The collections selected for the project all related to contemporary art movements such as performance art, video or new media art, environmental art, conceptual art, and installation art. This subject area was chosen because the documentation found in these types of collections often includes significant audiovisual recordings.

¹⁶⁴ The Society of American Archivists’ Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology defines archival processing as “The arrangement, description, and housing of archival materials for storage and use by patrons.” See <http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/a/archival-processing>.

¹⁶⁵ *Uncovering Hidden Audiovisual Media Documenting Postmodern Art*, funded by the Council on Library and Information Resources’ “Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives” funding program. See the project page on the Archives of American Art’s website at <http://www.clii.org/fellowships/hiddencollections> (accessed November 26, 2014).

2. The problem


For many archival repositories, processing workflows and descriptive tools for making collection content accessible are already in place, and are based on professional standards and best practices for archival arrangement and description.¹⁶⁶ And yet, while these standards and best practices are designed to be effective and efficient for making archival collections intellectually and physically accessible for research, they are woefully lacking in specific guidance for handling or describing audiovisual materials. Among the audiovisual specialists in the archival profession, professional discourse has focused on audiovisual recordings in isolation, rather than in collections, addressing issues of preservation, digitization, online access, and item-level description. While these are all urgent and essential issues facing archives that collect audiovisual material, for manuscript repositories under pressure to tackle their backlogs and make their collections accessible for research, this discourse has produced little that could help with the many decision points that arise in the course of processing collections, to ensure that audiovisual media are physically and intellectually accessible for research when the processing is complete.

On the one hand, then, general archival standards and best practices lack specific guidance for handling audiovisual material, and on the other, standards and best practices available for audiovisual material lack guidance for managing audiovisual material in the context of its collection of origin. The result of this lack of guidance is that archivists in the thick of processing large volumes of mixed-media collections are left to figure out for themselves how best to handle audiovisual media. As a result, collections with audiovisual components face a variety of possible fates. They may be set aside, put to the back of the queue, leaving the media to languish. Or perhaps, anticipating problems, they are not collected at all. Or, archivists may try to use standards for item-cataloging in their archival description, which, while appropriate for certain types of collections, creates a bottleneck for processing archivists trying to work through hundreds of linear feet of material a year. Or, a repository's audiovisual specialists might remove the materials from their collections of origin for a special format workflow that may or may not maintain the relationships between the media and other records in the collection.

Another issue facing the Archives of American Art regarding mixed-media collections was a lack of planning tools. In 2005, inspired by Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner's "more product, less process" paper¹⁶⁷, many archivists began to set ambitious goals to dramatically increase their rate of processing and eliminate backlogs. The paper called on processing archivists to ditch their pieties about archival processing, to work faster and smarter and make more collections accessible for research. Like many archival repositories, the Archives of American Art rose to this challenge and began to implement a minimal processing program. In the course of planning, however, it was assumed that collections that had significant audiovisual material would be more difficult, and take longer, but there was no way to know how much longer based on existing metrics. As a result, collections with significant audiovisual media in them were left out of these pilot MPLP efforts. Reflecting on this, another goal of the present project was to begin to establish metrics for processing tasks involving audiovisual materials to prevent these collections from being left behind in overall work planning.

¹⁶⁶ There are multiple relevant published standards, but for example, see *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, Second edition. Chicago: Society of American Archivists (<http://files.archivists.org/pubs/DACS-2007.pdf>, accessed 1 December 2014); the Encoded Archival Description Tag Library, Version 2002, Official site maintained by the Library of Congress: http://www.loc.gov/ead/tglib/element_index.html; Roe, Kathleen. 2005. *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts (Archival Fundamentals Series II)*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists; and ICA Sub-committee on Descriptive Standards. 2000. ISAD(G): *General International Standard Archival Description*. Ottawa: International Council on Archives (<http://www.ica.org/10207/standards/isadg-general-international-standard-archival-description-second-edition.html>, accessed 1 December 2014).

¹⁶⁷ Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing." *American Archivist* 68:2 (Fall/Winter 2005), available at <http://archivists.metapress.com/content/c741823776k65863/fulltext.pdf> (accessed November 26, 2014).



In response to these circumstances, evident at the Archives of American Art but reflecting a general issue across the profession, the primary goal of the Archives' project was to create tools for processing archivists that aim to integrate best practices for audiovisual material with best practices for traditional archival processing, providing guidance that will enable arrangement and description of mixed-media collections so that audiovisual material is just as accessible, both intellectually and physically, as other kinds of records in the collection.

3. Background

To provide a little context, when the Archives of American Art began this project, some of its big audiovisual issues had been addressed already. There was an audiovisual survey tool in place for collecting basic data on the audiovisual media in collections, and a retrospective inventory had been conducted, providing staff with significantly better information about the audiovisual holdings than had existed previously. There was also a process in place to survey new material upon accession, in order to prevent the accumulation of more undocumented, untrackable material. However, this database was not public-facing, so it did not address the problem of research access.

The Archives also had developed the necessary procedures and infrastructure for making digital access copies of the most common audiovisual formats found in its collections so that researchers could watch and listen to most of the sound and video they might find in the course of their research, and the Archives could then store and re-use the digital access files created. Several outsourced preservation projects had also been carried out to re-format many of the most at-risk and deteriorated audiovisual materials in the collections, which had been discovered in the survey.

However, even with this progress in collection management, preservation, and digitization, processing archivists at the Archives had no guidance for properly arranging and describing audiovisual media in the course of collections processing. As with many manuscript repositories, the processing pass at a collection is central to the Archives' research access strategy, and the finding aid is considered the fullest form of description of the repository's collections. The logical next step in improving the stewardship of audiovisual materials was to create tools and guidelines for archivists processing these collections, to enable them to make the most of the processing pass at collections to make audiovisual materials discoverable and understandable to researchers.

4. Project goals: tools and guidelines

The project resulted in the creation of tools for planning processing and guidelines for arrangement and description that could be adopted by any archivist processing collections with an audiovisual component. Planning tools produced by the project include 1) benchmarks defining expectations for different levels of processing, 2) metrics for how long media-specific tasks could be expected to take and how much the size of collections changed when processed, and finally 3) a ratings system to help archivists assess the pre-processed state of media in collections and its needs. Although more data is needed than that produced by this relatively small project, these ratings, metrics, and benchmarks may eventually allow archivists to predict the rate of processing for media-rich series in whatever state they are found, processed to whatever level of processing is planned.

Guidelines for arrangement and description developed during the project included instructions for when and how to replace media housing and how to seat media in collection containers, basic guidelines for intellectual arrangement of media in collections, and detailed guidelines for description of audiovisual media in Encoded Archival Description (EAD).

5. Planning tools: benchmarks

The benchmarks developed for this project were designed to make explicit what is expected of processing archivists at each level of processing, specifically for audiovisual media. At the Archives, levels of processing for all collections are defined as preliminary (tasks completed upon accession), minimal (the standard now for all but specially-funded processing projects or collections that will be fully digitized), intermediate (only undertaken with special funding), and full (typically undertaken when a collection is to be fully digitized).

For audiovisual media, preliminary processing involves a brief, minimal identification of media in the accession record for a collection, and a more detailed survey of the audiovisual media. At the Archives, when a new collection is accessioned that contains audiovisual media, the collecting archivist includes the extent, location, and general content of the media in the accession record. The audiovisual archivist then conducts a more detailed survey of the media, documenting its condition, the condition of its housing, format characteristics like recording speed and size, date, content description, and an assessment of the uniqueness of the media and its likely rights status. With this information, the media and its current state are documented and can be tracked, regardless of when the collection gets slated for further processing.

More detailed processing has three defined levels: minimal, intermediate, and full. Although it is always difficult to create rules that apply to all collections since each collection presents a unique case, a few rules were established to guide archivists in their decision-making about audiovisual media in the collection. For instance, for minimal processing, re-housing of media in damaged or unsupportive housing is not required; nor is playback of poorly-labeled media. Unlike intermediate or full processing, archivists processing to a minimal level can use the term “unidentified” to describe unlabeled media. They are encouraged to describe labeled media in the aggregate, so that even if individual tapes have more detailed labels, they do not have to include every detail available in their finding aids. Instead, they can list a date range and higher-level description of a group as a whole. With these few established benchmarks, archivists working on minimal-level processing projects, which are typically large-scale and fast-paced, can make note of media without letting it slow their pace. The benchmarks are meant to be flexible, however, so archivists can use their judgment to decide if the media merits the extra effort required to provide more granular intellectual access, or to provide greater physical protection to collection material found in poor condition.

For intermediate and full processing, archivists are explicitly required to play poorly labeled media, if it is stable and if the playback equipment is available, in order to provide an adequate description. For film, they must inspect the leader and head of the film to discover titles and dates. They are required to re-house media that is in substandard housing. Description also gets more complex at higher levels, and there are a range of enhancements archivists can consider to provide more granular and nuanced intellectual access.¹⁶⁸

6. Planning tools: metrics

Metrics were collected throughout the project to investigate how long processing tasks take for audiovisual media, the factors affecting those rates, and changes in overall extent of collections after processing. Data on extent changes showed that an increase in collection size is typical, with the median increase being 27%.

¹⁶⁸ See Appendix A for a draft of project benchmarks for levels of audiovisual processing.

collection title	project	initial l.f.	final AV l.f.	total survey hours	AV survey hours	condition rating	AV condition rating	Processing level	est. processing rate	est. processing hours	total processing hours (AV + all other record types)	AV processing hours (a portion of total processing hours)	total finding add hours (AV + all other record types)	AV finding add hours (a portion of total finding add hours)	total hours (survey + process + finding add)	total hours per survey + AV proc + AV La. (divided by AV %)	Factors affecting AV processing speed
Jan Butterfield	CLIR	15.4	4	15	4.2	3.5	2	1	15 hrs/ft	10 weeks	182	80.5	38.5	296	15.3	21.5	about 1/3 poorly labeled, no transcripts, not digitized
Robert Wingard	CLIR	7.5	5	10.3	6	3.5	4	4	10 hrs/ft	5 weeks	105	66.75	30	144	15.1	17.2	all media played to be identified for description
Marion Gore / K/CLIR		1.4	1	2.2	1.2	1	0	4	10 hrs/ft	1 week	6	1	4	11	5	1.2	all digitized, item records for all AV
Finch College	CLIR	19.2	1.8	20.4	2.3	19	1	3	15 hrs/ft	340 hours	180.5	10.5	60	258.5	12.7	5	most AV digitized; complex arrangement and description questions for AV

Image 1. Audiovisual Processing Task Tracking spreadsheet.

Tasks that were timed included surveying the audiovisual material, arranging and re-housing it, and writing and entering the description in Archivist's Toolkit, which is the tool used at the Archives to author finding aids. Calculating the data collected, it was found that audiovisual portions of collections took an average of 13.85 hours per linear foot to process, and the processing times for mixed-media collections as a whole averaged 15.3 hours per linear foot. These collections were all considered processed to the "full" level, that is, the highest level of processing.

Although the project collections represent a small sample, it is interesting to compare these numbers to the rates of processing for collections that do not contain substantial audiovisual material, which average 18.1 hours per linear foot for full processing at the Archives. It was significant to discover that large audiovisual components of collections do not necessarily result in longer processing times, and in fact, on average they seem to take less time than collections without media. And in the AV-rich collections, the audiovisual portion is taking less time than the non-AV portion. The assumption used to be quite the opposite of this. As more metrics are gathered, including rates for minimal processing of mixed-media collections, they will surely provide more insights. Already, these preliminary numbers indicate that mixed-media collections need not be excluded from processing projects based on concerns about processing speed.


7. Planning tools: ratings

The metrics also helped identify factors that affected the rate of processing. As with any type of archival material, audiovisual media in unprocessed collections present a wide range of needs. Three factors in particular emerged in the course of the project that seemed to affect the rate of processing the most: re-housing needed, playback needed to identify content, and analysis needed to determine relationships among media objects and relationships between media objects and other documents in the collection.

Using these factors, two rating scales were created to help archivists assess what level of work will be required to process the audiovisual media in a collection. The housing rating is simply a range from a poor rating, indicating that all media need to be re-housed, to an excellent rating, meaning no media need to be re-housed. The audiovisual access rating combines an assessment of how much playback and analysis are needed to properly arrange and describe the media. If everything needs to be played and analyzed to determine the content and the relationships among records, it gets a poor access rating. And conversely, if nothing needs to be played or analyzed, it gets an excellent rating.¹⁶⁹

To give some concrete examples, a collection might contain audiovisual media that is all unlabeled and has no corresponding paper documentation describing its content, in which case extensive playback will be required to arrange and describe it. Conversely, if everything is well labeled, seems to have been created in an orderly way, and there are transcripts or shot lists, it will have a higher access rating. The audiovisual access rating also has to do with complexity. One obvious series of interviews in the same format will be a lot easier to arrange than multiple media productions, with multiple versions and production elements in multiple formats, where everything has been boxed together and needs to be sorted out.

¹⁶⁹ See Appendix B for the complete audiovisual housing and access rating scales.



Eventually, it may be possible to combine the metrics and ratings to estimate processing time for specific collections. For example, a poor rating might mean processing an average of two pieces of media per hour, while an excellent rating is forty per hour. This project did not generate enough data to produce a reliable formula for such a calculation, but as more data is generated moving forward, one could feasibly use the ratings to predict processing time for collections of different sizes and in different states, being processed to different levels. Even without a formula, the type of assessment described in the ratings system could improve collection planning and management. For instance, when considering whether a repository has the resources to provide access to a collection it is considering acquiring, an assessment and rating of the audiovisual media could provide a rationale for decision-making. A mixed-media collection with a low AV access rating would be resource intensive to process, or, a collection might be enormous but easily processed despite its size, because of its high AV access and housing ratings. Such assessments could help archivists build and manage collections in a way that is responsive to available resources.

8. Guidelines: re-housing

Guidelines developed for this project are designed to assist processing archivists with the tasks of re-housing, arranging, and describing audiovisual media. The variety and complexity of archival audiovisual media, and of the repositories that collect it, make it difficult to provide guidelines that can apply to every possible circumstance in every setting. Guidelines written for this project were designed to summarize published standards¹⁷⁰, and to apply those standards to common circumstances specific to mixed-media archival collections.


Re-housing guidelines¹⁷¹ address both housing and the physical orientation of audiovisual media in storage containers, particularly in cases where audiovisual material is found in containers with other types of records. Archival repositories have a variety of storage resources and therefore will have different approaches to housing and storage of special formats. At the Archives of American Art, audiovisual materials in mixed-media collections are kept in their collection of origin, rather than removed to a special format storage area. Currently, although the general collections storage areas are effectively climate-controlled, there is no storage alternative for materials that would benefit from a cool or cold climate. Without the ability to improve on the storage climate for audiovisual media, there is no rationale for separating these materials from their collections of origin. The re-housing guidelines created for this project are designed to spell out what is expected of processing archivists at the Archives regarding re-housing, and to help them to improve the physical stability of audiovisual material for long-term storage as they physically arrange collections. Generally speaking, archivists should apply their knowledge of archival materials and their physical vulnerabilities to the housing of audiovisual media. This means getting rid of deteriorating, dirty, or un-supportive housing, and photocopying or scanning original housing to preserve the information it carries. Specific supplies, seating, and handling instructions vary by media format.

9. Guidelines: arrangement and description

As with any other type of archival record, the arrangement and description of audiovisual media should provide intellectual and physical access to all records, regardless of media, and should preserve and express the relationships between the records within a collection. The EAD and DACS standards are effective in supporting these goals, but they do not provide consistent or thorough guidance regarding audiovisual material. And although audiovisual cataloging specialists have made significant progress in standards development for item- and collection-level description of audiovisual media, there is no published guid-

170 See Peter Z. Adelstein (2009), 2nd Edition. *IPI Media Storage Quick Reference*. (https://www.imagepermanenceinstitute.org/webfm_send/301); and ISO 18923 (2000), *Imaging Materials – Polyester-base Magnetic Tape – Storage Practices*. Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.

171 See Appendix C for re-housing guidelines created for this project.



ance for describing archival audiovisual media in finding aids. In fact, the DACS standard even refers to item-level standards for those looking for guidance in describing audiovisual materials in their collections.

Although item-level standards provide a reference-point for the elucidation and definition of certain elements of description in finding aids, a wholesale adoption of item-level standards for the description of audiovisual materials can be problematic. Finding aids provide a hierarchical structure meant to express relationships among records in a collection and to make use of efficiencies in multi-level description, where a component can inherit description from higher levels. Item-level descriptive information systems tend to be flat and do a poor job of expressing relationships among records so described. They also tend to repeat common metadata in each record, which is anything but efficient. Also, as DACS states quite explicitly, the level of description for a particular component of an archival collection is supposed to match the level of processing; the flip side of this is that more detailed description means more laborious processing. While some recordings might merit such time and effort, many do not, and a high level of detail may mislead researchers as to its importance in relation to other records in the collection that have been more efficiently described. If item-level description is the only tool a repository has for describing its audiovisual material, it may be tied to that process even when the material could just as easily be described in a single aggregated component or a simple list in a finding aid.

And finally, item-level records are very good at capturing the many possible metadata elements that exist for audiovisual media that do not exist for paper records. However, following the “more process, less product” approach now widely accepted as archival best practice, a critical assessment must be made of how much the researcher gains by knowing many of the format details one could include in the description of recordings. At the Archives of American Art, guidelines direct archivists to limit their description to a minimum of what is necessary for physical and intellectual access. That is, include what is necessary for researchers and archives staff to understand what the content of a recording is, how it relates to other documentation in the collection, and how it may be accessed. Many of the details regarding its recording characteristics and technical specifications can be left out of the finding aid. If researchers are interested in such details, they can be discovered when the material is accessed for research.

That said, archivists must ensure their arrangement of audiovisual material in a collection and its description is clear and makes sense of the material, which can often be complicated by multiple versions, formats, and production elements. If the media does not make sense to the processing archivist, it is not going to make sense to the researcher. Disambiguating versions and components of archival media is the sense-making of processing work. If this work has not been done, the material has not been processed.

Other principles of arrangement and description will be familiar to any processing archivist. First, as with any format, preserve relationships among records. In any mixed-media collection, chances are at least some of the audiovisual media is related to paper or other types of records in the collection. These relationships should be preserved in the arrangement and expressed in the description. Media should not automatically be segregated from the paper records. Also, audiovisual media can be effectively described in the aggregate. If a collection contains thirty cassettes of annual meetings with detailed notes on their cases, “annual meetings, 1975-1993, 30 sound cassettes” is an adequate description for a minimally processed collection. Archivists can guide the researcher to key documents in series descriptions that will help them unlock the content, and they can go back to heavily used collections to provide more detail in their descriptions if merited. At the other extreme, an overemphasis on format where audiovisual media is concerned can also lead to under-described material. An inventory of media types is not an adequate description of archival recordings, although such description is commonly found in finding aids. The DACS guidance for devising titles applies here as anywhere: “When devising title information, compose a brief title that uniquely identifies the material, normally consisting of a name segment, a term indicating the nature of the

unit being described, and optionally a topical segment...¹⁷² In other words, the description of audiovisual components should use some combination of names, genres, locations, and subjects to devise a succinct and unique description of the recording's content.

A chronic problem in the adoption of EAD has been the tendency to retrofit description to display, leaving the metadata compromised and out of standard. This is particularly true for description of AV components, where style sheets may not have accounted for metadata elements particular to AV materials. For example, the existence of a copy or a location gets noted in a unit title. The issues this creates become painfully apparent when migrating or sharing metadata between systems. In this era of aggregating and linking descriptive metadata, it is increasingly important to follow standards for tagging metadata so that the code that underlies the archival description is clean, or in standard. If a style sheet has not been designed to display the metadata elements used in standardized audiovisual description, the style sheet must be corrected.

The instructions for describing audiovisual material in EAD at the Archives of American Art¹⁷³ were designed to be a local document integrating guidelines for AV description with local guidelines for general archival description, with a few notes on arrangement as well. They provide detailed instructions and refer specifically to local practice, and will be updated as tools evolve. As of this writing, the guidelines specify where certain types of metadata are to be entered in an Archivist's Toolkit environment, and metadata elements are based on the EAD 2002 standard. The guidelines were developed through a process that began with a close review of the EAD 2002 tag library and DACS (second edition), a review of the Archives' EAD and DACS implementation, consultation with archivists at other organizations on their usage of EAD for describing audiovisual material, and finally a refinement and interpretation of the standards to establish local rules. Because of the variety of institutional practices and contexts, the Archives' guidelines would likely need review and adaptation to be adopted by other repositories. The Archives also anticipates a significant revision with a future migration to ArchivesSpace and EAD3. Still, the guidelines provide possible answers to many of the questions that arise in the course of processing audiovisual components of mixed-media collections, and as such, they fill a gap in existing standards.

10. References

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172 Rule 2.3.3. *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, Second edition. Chicago: Society of American Archivists (<http://files.archivists.org/pubs/DACS-2007.pdf>, accessed 1 December 2014), p. 17.

173 A draft of the EAD guidelines is currently available to the public at <http://goo.gl/NmnhXh>. Eventually, they will be linked from the project web page at <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/projects/clir>.

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Appendix A: Benchmarks for levels of processing for collections containing audiovisual material

The following guidance has been developed for archivists processing AV-rich collections, specifically outlining what is expected at each level of processing, and what treatment AV should receive to be considered processed to that level.

1. Preliminary

- Location and extent of audiovisual materials in collection is noted by the collecting archivist, as well as general formats and content
- AV archivist surveys the audiovisual material, grouping media intellectually and noting:
 1. specific condition of the media and its housing,
 2. format characteristics like recording speed and size,
 3. dates,
 4. content description taken from labels on media or accompanying documentation,
 5. an assessment of the uniqueness of the media, and
 6. its likely rights status

2. Minimal – processing archivist uses the following strategies to arrange and describe AV:

- a. group media with related documentation found in collection;
- b. use existing labels and/or broad categories to describe;
- c. media can be described in the aggregate, either as a group of related media of a particular genre, or as part of a mixed-media component.
- d. do not play media to describe; unlabeled media can be described as “unidentified” sound recording, video recording or motion picture film.
- e. Do not re-house media (encouraged but not required)
- f. EAD/AV description guidelines must still be followed, with collection-level <access-restrict> note, series-level scope notes including media description, and component-level <physdesc> and <extent> noting count and specific formats found

3. Intermediate – expectations of processing archivist:

- a. Media that is poorly labeled must be played or inspected to provide adequate description, as long as it is stable and in a format AAA can play
- b. Media should be re-housed during processing if existing housing is broken, unresponsive, or deteriorating.
- c. Motion picture film should be inspected to help identify and date for description
- d. Media can be described in the aggregate, either as a group of related media of a particular genre, or as part of a mixed-media component.
- e. Or, if item-level metadata is a significant access point, a simple item-level component list can be created, e.g. a list of interview subjects or episodes of a broadcast series.

4. Full – expectations of processing archivist:

- a. Media that is poorly labeled must be played or inspected to provide adequate description;
- b. Motion picture film should be inspected to help identify and date for description
- c. item-level components are typically created for all media, with cross references, <physfacet> notes, or <scopecontent> notes to clarify content and enhance access.
- d. Media should be re-housed during processing if existing housing is broken, un-supportive, or deteriorating.

Appendix B: Access and housing ratings for assessing processing needs of collections containing audiovisual media

In order to guide processing archivists and to work towards a system for estimating the rate of processing for AV-rich collections, a ratings system for two aspects of collections was developed. They are the AV housing rating, and the AV access rating. The access rating rates the existing physical and intellectual accessibility to AV material prior to processing, e.g., how well-labeled or otherwise well-documented it is in the collection, and how straightforward or complex the intellectual arrangement of the AV material may be. The housing rating rates the extent of re-housing work needed for the AV material in a collection.

Although it bears some similarity to the Columbia/Mellon ratings system that AAA uses in its general collections survey, the AV ratings function differently in that they assess the state of AV materials prior to processing, and help the archivist understand and estimate the amount of work to be done. For more information on the Columbia/Mellon ratings system, see “Special Collections Materials Survey Instrument” (http://library.columbia.edu/services/preservation/survey_tools.html). Note that the physical condition of AV materials does not factor into processing planning because processing archivists are not responsible for preservation of media content. AV condition is tracked via a preliminary AV survey taken for each collection containing AV upon accession, and preservation issues are addressed through a separate workflow.

The AV Access rating can be used in combination with the AV housing rating to evaluate the processing needs of AV in any collection, and to help estimate the time it will take to carry out the arrangement and description of AV portions of collections.

AV access rating:

1. Poor – large AV portions where the bulk of AV items need to be played/inspected in order to be described/arranged
 - items unlabeled and no corresponding documentation of content is found (transcripts, shot lists, inventories, etc.);
 - OR items labeled but there are complex arrangement issues, like many copies and production elements from a media production, or poorly understood relationship between media and paper records that needs analysis
 - or media from many projects boxed together and need sorting/viewing/inspecting
2. Fair – large AV portions where some media must be played/inspected to be described/arranged
 - some items labeled, some not;
 - OR items unlabeled but have corresponding documentation, so a sample of AV can be taken to verify documentation;
 - OR items poorly labeled but form an obvious series, so playing a sample of each series is appropriate to describe;

3. Good – small AV portion needing playback, or large AV portions where bulk of AV items do not need to be played to be arranged/described
 - items well-labeled and described in other documentation
 - arrangement is straightforward
4. Very good – Small amount of AV material in the collection
 - needed interventions will not add significantly to processing time.
5. Excellent – bulk of AV Items digitized, with item records in DCD
 - already described at the item level, item records can be consulted for finding aid description.

AV housing rating:

1. Poor – large AV portions with most or all AV material needing re-housing and/or special collection containers
2. Fair – large AV portions with more than half of AV materials needing re-housing and/or special collection containers
3. Good – large AV portions with little rehousing needed, or small AV portions
4. Very good – small amount of AV material in the collection, re-housing needs of AV material is not a significant factor in processing time
5. Excellent – Bulk of media in collection have already been preserved, physical items should already be re-housed

Appendix C: Instructions for re-housing audiovisual media during processing

These instructions outline the expectations for processing staff regarding housing of AV media during collections processing. The steps below are considered basic measures for providing adequate housing for AV media. Supplies mentioned in this document are all available .

Minimal processing does not require re-housing of AV media, although it is still encouraged if media housing is broken, deteriorating, or unsupportive.

Additional measures for improving the storage condition of AV media in our collections may be implemented through other collection management projects, such as rewinding and coring film, or improving the wind and/or reel for open reel tape, but those types of activities are not required during processing at any level.

I. Re-housing:

- A. In general:
 - Remove any acidic or damaged housing as you would for any other record.
 - Media housing should provide structured support for media, and be acid-free, and vented or loose. Some original housing is sufficient if it meets these criteria. Original paper or plastic housing that does not have acid stains or discoloration is adequate and can be left alone.
 - When replacing housing, unless the original housing is completely blank, photocopy old housing on acid-free paper and keep the copy of the original container in its entirety with the media object. Be sure to photocopy printed information on the original media housing that relates to the media such as brand, footage length, tape thickness, etc. This information is important to retain.
 - Photocopies of original housing can be placed in collection folders along with re-housed media. You can also affix a pocket envelope to the new media housing with double-sided tape and put the photocopy in the pocket.

- Four-flaps are not adequate housing for most media because it is not supportive and media on reels or in cassettes can still be crushed. Four-flaps will only work for flat media – i.e. grooved discs.

B. Magnetic media:

- Put audio reels, cassettes, and VHS videocassettes in new plastic containers if the original housing is missing, acidic, broken, or unsupportive. If original housing is clean, unbroken, and doesn't show signs of being acidic, leave the tape in its original housing.
- for open reel tapes, add hold-down tape to loose ends; use white paper tape or silver tape
- Plastic video containers that are dirty can be cleaned and retained. Replacement containers are not available for U-matic, 1/2" video reels (Usually square and labeled "SONY helical scan"), various Beta-type video, MiniDV's, HDCam, and other video tapes, so original containers should be used. Clean if necessary.

C. Motion picture film:

Technically, all films in archival storage should be on cores (plastic hubs in the center of the reel with no sides/flanges), with leader at the head and tail, in plastic vented cans, and stored flat. Most films in our collections are not currently stored to this standard, but this type of film re-housing is labor-intensive and is not expected of processing archivists. If film is on a reel and is becoming at all damaged by the flanges of the reel where they touch the edge of the film, it should be wound onto a core and stored flat regardless of size. See AV archivist for help with this.

However, the following actions are considered basic processing tasks for any archivist with film in their collections:

- Film in airtight (difficult to open) or rusted metal cans or cardboard boxes should be re-housed in plastic, vented cans. Clean metal cans with loosely fitting lids are acceptable to retain.
- If replacing film cans, be careful not to let films on cores with loose winds unravel. Place the new can over the film in its original can, and flip it over to transfer the film to the new can intact.
- Photocopy original housing if it has any labeling on it and keep photocopy with film reel.
- If end of film is loose, tape it down with white paper tape. Do not pull the end to tighten the wind – this can scratch the emulsion and damage the images on the film.
- Film with odor (usually vinegar) can be wrapped in buffered tissue paper within the can to absorb some of the acids and help prevent the off-gassing from damaging other materials in the container. Use tissue paper approved for film-based photographic materials.
- If it is a unique or fragile film, and it is not cored/leadered, it is probably worth re-housing the film to better standards while the collection is being processed. Please bring such films to the attention of the AV archivist.

D. Grooved discs:

- Many old discs have glass bases underneath the lacquer or acetate coating on the surface of the record and are very fragile. Glass-based discs should be encapsulated between two stiff boards, tied with cloth tape, and should not have anything heavy stored on top of them.
- Contemporary vinyl records are more durable and don't require encapsulation. You can tell if a record is vinyl if it is somewhat flexible. Glass or aluminum-based discs are inflexible, and glass discs are generally much heavier than aluminum.
- Pre-cut sleeves for 10" and 12" diameter discs are available. Sleeves can also be fashioned out of folder-weight paper, using the 4-flap method. See the AV Archivist for help identifying and re-housing grooved disc materials.

E. CDs and DVDs:

- Tyvek or polypropylene sleeves are adequate housing for CDs and DVDs. If already housed in a jewel-case, this is adequate.

2. Seating in collection containers:

A. In general:

- When AV are scattered among other documents, place AV in folders like any other record.
- When there are large quantities of AV, you can consider not using folders. Sometimes it's a better use of space. If no folders are used, AV items must still be adequately labeled with container numbers and/or unit titles corresponding to the finding aid for reference staff to be able to locate them in the box from your folder listing.

B. Magnetic media:

- All sound reels, sound cassettes, videocassettes, and video reels should be stored vertically, not flat. It does not matter which edge they rest on.

C. Motion picture film:

Housing of films in collection containers is determined by two factors, a) whether the film is on a reel (with sides/flanges) or a core (a plastic hub with no core), and b) can size.

- Small films on reels, like 8mm or Super8, or 16mm films smaller than 12" in diameter, can be stored vertically in folders.
- For film on reels larger than 12" in diameter, it is usually okay to store a 16mm film flat in a large-format flat box, whether it's on a reel or core.
- If film is on a core, it is better to store it flat. Multiple small cored films can go into a single can if stored flat.
- Film cans less than 7" diameter with a single cored film in them can be taped shut and stored vertically.
- Film cans less than 12" diameter can also be stored flat in regular collection boxes, especially when there is a group of reels that can be stacked. Film cans larger than 12" must be stored in large-format flat boxes. Be sure to label stacked cans adequately for reference staff to be able to identify films listed in your folder list, either with markings on the can itself, or on tape labels, encapsulating cans in folders, or affixing paper pockets that can be labeled.
- Any film cans stored vertically should have their lids taped to make sure can's don't open in the folder.

D. Grooved discs:

- Discs 12" in diameter or larger should be stored flat in large-format flat boxes, without anything heavy on top of them. Smaller discs can be filed vertically in folders.

E. CDs and DVDs are best stored vertically in folders and not stacked.