

CONDITION REPORTING CRIB SHEET

If at all possible you should access a current edition of SPECTRUM, which has up to date information regarding a variety of museum documentation procedures. The current version is 4.0 and is available from Collections Link. You should also consult your museums documentation procedures and policies.

Things to find out before you begin:

1. What is the aim of your reporting exercise

- Item going on loan
- Item going on display
- General assessment
- In preparation for building work or store move

2. Who is the recipient

- Is there a known recipient
- What is their level of understanding
- What are they going to use the report for
- How do they need to use the data

3. Information

What is the required format

- Directly into a computer
- Recorded on paper
- Transferred from paper to computer

Do you need to take photographs

- Understand what size and format is required
- Use a suitable background, scale, lighting
- Purpose of photograph – inventory or condition check – what are you trying to show.

What kind of records already exist/don't duplicate effort

- Photograph
- Drawing
- Weight
- Number of parts
- Measurements
- Materials list
- Name
- Description
- Existing condition report – are you just looking for change or starting from scratch
- Does the institution have a glossary which is already in use
- How are you going to deal with sets and parts and multiple objects
- What about unnumbered items you find

- What about detached parts that you find
- Location
- Are there good digital photos/can you take some. Is there access to a printer. Annotated photos are excellent to speed up complicated reports and very useful for loans in and out as the picture doesn't lie.

4. What is the available time scale

- Work out what you can do productively in the time
- Suitable sample size – do you need to check every single object, do you have time
- Can you do a representative sample
- What size and distribution will give the information you need
- Don't forget to include preparation time (finding equipment) input time (adding to computer records etc), and time for moving objects around and returning them

While condition reporting:

5. Normally you will be reporting on at least some of the following:

- **How stable is it (Has it changed)**
- How damaged is it
- How complete is it
- What can it be used for (safe to travel, safe to display, condition good enough to display now, condition good enough for display with minor cleaning, condition good enough for display with some conservation work, only useful for research – retain in store)

6. Do you need to move objects around

- Moving items round the building to inspect them can cause an insect infestation to spread
- Plan the handling and movements of the objects so no damage occurs during the condition reporting

7. Make it obvious and repeatable.

- If someone repeats this work in three months will they come up with similar results?
- If you give the condition a word, number or letter rating you must explain what this means. 1A? 4D? Fine? Poor? This may relate to a preset glossary within the organisation.
- Positive statements, i.e. 'no scuff marks' are useful
- Be descriptive. Fine, acceptable and poor are not helpful and giving three options normally results in everything being categorised in the middle. Free text or a preset glossary, (normally needed for computerised records) are generally more useful.

8. Suitable space and equipment

- Lighting

- Pencils
- Table
- Measure
- Magnifier
- Gloves
- Computer
- Power supply
- Camera
- Printer

9. Safety

- Your safety
 - Organics, especially taxidermy, may have been treated in the past with substances which are hazardous to human health.
 - Metals may have been treated in the past with substances which are hazardous to human health. i.e. copper may be treated with BTA which is now known to be a carcinogen.
 - Dust on objects and boxes may contain mould spores and substances hazardous to human health
 - Always wear gloves - nitrile/latex/vinyl are much better barriers than cotton
 - Dust masks with FFP 2 rating at least should be made available and worn if needed
 - Wash hands before and after eating
- Safety of the object
 - Most objects must never be handled without nitrile/latex/vinyl gloves as moisture, salts and acid from the skin will negatively affect the surface. This is most obvious on metal and gilt objects but it is true of almost everything.
 - As a general rule therefore, always wear gloves. Exceptions are made for objects which are difficult to handle with gloves on and more damage would be caused by wearing them. This includes fragile paper and also objects which are hard to lift (heavy industrial, glass etc). In the case of paper, wash hands well and frequently, where lifting is the consideration rigger gloves may be required. Do not wear gloves with grip dots on the surface as these tend to dig in.
 - Wash hands before and after eating
- Safety of others
 - Take care not to create trip hazards and obstacles for others
 - Repack objects in storage locations such that they can be safely removed again.
 - Mark up records and containers appropriately to notify others about any hazards you identify in your work – i.e. splinters