

## Glossary of Archival Terms

---

Access	The use of records, papers and collections for the purpose of viewing and understanding their contents, as a way of furthering research, or for simple personal knowledge of facts.
Access control	Restrictions on access to records which are exercised for reasons stipulated by legislation, or for reasons of format and/or the physical preservation of the records to which access has been requested.
Access request	A user's formal request to view documents or obtain access to their own personal information in the custody or control of an institution through channels created by legislation or policy.
Access review	The review of information initiated by a user's request for access to documents by an official appointed for that purpose.
Accession	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (v.) The act and procedures involved in formally accepting and recording the physical and legal transfer of material into the custody of an archives.</li> <li>2. (n.) A body of material from the same donor taken into archival custody at the same time. This acquisition may occur through gift, donation with tax appraisal, purchase, copy loan, or direct or scheduled transfer.</li> </ol>
Direct transfer	Transfer to the Archives of unscheduled discontinued series of archival records or archival records (usually old) that are not part of any existing records series.
Scheduled transfer	The transfer to an Archives of those records previously determined by the records scheduling process to have permanent value.
Active records	Records which continue to be maintained in their place of origin and are regularly used for the conduct of the current business of an agency, institution, or organization.

Appraisal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The process of determining the value and thus the disposition of documents based on their current administrative, legal and fiscal value; their arrangement; their medium and format; their condition and future preservation; their accessibility and their relationship to other documents.</li> <li>2. The monetary evaluation of documents.</li> </ol>
Archival value	The determination, through appraisal, that documents are worthy of indefinite or permanent preservation by an archives due to their administrative, fiscal, legal, evidential, and/or informational value.
Archives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An institution responsible for the appraisal, acquisition, preservation, and provisions of access to archival documents.</li> <li>2. All or part of a building in which archival materials are preserved and made available for consultation.</li> <li>3. see also Fonds.</li> </ol>
Arrangement	<p>The intellectual and physical analysis and organization of records. Based upon the principle of provenance, and especially the principle of original order, the purpose of arrangement is to group the components of a fonds into an order which reflects the system by which the documents were originally created and used. Such a system will</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) reflect the structure and/or functions of the creator;</li> <li>(ii) show relationships between records; and</li> <li>(iii) demonstrate the original meaning and significance of the documents.</li> </ol> <p>If no original order is evident, then an order based upon other criteria (such as functions, or alphabetical, chronological, geographical, or subject order) may be used. Arrangement may be carried out at all or any of the following levels: repository, fonds, series, file unit, or item.</p>
Closed file	A file with access restrictions, as distinct from an open file.
Collection	An artificial accumulation of documents of any provenance brought together on the basis of a common characteristic, e.g., way of acquisition, subject, language, medium, type of document, name of collector, to be treated for description purposes as a descriptive unit under a common title.

Collections file	A file containing the essential physical, administrative, and intellectual control documentation for a fonds, sous- fonds, or university record series. It serves as a permanent record of archival management.
Collector	The person or corporate body that assembled a collection.
Control (of a record)	The power or authority to make a decision about the use or disclosure of the record.
Copyright	The exclusive right, granted by law, of the creator of a work (or his/her assignees or employers) to make or dispose of copies and otherwise to control the use of a literary, dramatic, musical, artistic, or other work. The Copyright Act in Canada is not concerned with ideas or the originality of ideas; it is the language or the expression of the idea which is the subject matter of copyright.
Corporate body	An organization or group of persons that is identified by a particular name and that acts, or may act, as an entity. Typical examples of corporate bodies are associations, institutions, business firms, non-profit enterprises, governments, government agencies, religious bodies, local churches, and conferences.
Creator	See Provenance.
Culling	The removal of non-archival material from file units during the processing of a series. The documents removed may be returned to the donor, donated to another archival institution, or destroyed.
Custodial history	The history of the custody of the material being described, i.e., its successive transfers of ownership and custody. See also Provenance and Respect des fonds.
Custody (of a record)	The keeping, care, watch, preservation or security of a record. While physical possession of a record may not always constitute custody, it is the best evidence of custody.
De-accession	A formal act which allows an institution to remove permanently from its holdings items deemed no longer to be of archival value, or within the repository's acquisitions mandate or responsibilities.

Description	The process of recording information about the nature and content of the records in archival custody. The description identifies such features as provenance, extent, arrangement, format, and contents, and presents them in a standardized form.
Directory of records	A publication which lists the general classes of records, manuals, and personal information banks maintained by institutions subject to the FOI/Privacy Act.
Disclosure	The release of records in the custody and control of an institution.
Discretionary exception	An exception to the general right of access to records which permits the head of an institution to disclose a record despite the existence of the exception.
Disposition	Actions taken with regard to inactive records once the expiration of their retention period has taken place in accordance with legislative, regulatory, or administrative requirement. As agreed to on the records schedule for records, or following appraisal, the actions may include transfer to a Records Centre for temporary storage, transfer to an Archives, donation to an eligible repository, reproduction on microfilm, and destruction.
Evidential value	The value of the records of an institution or organization in providing evidence of the institution's origins, structure, functions, procedures, and significant transactions, as distinct from the informational value of the records.
Excepted record	An excepted record contains information that has been reviewed and currently qualifies for exception under the FOI/Privacy Act.
Exception	A specific and limited exception to the general right of access to records in the custody and control of institutions because of information contained in them.
Finding aids	Descriptive tools, e.g., registers, guides, inventories, indexes, containing information about records in archival custody, that establish administrative, physical, or intellectual control over the holdings of an archives, and make it possible to retrieve particular records or information from these archives.

Fonds	The whole of the records, regardless of form or medium, automatically and organically created and/or accumulated and used by a particular individual, family, or corporate body in the course of that creator's activities or functions. Note: The fonds is the highest level of description in a multilevel description in a particular repository. For the purposes of these rules, that part of a fonds that is actually present in the repository is what is described at the fonds level of description. A fonds is not equivalent to an accession. A fonds may contain two or more accession units; similarly, an accession may contain more than one fonds.
Freedom of Information Coordinator	An official of a public institution holding public records who is appointed to administer and coordinate the institution's access operations and services required by legislation or policy.
General records series	Certain types or classes of records are common to most institutions. These records contain information about general administration and operational functions such as personnel, finance, purchasing, auditing and property management. General records may contain some personal information, but not of the nature to meet the criteria for the definition of a personal information bank.
Head of an institution	The official of an institution responsible for decisions made under the legislation on behalf of the institution, and for overseeing the administration of the legislation within the institution.
Inactive records	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Records no longer needed for current business.</li> <li>2. A series of records with a reference rate of less than one search per file drawer per month or less than 15 times a year.</li> </ol>
Information management	The administration of information, its uses and transmission, and the application of theories and techniques of information science to create, modify, or improve information handling systems.
Institution	The general term used for government ministries, agencies, boards and other bodies subject to the FOI/Privacy Act. An institution is responsible for administering and adhering to the requirements of the legislation.
Intellectual control	The control established over the informational content of a body of material, resulting from ascertaining and documenting its provenance and from the processes of arrangement and description.

Mandatory exception	An exception to the general right of access to records which imposes a duty on the head of an institution not to disclose a record.
Multimedia	A record which combines two or more media types but which, for reasons of intellectual continuity, must be conceived of as a single entity (e.g., a slide tape program).
Personal Information (PI)	Recorded information about an identifiable individual. Certain types of personal information are defined in the FOI/Privacy Act. Personal information does not include information about an individual who has been dead for more than twenty years or is contained in records more than 100 years old.
Personal information bank (PIB)	A collection of personal information that is organized and capable of being retrieved using an individual's name or an identifying number or some other personal identifier.
Preservation	All actions taken to retard deterioration of, or to prevent damage to, cultural property. Preservation involves controlling the environment and conditions of use, and may include treatment in order to maintain an object, as nearly as possible, in an unchanging state.
Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (v.) A collective term referring to the series of activities required to gain intellectual control of records, papers, or collections, including: accessioning, arrangement, culling, boxing, labeling, description, and preservation.</li> <li>2. (v.) In photography, the chemical treatment of exposed film to induce the latent image to emerge.</li> <li>3. (v.) With respect to automated records, the inputting of data into a data bank so that the data may be manipulated and called forth to serve a variety of needs.</li> </ol>
Protection	The counter-balancing concept of privacy protection provides that public institutions should protect the privacy of individuals with respect to information about themselves held by institutions, and that individuals have a right of access to their own personal information.
Provenance	The person(s) or office(s) of origin of records, i.e., the person(s), family (families), or corporate body (bodies) that created and/or accumulated and used records in the course of that creator's activities or functions. See also Custodial history and Respect des fonds.

Recorded information	Information that is recorded or stored by graphic, electronic, mechanical, or other means.
Record(s)	Any document(s) created in the course of University activity that is recorded evidence of that activity; such as a letter, memorandum, report, computer database file, electronic mail, audio recording (voice message), video tape or film, photograph, map, drawing and any other thing on which information is recorded or stored.
Record keeping	<p>Managing the life cycle of a record by appraising values and setting standards by which records are retained and disposed of. There are three phases:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The time at which a record is created or received and is of immediate administrative, fiscal or legal value and use to the office of origin in conducting university activities;</li> <li>2. The point at which records have ongoing value and use but are no longer referred to on a regular basis;</li> <li>3. 3. The stage when records have no further operational value to the office of record and are either destroyed or transferred to the University Archives and preserved for their archival value.</li> </ol>
Records Centre	A building, usually specially designed and constructed, for the low-cost storage, maintenance, and referencing of semi-active records pending their ultimate disposal, and for housing and servicing inactive records.
Records Centre box	A corrugated cardboard box usually one cubic foot in volume and used to hold records in records centres.
Records schedule	A legal document describing the recurring record series of an agency, institution or administrative unit, specifying those records to be preserved for their archival value, and authorizing on a continuing basis the destruction of the remaining records after the lapse of a specified retention period or the occurrence of specified actions or events.
Research agreement	A legal document that allows researchers to gain complete access to personal information banks and general records, subject to certain confidentiality terms and conditions.

Respect des fonds	The principle that the records of a person, family or corporate body be kept together in their original order, if it exists or has been maintained, and not mixed or combined with the records of another individual or corporate body. See also Custodial history and Provenance.
Restrictions on access	The conditions governing access to all or part of the material being described, including laws, regulations, policies, donor terms, or other relevant access conditions.
Retention period	The length of time, usually based upon an estimate of the frequency of current and future use, that records should be retained in an office before they are transferred to a Records Centre, or transferred to the Archives, or otherwise disposed of.
Retrieval (archival)	The search for, and presentation of, archival material in response to a specific user request.
Retrieval (semi-active)	The search for, and presentation of, a semi-active file in response to a specific user/department request.
Semi-active records	Records required so infrequently in the conduct of current business (about twice a month or less) that they should be transferred from offices to a Records Centre or other holding area, pending their ultimate disposition.
Series Archival:	A subdivision of a fonds maintained as an entity because the documents relate to a particular function or subject, result from the same activity, have a particular form, or because of some other relationship arising out of the circumstances of their creation or use.
Printed Materials:	(a) a group of separate items related to one another by the fact each item bears, in addition to its own title proper, a collective title applying to the group as a whole. The individual items may or may not be numbered; (b) each of two or more volumes of essays, lectures, articles, or other writings, similar in character and issued in sequence; (c) a separately numbered sequence of volumes within a series or serial.
Severability	A policy of severing excepted information from records requested by users and of making the remainder of the record available.



Sous fonds	A body of related records within a fonds, usually consisting of the records of an important subordinate administrative unit or family unit. Sous fonds may also be established for related bodies of documents within a fonds that can best be defined in terms of chronological, functional, or geographical relationships. Sous fonds may be divided into as many further levels as are necessary to reflect the hierarchical organizational units within the subordinate administrative unit, or that will assist in grouping series in terms of their relationships.
Transfer	The act involved in a change of custody of records, with or without change of legal title and control or physical location. See also: Direct transfer, Scheduled transfer, under Accession.
Unscheduled Record	Record for which no ultimate disposition has been determined.

For more information, contact the Archives.

[sfu.ca/archives](http://sfu.ca/archives)