DACS: Describing Archival Materials

DACS Chapter 1
“Requirements”

- Articulated based on desire to communicate basic information relevant to:
  - Identifying (and from end user perspective, citing) the material being described
  - Context for the accumulation of material being described
  - How and where to access the material being described
- Requirements “specify particular elements from … DACS that should be used in output products …” (p. 7), meaning:
  - That’s “should be used” and not “you’ll do time in archival purgatory if you don’t use”
  - Your usage will depend on the output product(s) you create locally
  - If you decide to develop a divergent practice for your repository …
  - … it would be good to be consistent in your application of that divergent practice, and document your locally standardized practice regarding minimum required elements and how you want this to play out in your multi-level descriptions

Reference Code Element
[DACS Chapter 2.1]

- DACS encourages you to have a means of providing a succinct alphanumeric identifier for each of your archival collections that is unique within your repository
- DACS doesn’t prescribe a formula for doing this
- Standardized repository and country code components of the reference code are only useful and required when exchanging encoded descriptive outputs (e.g. EAD, MARC) in consortial, national, or international settings

EAD example:
<unitid countrycode="us" repositorycodes="mc">MS-C01</unitid>

Name and Location of Repository Element
[DACS Chapter 2.2]

- DACS “requires” this element
- Gloss on that “requirement”
  - Obviously this element is most useful in descriptive outputs that are created for use by end users
  - Less important and useful in internal descriptive outputs (especially when something like an accession record form already has the name of your repository printed on it) used for collection tracking and management
- Good example of the DACS approach to “requiredness” in the rules:
  - Rule 2.2.2 “Explicitly state …” = core data content component
  - Rule 2.2.3 “If desirable …” = an instruction that may or may not be used, frequently indicated by “Optionally …”
  - DACS also uses “Alternatively …” to indicate a parallel approach to providing data content

Title Element
[DACS Chapter 2.3]

- Formal titles
  - Your professional judgment is required to determine when material being described has a formal title and, if it does, when that matters in the context of your archival descriptive practices
  - Example: You are providing a file-level title for a file comprising a dozen items that you determine do each have formal titles
    - If you actually do item-level description within the file, you would be transcribing a formal title
    - DACS does not provide rules for transcribing formal titles, since there are many other data content standards to which archivists can turn for those rules (AACR2, Graphic Materials)—see rule 2.3.2
**Title Element (cont.)**

- Supplied titles
  - The collective nature of archival approaches to description means that archivists primarily supply titles
  - Should be brief and uniquely identify the material (this is, of course, qualified by how/where the title fits into a multi-level descriptive output)
  - Three segments generally possible in a supplied title
    - Name segment
    - Nature of the unit being described segment
    - Topic of the archival unit segment
  - DACS does not prescribe an order for those segments
  - Don’t use square brackets
  - Don’t confuse title with abstract. There are 25 elements to use to describe the collection

**Date Element [DACS Chapter 2.4]**

- Types of dates
  - Date(s) of creation (DOC)
    - “This is the type of date recorded most often by archivists and manuscript catalogers …” (p. 24)
  - Date(s) of record-keeping activity (DORKA)
    - “When DOC and DORKA are the same, record only the former…” (p. 24)
  - Date(s) of publication
    - “…most often used when describing items.” (p. 24)
  - Date(s) of broadcast
    - “…most often used when describing items.” (p. 24)

**Date Element (cont.)**

- 2.4.3 Record dates of creation, RKA, publication, or broadcast as appropriate the materials being described
- 2.4.4 Alternately … record multiple dates, labeling each clearly. When recording multiple dates, explain each in the Scope and Content Element
- Various strategies for dealing with dates
  - Depends on your repository’s context and mission
  - Have a repository policy, apply it consistently and document it!

**Extent Element [DACS Chapter 2.5]**

(Straw that broke the camel’s back in CUSTARD project)

- Two approaches
  - Physical extent (items, containers, etc.) (RAD says NO)
  - Material type(s), general or specific (RAD uses GMD and SMD from AACR2)
- 2.5.3. Record the numerical quantity associated with each expression of physical extent … or material type …
- If you choose material type, use a standardized thesaurus for your terms (AAT)

**Extent Element (cont.)**

- Ways of expressing extent
  - Single – 2.5.4 and 2.5.5 (25 linear feet)
  - Qualified, generic overall, but highlight important material types – 2.5.6 (75 boxes, including 25 boxes of photographs)
  - Parallel (equal expressions of extent) – 2.5.7 25 linear feet (150 boxes)
  - Multiple single expression, to highlight various types of material – 2.5.8 (12 linear feet of textual materials, 68 photographs, 16 architectural drawings
  - OK to estimate, as long as you clearly indicate that you are doing so – 2.5.9 (circa 2,000 maps)

**Name of Creator(s) Element [DACS Chapter 2.6]**

- Description of context is crucial to archival description; covered in Part II of DACS
- Rules for choice of creator in chapter 9
- Rules for constructing names of creators in Part III (Chapters 12-14)
  - Based on AACR2 with a few specifically archival enhancements
  - Provided in DACS because many archivists don’t work in institutions that do AACR2-based name authority work
- Set aside for now; more later
Scope and Content Element  
[DACS Chapter 3.1]
- Scope and content can include information about the materials being described relating to:
  - Functions, activities, transactions, processes that generated them
  - Documentary forms and intellectual characteristics of them
  - Content dates
  - Geographic areas to which they pertain
  - Subject matter (topics, people, events, organizations) to which they pertain
  - Any other information that assist the user in evaluating the relevance of the materials, such as:
    - Completeness
    - Uniform document types
    - Materials being described in wholly or part a reproduction
- This element can be seen as a "dumping ground." Consider other 24 DACS elements for this type of information

Conditions Governing Access Element  
[DACS Chapter 4.1]
- Succinct statement
- Information about restrictions on access might include:
  - Extent of materials restricted
  - Authority for restriction
  - Duration of restriction
  - Authorized users
  - Contact persons for further information
- If there are no restrictions, state that fact (Open for research)

Language and Scripts of the Material Element  
[DACS Chapter 4.5]
- Required, even if materials all in English. Acknowledges that we live in a world where international exchange of and access to descriptive information is an increasingly real issue
- Inclusion of this element as a "minimum" requirement recognizes that archivists in the U.S. should no longer let English be the tacit assumption in their descriptions, but should state information about languages of the materials, regardless of the language(s) explicitly

Further “Minimum” Requirements for Multi-Level Descriptions
- Identify whole-part relationships of at least the next subsequent level
  - Your output system may handle this internally (e.g. EAD’s nested component hierarchy, <c01> through <c12>)
  - If not, the System of Arrangement Element (DACS Chapter 3.2) provides a vehicle for this
- At each subsequent level, use all “minimum” elements from the highest level "unless the information is the same as that of a higher level"

REVIEW: Minimum Required Elements in a “ready for primetime” DACS-based Output
- Described in greater detail in Chapter 1 of DACS
- In a single-level descriptive output:
  - Reference Code Element (2.1)
  - Name/Location of Repository Element (2.2)
  - Title Element (2.3)
  - Date Element (2.4)
  - Extent Element (2.5)
  - Name of Creator(s) Element (2.6) – identify if known
  - Scope and Content Element (3.1) – okay if just a brief scope/content abstract in a minimum description
  - Conditions Governing Access Element (4.1)
  - Language/Scripts of the Material Element (4.5)

REVIEW: Minimum Required Elements in a “ready for primetime” DACS-based Output
- In a multi-level descriptive element:
  - At the highest level, all the above, plus …
  - Identify whole-part relationship of the top level to at least the next subsequent level in the multi-level description
    - Can be done through system capabilities or as an explicit statement of the relationship
  - At subsequent levels
    - Any element used at higher levels, unless the information is the same as that at the higher levels
The Remaining DACS Elements

Optional
- Use on a regular basis at your repository’s discretion
- Use on an occasional basis when the description of a particular unit of archival materials calls for one or more of these optional elements
- An important part of your professional description “arsenal” – provides a framework for analysis of what elements of description might be useful with a given collection

The Remaining DACS Elements
System of Arrangement Element (DACS Chapter 3.2, p. 40)

- Describe
  - Current arrangement (which might not be discernable or may be no arrangement)
  - Relationships between various aggregations (5 series)
  - Optionally, information about system for ordering component files and/or items (e.g. Correspondence arranged alphabetically or chronologically)
- Provide significant information about
  - Maintenance/reconstruction of original order
  - Imposed arrangement by archivist (if no original order)
  - Previous arrangements/reorganizations by creator or subsequent custodians, if important for understanding/using the materials
- Identify whole-part relationship to next lowest level if your system can’t do it in some other way

The Remaining DACS Elements
Physical Access Element (DACS Chapter 4.2, p. 46)

- Describe
  - Physical characteristics or conditions that limit or restrict access to the materials (e.g. Some letters illegible due to water damage)
  - Storage location of materials that affects access (e.g. offsite storage; 48 hours notice required for retrieval)
  - Preservation issues that affect access to all or parts of the unit being described (note here if reproductions are available for use)

The Remaining DACS Elements
Technical Access Element (DACS Chapter 4.3, p. 48)

- Describe
  - Special equipment required to view or access records
    - Projection or playback equipment
    - Computer
  - Technical information about access to records in electronic form
    - Memory requirements
    - Operating system requirements
    - Software dependencies
    - Required or recommended peripherals

The Remaining DACS Elements
Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use Element (DACS Chapter 4.4, p. 50)

- Describe
  - Copyright status or other conditions governing reproduction, publication, and further use of materials
  - Can be specific or general statement
  - If copyright holder and expiration date are known, provide that information
  - If materials being described are wholly or partially in the public domain, state that fact
  - Provide information about use/reproduction restrictions (not access restrictions) imposed by donor, other legal statutes, or by the repository, including expiration date if known (e.g. permission of donor for photocopying)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Remaining DACS Elements</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding Aids Element (DACS Chapter 4.6, p. 56)</td>
<td>Custodial History Element (DACS Chapter 5.1, p. 59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describe</strong></td>
<td><strong>Describe</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Other valuable finding aids (indexes, card files, calendars) relating to the unit being described, and where to obtain/use</td>
<td>– Successive transfers of ownership of the unit being described, if known and significant for users’ understanding of authenticity or arrangement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– If materials are unprocessed but available to researchers, indicate any tools for access (record schedules, transfer lists) available to researchers and how an interested party could obtain those other tools</td>
<td>– Important to note that this is not the element in which to indicate the immediate source of acquisition of the material by your repository – see Immediate Source of Acquisition Element (5.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immediate Source of Acquisition Element (DACS Chapter 5.2, p. 61)</td>
<td>Appraisal, Destruction, and Scheduling Information Element (DACS Chapter 5.3, p. 63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describe</strong></td>
<td><strong>Describe</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Source from which materials were acquired by the repository</td>
<td>– Any of these if they have a bearing on understanding, interpreting, and using the materials being described</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– If relevant and not confidential, indicate donor’s relationship to the materials</td>
<td>– What was done, why, when, by what authority …if known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– If desired, record acquisition numbers associated with the materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Important to note that this is not the element in which you should describe important details about the custodial history of the materials prior to acquisition by your repository – see Custodial History Element (5.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accruals Element (DACS Chapter 5.4, p. 66)</td>
<td>Existence and Location of Originals Element (DACS Chapter 6.1, p. 69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describe</strong></td>
<td><strong>Describe</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– If known, whether or not accruals are expected</td>
<td>Use only if describing copies of something for which your repository does not hold the original</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– If they are, anticipated frequency and volume, if known and appropriate for end users</td>
<td><strong>Describe</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Date Element reflects what’s there, not what’s coming</td>
<td>– Name of institution or individual holding the original(s), if known and not confidential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– If desired, contact information for the above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The Remaining DACS Elements

**Existence and Location of Copies Element** (DACS Chapter 6.2, p. 71)

- Excludes copies that must be used for preservation reasons (Element 4.2)
- **Describe**
  - Copies available in addition to the original
  - Medium of copies and ID# if appropriate
  - For what portion of original materials are copies available
  - Copies (e.g. digital surrogates) available via remote access; provide URL
  - Copies available at another institution, with contact information if appropriate

**Related Materials Element** (DACS Chapter 6.3, p. 73)

- Relationships to materials being described should be *direct and significant*
- Ability to keep this information current in your access tools should be an important consideration in how this element is used
- Other strategies for dealing with relationships to materials *in your repository* without using this elements? (e.g. access points in catalog)

**Publication Note Element** (DACS Chapter 6.4, p. 75)

- Provide citations for or information about publications based on *use, analysis, or study* of the materials being described
- This element is not for information about published finding aids for the materials (Element 4.6)

**Notes Element** (DACS Chapter 7.1, p. 77)

- Made generic on purpose!
- For information that won’t fit elsewhere
  - See/see also references
  - Sponsoring organization or project
  - Conservation information
  - Preferred citation style
  - Non-Reference Code Element alphanumeric identifiers
- Important to think about clear, communicative labels for notes if you use this in your access tools
- Make sure it doesn’t belong in a specific DACS element

**Descriptive Control Element** (DACS Chapter 8.1, p. 81)

- A place to record information about the description tool and its creation
  - Sources used
  - Rules/conventions
  - Archivist and date
  - Revisions
- Whether or not to make this information publicly accessible is completely up to the repository
- Make explicit what our role was in processing the collection: “the archivist’s hand”