

Marking objects with their accession number

Marking objects with their unique identification number is essential so that you can always match the information in your files with the object on the shelf. Numbering is important in another way - it allows an object to be extracted from the rest of the collection.

When numbering your collection, three things must be considered:

- The number must be very durable
- The numbering method must not damage the object
- The number must be removable

It is very important that this number is put on in a way that will last a long time, yet will not damage the object. For example, do not use sticky labels as the adhesive can damage the object and they often lose their 'stick' and fall off. Do not use permanent ink or paint to apply the number directly onto the object as you will damage the object and never be able to get it off! Always clean the area before applying the paraloid to it.

The Equipment

Paraloid is a substance that for museum purposes is dissolved in a chemical such as white spirit, acetone or methylated spirits. Whatever it is mixed up in, is the chemical used to remove it if there is a mistake made in the marking process.

Paraloid B67 mixed in white spirit is ideal because it can be removed without damaging the object. It should be applied in a thin line on an inconspicuous part of the object. Paraloid can be purchased from Eckersley's for around \$8.10 for a 100ml bottle, with larger supplies available. Phone 1800 045 531. They will probably have to courier it to you rather than post it as posting solvents is not possible. It is not advisable to buy in too large a quantity as the paraloid may go hard or dry up and become unusable.

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Many institutions use two types of paraloid for marking. Paraloid B-72 in acetone is used in most situations as the base coat and is applied directly to the object. Paraloid B-67 in petroleum spirit is applied as a top coat over the number to seal it onto the base coat. The two types assist in stopping the numbers to blur or smudge.

For writing the number onto the paraloid, use one of the following pens:

(These pens we purchased at Dymocks, but you could try other stationery stores as well. They all cost under \$10)

- Pentel K108 Hybrid roller in white is another good option for white marking and is rather inexpensive.
- Staedtler 313 Lumocolor permanent pen is good for black or the 05 Staedtler pigment liner for drawing and writing is another good waterproof and lightfast pen.
- ZIG Millennium 005 in black.

Or you may like to try:

- nib or fountain pen with India ink: India inks cost \$4.50 and the nib pen costs around \$2.75
- Radiograph pens for black ink (approx \$33), and isograph pens for white ink (approx: \$45)
- Artline "Drawing System" or "Calligraphy" felt tip pens: vary from \$1.95 to \$3.95 depending on the size of the nib. These pens last up to ten years.

The important thing is to use waterproof ink and check if the pen says lightfast, which is also good. You should be able to buy this equipment from your local art supplies shop or good stationers eg. W.C.Penfolds.

A general rule is to apply white ink to a dark surface and black ink to a lighter surface. ALWAYS use a pencil like a soft 2B for paper objects. Remember the number marking must be reversible.

Numbers are not physically marked onto textile objects, but rather, the number is written onto a piece of white cotton tape and the tape very carefully stitched onto the piece of textile, costume or whatever the object is. Cotton tape can be purchased from fabric supply and haberdashery stores such as Spotlight and Lincraft, or from S & M Supply (Ph: 1800 020 001).

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If it is not possible or practicable to put a permanent number on the object, tie a tag to a part of the object where it can't slip off. Tags are also suitable for plastic objects that cannot tolerate paraloid, and objects that are too small to number are catered for with jewellery tags. In fact, you may wish to secure tags to each object as a matter of course in the acquisition process. This will allow for easy identification and is a precautionary measure in case the applied number is removed or proves illegible.

The Process

Step 1

- Consider the object you have before you. What is it made of? Therefore, how should it be marked, using what materials? Where should it be marked? Plan ahead.
- It is always a good rule to find an untreated 'remote' area of the object to mark the number on. Think about the object being on display and keeping the number hidden from view. However, you should be consistent with where you mark objects so that finding the number in the future is a simple process. There is nothing more frustrating than turning an object around and around five times, trying to find the marked number.
- The enclosed list of where to mark should help in this area.
- Clean the area with a little water or white spirit on a cotton bud.

Step 2

- Apply a line of paraloid B-72 in acetone the size of which you want your marked number to be. The paraloid provides a protective coating for the number to be placed on and can be easily removed using white spirit if you make a mistake.
- Wait for the paraloid to be thoroughly dry. If it isn't dry, your number will be smudged and illegible.

Step 3

- When the paraloid is dry, mark the number onto the paraloid using the appropriate pen. Be careful to write the numbers exactly. You should take great care in writing each number, as confusion can arise over numbers written in haste, eg: a 3 can be mistaken for an 8 and vice versa.
- Don't press too hard with the pen you are using as some harder nibs can scratch the surface of the paraloid and possibly the surface of your object. So, light enough to make a mark is enough.

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- Numbers should be clear and legible and their height should be relative to the size of the object being marked. For small to medium sized objects, the lettering should be from 3-6mm in height.
- For large objects, the lettering should be approximately 1 cm high.
- Wait for the pen ink to dry thoroughly. If you do not wait for the ink to dry it will smudge when you apply the topcoat of paraloid.

Step 4

- When the ink is dry, apply the topcoat of paraloid B-67 in petroleum spirit. This is applied to seal in the number marked. You do not have to apply a topcoat, as not all organisations do this.
- Remember, the purpose of all this is to place a number on the object that can be used as it's identification tag for years to come. We don't wish for it to damage the object in anyway and it must be reversible. So, never use pen on paper for example, always pencil.

Where to mark objects

Material	Object Type	Position of number	Notes
Wood	Chairs	Inside top of the rear right leg (Imagine you are pushing a chair in under a table, the right in this instance is as you see it from behind).	
	Large Armchairs/ Sofas	Mark on the inside top of the rear right leg.	
	Light/small pieces of furniture, eg: occasional tables, card tables, etc.	Mark on the back surface at the top or waist height on the right hand side of the object. If the object has a door and/or drawer, mark on the inside of the door/drawer on the top right hand side also.	
	Beds	Mark on the bottom-back or upper-inside surface of the right leg at bedhead.	
	Large tables	Mark on the underside near or on the structural piece or on an inner surface at the top of one leg.	

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	Clock: long case	Mark on the top right hand surface of open door.	
	Small objects: boxes, clocks, etc	Mark on the back surface in the lower right-hand corner if the base of the object is flat.	
Metal including bronze, gold, silver and pewter	Smaller objects: candle sticks, cups, trophies, jugs, etc.	Mark on recessed underside at edge (if applicable). If the object has a flat base, mark at the rear, near base.	Be sure to mark a corrosion-free area for metals.
	Scientific instruments	At rear near base if flat bottom. If not, recessed underside at rear edge. Mark all parts.	
	Cutlery	Underside of the handle at the throat near to where it meets the bowl or plate. Mark knives on the blade near the junction of where it joins the handle. Do not obstruct any hallmarks.	
	Weapons	Mark fire arms close to the butt and/or inside the trigger guard. Swords should be marked on the blade next to the hilt or handle.	
	Jewellery, snuff boxes, etc.	Place the number on an acid-free tag (eg: jewellers tag) and tie to the object in the case of jewellery or put inside if the object has a lid.	
	Industrial/mechanical items	Mark on an inconspicuous and yet easily accessible position. The number's location depends upon the nature of the object.	
Ceramics	Small-medium objects: cups, saucers, plates, jugs, teapots, mugs, platters, etc.	Mark on the recessed underside of the object towards the edge. Mark lids on the inside of the rim.	Application of the paraloid is very important in the case of porous surfaces such as earthenware and terracotta.
	Larger objects: urns, planters, etc	If the object cannot be moved, mark at the back near the base.	

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Glass	Small objects: comports, glasses, goblets, etc	Mark on recessed underside or at back of the rim or foot of object. Mark lids on inside of rim.	If marking clear glass, use white lettering or keep the black lettering very small.
	Larger objects: vases, etc.	Mark on the recessed underside at back edge.	
Bone/Ivory	Scrimshaw, etc.	At rear, close to bone or on an internal surface. If object has a recessed base, mark on base close to back edge.	Do not mark on porous or flaky areas. Wear cotton gloves.
Stoneware		Mark objects on recessed underside if possible. If not, on rear close to base or on back in lower right-hand corner (if applicable).	
Plastic/Vinyl		See Stoneware. OR apply a small tag.	
Rubber		See Stoneware. OR apply a small tag.	
Textiles	Rugs, tapestries, quilts	Attach number on the reverse top right-hand corner and diagonally on the bottom left-hand corner.	Wear cotton gloves at all times.
	Samplers, woolwork and embroidered pictures, table runners, etc	Attach number on the reverse top right-hand corner. If the work is large, also mark on the bottom left-hand corner.	
	Small/fine objects: lace, doyleys, etc	It attaching a cloth label directly onto the object is inappropriate, tie a jeweller's tag to the object.	