

Cataloguing

Introduction

Cataloguing is an essential part of managing a museum's key asset, the collection. Important museum activities such as research, interpretation, conservation, risk management, exhibition development and publications are dependent on detailed and up-to-date collection information.

The Small Museums Cataloguing Manual, published by Museums Australia Victoria, is an excellent guide to cataloguing objects and image collections and has been specifically developed for regional and community museums. It can be downloaded free-of-charge from their website.

www.mavic.asn.au

Cataloguing is the compilation and maintenance of key information, formally identifying and describing objects. It provides a permanent record of all the objects in the collection and the information relating to each object.

Cataloguing worksheet

The cataloguing worksheet (see template) is the most frequently used document in collections management. While the layout of catalogue sheets/forms varies from one museum to another, there are basic fields that are common to all. These include:

- The registration number – a unique and permanent number given to each object as a form of identification
- Object name – use simple terms, in common usage, so that people from different backgrounds can find the object they are looking for
- Title – a discretionary field used for books, artworks, titled documents etc.
- Description - the aim of the catalogue description is to provide a clear, concise picture that enables another reader of the worksheet to visualise the object and recognise it immediately if searching for it.
- Distinguishing marks - examples include labels, signatures, serial numbers, patent dates and trade-marks.
- Dimensions- accurate measurements of height, length, width, diameter and weight (where relevant)
- Condition and completeness – a general physical description of the condition of the object as it appears when catalogued



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Collection Policy: Guidelines to Writing

Amanda Jones, Community History SA
www.community.history.sa.gov.au

Small Museums Cataloguing Manual

Museums Australia Victoria
www.mavic.asn.au

Cataloguing Worksheet

Museums Australia Victoria
www.mavic.asn.au

Significance 2.0

Roslyn Russell and Kylie Winkworth
www.arts.gov.au

Object Files: Getting Started on Significance Assessment

Kylie Winkworth
www.centralnswmuseums.com.au

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- Make – details about the person/people involved in creating, producing or manufacturing the object (name, role, address)
 - Place and date of manufacture
 - Provenance – history of the object’s use, previous owners etc. Provenance is a key element in assessing significance and is explained well in Significance 2.0

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- References – books or research files used to obtain catalogue information.
- Location - the current location of the object and the date it was recorded
- Statement of significance - the meaning and values of an item or collection, or what makes it important.
- Handling/storage/display requirements – any specific requirements needed for the preservation of the object.
- Acquisition details – name and contact details of donor or where/whom the object was purchased (include cost and receipt number).

Additional extras for the cataloguing worksheet

- Collections management checklist - lists of tasks such as recording the acquisition in the register, tagging the object, sending thank you letters to donors etc.
- Space to insert a digital image of the object.
- Key words or subject terms – these are tags or broad categories that help locate similar or related objects together.
- Conservation treatment notes – summary of conservation treatment. The actual treatment reports should be added to the object file.

Object files

The catalogue worksheet can be expanded into an object file. Any folder can be used; simply record the object’s registration number and name on the outside of the folder. Object files also include photographs, copies of articles relating to the object, copies of acquisition records (donor forms, receipts), research notes, in fact, any information relevant to understanding the object, its history, significance and what’s happened to it in the museum. Kylie Winkworth’s paper, Object Files: Getting Started on Significance Assessment is a source of further information.

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