



## Labelling is key to identification

This sheet will describe:

- the importance of labels;
- information to include;
- how to attach them;
- materials to use.

If an item cannot be identified, its provenance and significance to a collection is lost; a label will give a link to this information. Labels from the past can also give information about the item's history.

A label uniquely identifies an archival document, or group of documents from a collection. It usually consists of a combination of letters, numbers and words. A label is either: written on, adhered to, or attached to an item. There are pros and cons with each concerning both security and preservation.

## Label information

The identity of many documents may be self-evident, such as the date and title on a newspaper. But this information may not always be clear, for example if the date and source is not recorded on a newspaper cutting. Photographs of people are particularly important to label when the information is available. Once faces and names are forgotten, this evidence is gone.

The reference on a label will uniquely connect a document to a reference in the collection catalogue. From there, other information for example about donors or related items may be found.

## Moving archives

In the event of an emergency, such as a flood where documents have become wet, it is essential to be able to identify them if they are to be moved elsewhere for drying, or separated from wet packaging. High priority items can be easily identified if labelled and listed on an emergency "grab list". However, consideration needs to be given to security when identifying high value items. If items are moved for any other reason, such as display or reorganising storage, there is less likelihood of misplacement if well labelled.

## Labelling

Ideally, a document should have a label written on or inside it. It may be that this is part of the item's title itself, such as the title of a book (if it is unique). If an item has parts that may be easily separated, such as unsewn folios, these may also be labelled.

The primary packaging should also be labelled (packaging which is next to the item, such as a sleeve or folder). Secondary packaging (such as the box in which the folder is stored) should then be labelled with its contents. The catalogue entries should correspond with all the information that is on the document labels.

If items are easily located using good labelling, it reduces unnecessary handling of other items when searching – a preservation benefit.



## Materials

Paper may be written on using a soft 2B pencil. Convention is to label in the bottom right corner, or the inside of a book. Consistency will mean it is easy to spot the labels. Do not label a weak area of a document which is at risk of being lost. Photographs may also be labelled on the back with a soft pencil. Do not press hard as this will damage the image.

A label should be durable and not affect the condition of the item it is attached to, in the same way packaging materials are chosen. Archival paper or card is suitable. Thinner paper is preferable for inserting into books, as this will not mark the pages. Card is more durable for labels that are to be threaded and tied with cotton tape. Labels made from inert polyester fabric such as "Tyvek" are very durable as they are tear and water-resistant. However, these need to be written in permanent pen.

Pencil is preferred, as it is durable and water resistant and may be altered or removed with care if necessary with an eraser. Permanent pen, which will not run if wet, can be used on external boxes and folders. Labels can also be printed, but ink-jet printers should be avoided for this as the ink will run when wet.

## Label attachment

It is not advisable to stick labels directly onto documents. They may fall off and cause damage as the adhesive ages, or the adhesive seep and stick elsewhere. Labels may be stuck to packaging but an additional written label will provide back up.

A thin, archival paper label may be inserted into a book so that it protrudes from the top, enabling information to be read without removing the item from the shelf. This can be easily lost, so the book should also be directly labelled too, e.g. on the fly leaf in pencil.

A tag made from either card or "Tyvek" may be tied to a book or packaged item using cotton tape. This should be easily visible, if possible without having to remove the item from the shelf. Labelling both sides will also help. When writing labels directly on packaging, consider where it will be most easily seen when in a drawer, on a shelf or in a box.

## Consistency

Developing an institutional style and conventions will aid consistency and accuracy of labelling. If catalogue numbers or guidelines change, it is not necessarily essential to re-label items, particularly if the label is written on the item, but the changes should be trackable via the catalogue.