



Criteria for Accessioning – Practical Exercise

Museums and many archives have formal accessioning processes for setting criteria and making decisions about acquiring objects to the collection. However, there are different responsibilities and ethical expectations between the different organizations. Museums are assumed to collect in perpetuity and thus the bar for acquiring objects for the collection is high. Ultimate authority for accessioning usually rests with the governing authority.

Archives and special collections libraries are also expected to be long-time custodians for their collections, and they have responsibilities to set criteria for acquisition based on their mission. In many cases, decision-making authority rests with staff.

During the webinar on accession, acquisition, deaccession, and disposal, you were presented with various criteria that should be used by your institution when considering the acquisition and accession of objects into your collection. In the following exercise you will be presented with three different objects. For each object, list the pros and cons you see when considering them for possible accession by your institution. Then check the box with your ultimate decision.

Use the following guides to help make your decisions:

Simmons, John E., *Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies*, Chapter 7.

Hoffman, Frank W. and Richard J. Wood, *Library Collection Development Policies*, Chapter 8.





Object #1: A letter written by the founder of your museum, donated by his or her spouse. The letter has a strong provenance and the founder’s spouse has full title to the object. Unfortunately, the letter is also in poor condition, as it was damaged and repaired with scotch tape in various spots. The donor is also asking you to keep the document on restricted access, with only immediate family being able to view it for the next 25 years.

Pros	Cons

Acquire and Accession?
yes no

Object #2: A large artifact, which just barely meets your storage limitations. The artifact is in good condition, and sparks a story related to your institution’s mission. You do not have anything similar in the collection. However, it is offered to you by a donor who purchased the object at an online auction site, so there is little to no provenance information.

Pros	Cons

Acquire and Accession?
yes no





Object #3: A rare book that, while meeting the mission of your institution, will considerably deplete your acquisition budget for the rest of the fiscal year. Your institution also owns a copy of the book in a later, more common edition.

Pros	Cons

Acquire and Accession?

yes no

