

The SPECTRUM 4.0 *Object entry* Procedure

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1. What is the SPECTRUM *Object entry* Procedure?

[SPECTRUM 4.0](#) defines 21 Procedures, each describing how objects are managed in museums. The SPECTRUM *Object entry* procedure is one of those procedures, and is used to manage and record every object when it enters the museum. *Object entry* is a SPECTRUM Primary Procedure, which means that it is an essential component of a workable and efficient museum Documentation System. The SPECTRUM Primary Procedures are:

- Object entry
- Loans in
- Acquisition
- Location and movement control
- Cataloguing
- Object exit
- Loans out
- Retrospective documentation

Museums use the SPECTRUM Standard to benchmark the effectiveness and efficiency of the collections management procedures.

This fact sheet explores how the *Object entry* procedure might work in your museum, and is aligned to the requirements of the [Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the UK](#).

You can also download the [SPECTRUM *Object entry* Procedure](#), which includes a step by step workflow diagram taking you through the procedure, and describing what you might need to do at each step, and the information you might collect.

Documentation: a Practical Guide contains more information about the application of all of the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures and can be bought from the [Collections Trust Shop](#).

2. The *Object entry* Procedure and Accreditation



The [Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the UK](#) requires that specific **procedures, policies** and **plans** are in place in your museum.

At a procedural level, it is a requirement of the Museum Accreditation Scheme that the **SPECTRUM Primary Procedures**, including the *Object entry* procedure, are in place in your museum, and that you describe how the procedures work in your museum in a **Procedural Manual** - see [Accreditation Standard 2.7](#).

The Accreditation Scheme also requires that your museum has written **policies, or policy statements**, in place, which state your museum's policy regarding the management of the documentation of your collection. The two policies required by Accreditation, which will impact on your *Object entry* procedure are:

- Your **Collections Development Policy**, also known as an Acquisition and Disposal Policy – see [Accreditation Standard 2.2](#). This policy defines and impacts on the way you carry out your *Object entry* procedure. It might influence the wording on *Object entry* forms, and will definitely influence the type of objects accepted into your long term collections, and how you manage the conversations you have with potential donors.
- Your **Documentation Policy** – see [Accreditation Standard 2.3](#). This policy will contain key statements about the way your museum manages the documentation of its collection, and with reference to *Object entry* should state your museum's policy on:
 - The terms and conditions under which objects are accepted into the care of the museum, either short or long term
 - Which members of staff are authorised to accept objects into the care of the museum
 - How long objects left at the museum for identification or as possible donation are retained
 - What the museum will do if objects are not collected by depositors

The Accreditation Scheme also requires that your museum has a **Documentation Plan** to improve its collections documentation and documentation systems – see [Accreditation Standard 2.5](#). This plan will state how you are going to remedy shortfalls in the quality of your Documentation System, such as:

- Documentation backlogs – e.g. objects which do not have Accession numbers, or documentation about objects which is not linked to objects
- An *Object entry* procedure which falls short of the SPECTRUM standard

Lastly, Accreditation requires that you have an '**appropriate workforce** for the museums responsibilities and plans' – see [Accreditation Standard 1.7](#). With reference to the *Object entry* procedure and all of your collections management procedures, this requires that:

- There is a clear understanding about roles and responsibilities in your museum – for *Object entry* this implies that roles and responsibilities are understood, and adhered to, throughout the museum, and are stated in policies and job descriptions.
- There is a commitment to sustaining the skills required to support the *Object entry* procedure in training and induction

Find out more the *Object entry* procedure and Accreditation:

- For policy requirements - see [Accreditation Guidance Sheet 2: Collections Management Policies](#)
- For the structure and content of a Procedural Manual - see [Developing a Procedural Manual](#)
- For procedures and plans - see [Accreditation Guidance Sheet 3: Procedures and Plans](#)

3. Why is the *Object entry* procedure important?

Making sure that the *Object entry* procedure works well in your museum will ensure that you are able to account for all objects entering your museum - this includes objects which are being considered as donations and objects which may only be in your care for a short time. SPECTRUM 4.0 lists the following Minimum Standard for *Object entry* – if your *Object entry* procedure follows the SPECTRUM standard, it will:

- Establish the terms and conditions under which objects are being received for deposit
- Uniquely identify the newly received object or associated group of objects
- Ensure the organisation is able to account for all objects left in its care
- Provide a receipt for the owner or depositor
- Help establish the extent of the organisation's liability
- Indicate the reason for the receipt of the object
- Determine a finite end to, or programme for review of, the deposit
- Enable the object to be returned to the owner or depositor as required (i.e. for objects which have come into the museum for identification, or as possible accessions)
- Allow for objects and associated records to be checked on entry to ensure that they correspond to any accompanying inventory and/or transfer of title documentation supplied
- Establish who has legal title to the object in case of subsequent acquisition
- Capture key information about the object, to be augmented in the future
- Inform the decision making-process

If your *Object entry* procedure does not achieve the above, or does not exist in your museum at all, you will have a situation where objects are accumulating in your museum, with no record of why they are in the building, or who owns them. In addition, you may be risking a situation where you could be held liable for damage or loss of objects which do not belong to you.

4. When is the *Object entry* Procedure carried out?

The *Object entry* procedure begins whenever an object enters the museum, or is collected to bring to the museum.

The object might be:

- Brought to the museum by a member of the public and left for identification as part of your museum's Enquiry Service
- Brought to the museum by a member of the public to be considered as a donation, or purchase, or as a loan
- Arrive at the museum as an unsolicited gift e.g. occasionally objects are left outside the museum anonymously, or arrive in the post. In this case you are under no obligation to take the object into your collections, but will need to record its existence before you decide what to do with it. (see the Collections Trust factsheet, [Disposing of Objects You May not Own](#))

Occasionally your museum will already know that the object is going to arrive at the museum, in which case objects might be:

- Collected by a member of staff as a donation which has already been accepted
- Entering the museum as a pre-arranged loan

In both of these cases you may have already set up documentation for the object, and may even have allocated an Accession or Loan number. It is still however still good practice to go through the *Object entry* procedure, and obtain a signature from the depositor. If a museum representative goes out to collect the loan or new acquisition they should take an entry form with them.

5. What happens during the *Object entry Procedure*?

The exact steps within the procedure will vary according to the circumstances of the deposit. However, generally an *Object entry* procedure will consist of:

- The arrival or collection of an object
- A conversation with the owner/depositor which should include:
 - The reason for the object being left at the museum
 - Any contextual information about the object known by the owner/depositor
 - The terms and conditions which will apply while the object is in the care of the museum
 - The ownership of the object, and any intellectual property associated with it
- A record being made of the deposit, which captures the date, key information about the depositor and the object, allocates an Entry number to the object, and obtains the depositor's signature
- Giving the depositor a receipt which records the deposit
- Adding a record of the transaction to the museum's *Object entry* file
- Attaching the Entry number to the object with a tie on label. If the object is in pieces, or cannot easily be tagged, place it in a container and tag the container - see [Labelling and Marking Museum Objects](#) factsheet for more information.
- Passing the object to an authorised person for processing e.g. for consideration as a potential acquisition, or for identification

If an object is returned to the depositor, the depositor should produce the receipt given to them at the time of deposit, and sign and date the museum's records to acknowledge return of the object - see the [SPECTRUM 4.0 Object exit Procedure factsheet](#) for more information.

If the owner/depositor is not present, but known, when the material is received (e.g. if items arrive through the post), send them a copy of the entry documentation as a receipt and ask for a copy to be signed and returned.

Terms and conditions for deposited objects should be discussed with the owner/depositor, and will be influenced by your museum's policy for Collections Development and Documentation. They may include:

- A statement of the care and responsibility for the object(s) that will be taken by the museum
- A disclaimer of liability
- A declaration of the right to dispose of objects not collected by the depositor by an agreed date
- A disclaimer concerning museum opinions on objects
- A refusal to give valuations by the museum
- For a proposed acquisition, a statement about the ownership status of the object(s)
- For a loan in, the steps that the organisation will take to return the object(s)
- In all cases, a timescale for any action
- Establishment of which party is liable to costs incurred by the deposit e.g. transport costs

Always consult your museum's normal source of legal advice when establishing terms and conditions of deposit, or if you are in any doubt as to the ownership or legal status of an object. Terms and conditions are printed on the back of Collections Trust Object Entry Forms.

6. What form should *Object entry* records take?

Information for this procedure is usually managed on paper, rather than digitally, as it requires signatures, and receipts. *Object entry* records can consist of:

- *Object entry* forms – these might be designed and printed by the museum, or can be bought from the Collections Trust
- *Object entry* files
- Day books

Object entry forms

Pre-printed Object Entry Forms are available from the [Collections Trust Shop](#). These carbonless forms are available either from stock, or pre-numbered and overprinted with the museum name and address. They are printed on the reverse with standard terms and conditions for deposit. The forms are in triplicate:

- The top (white) copy of the form should be filed immediately into an 'entry file', where it serves as the museum's master record
- The second (pink) part of the form should be given to the depositor as a receipt for the object(s). This part of the form must be presented when items are returned to the owner/depositor
- The third (blue) part of the form should be kept with the deposited object(s)

The Object entry File

The *Object entry* File contains the museum's master copies of deposited objects, filed in numerical order, with no gaps in the sequence. If you are using Collections Trust forms, this file will contain the white copies of the form, which carry the original signature of the owner/depositor. The *Object entry* File is an important archive and must be kept safe. It should be clear from the file which objects have entered the museum and what eventually happened to them.

Day Books

Some museums use a book, usually known as a 'Day Book' or 'Entry Book', which usually records the date, the object, the name and address of the depositor, and the owner/depositor's signature. (Note, the Day Book is not an Accession Register, which is used to formally record the acquisitions into the museum's long term collections.) Using only a Day Book to record *Object entry* does not meet SPECTRUM or Museum Accreditation standards as the museum is unable to provide a receipt for the depositor or provide terms and conditions of deposit. *If you are using a daybook to manage your museum's Object entry procedure, you will need to use it in conjunction with triplicate Object entry forms which provide a receipt for the depositor.*

7. What information is recorded during the *Object entry* procedure?

The *Object entry* form should prompt the recording of the following information (which is all included in the Collections Trust *Object entry* form):

- The museum name
- A brief description of the object(s)
- The number of objects deposited. If it is not possible to count the number of objects deposited, e.g. in the case of a large number of potsherds, indicate the size of the deposit in an appropriate way, e.g. '2 boxes'. In this instance, it will be appropriate to assign numbers to groups of objects rather than individual items. Thought should also be given to the different levels of recording appropriate eg a summary list, rather than an itemised list of specimens, may be all that is immediately required, or indeed feasible
- A brief statement of the condition and completeness of the object(s). This will establish the original condition of the object in the case of any claims against the museum by the owner, as well as protecting the existing museum collections against infestation in the case of deposited objects carrying invasive organisms, such as moulds or woodworm
- Any contextual information about the object, such as production or usage

- The entry number - this is a unique number assigned to the entry of an object or group of objects and used to identify and track objects prior to their return or acquisition. The only number should be assigned to the *Object entry* form, and attached to the object or group of objects. It may be necessary to prefix the number to distinguish it from other reference numbers in use in your museum, for example from Accession numbers. (For further advice about numbering systems see the factsheet [Numbering: SPECTRUM 4.0](#))
- The name, address and telephone number of the owner/depositor
- The entry date
- The return date (this is often included in the terms and conditions)
- Entry reason (gift, sale, loan, identification)
- Agreement to transfer the title of the object(s) in the case of purchase or gift
- Signature of the owner/depositor
- Name and signature of the museum's representative who received the object
- First location of the object e.g. 'Identification cupboard'

Other information which might be recorded includes:

- Insurance details
- Note of packing materials (they may be an integral part of the object);
- Field collection information (method, context, co-ordinates, finder)
- A hazards note (e.g. chemical, radioactive)
- Legal/licence requirements (e.g. a firearms licence)
- Associated intellectual property rights (e.g. copyright)

If an object is being offered for acquisition, record the:

- Proposed object purchase price

If an object is coming in to the museum as a loan, or for research, record the:

- Reference to a loan or other information file

If the depositor is not known (e.g. when objects arrive anonymously through the post), record as much detail as possible, and include photographs and reference to the circumstances of the deposit.

8. Glossary

Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom – Accreditation is the UK standard for museums and galleries. It defines good practice and identifies agreed standards, thereby encouraging development. It is a baseline quality standard that helps guide museums to be the best they can be, for current and future users.

Documentation System – all of the recorded information a museum holds about the objects in its care. This includes paper and digitised records of all kinds (e.g. registers, forms, committee minutes, curator's files, donor letters).

Collections Management System – an electronic database, often provided by a software supplier, which enables the user to record information about collections and their management, and forms part of the documentation system.

[SPECTRUM 4.0](#) – SPECTRUM is the UK Collections Management Standard. It represents a common understanding of good practice for collections management in museums and contains detailed procedures for managing the different processes that an object goes through in its lifecycle in a museum. Find out more about [SPECTRUM and the SPECTRUM Community](#).

SPECTRUM Primary Procedures – the procedures that should be in place in a workable and accountable museum Documentation System. If the Primary Procedures are not in place, documentation backlogs will occur.

Documentation Backlogs – a term used in museums to describe undocumented or poorly documented collections. Your museum should have policy statements which define the standards expected for the documentation of your collections – most museums use the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures as a standard against which to measure the quality of their Documentation System and records. If the Primary Procedures are not in place there will be gaps, or backlogs, in the system and the information it carries (e.g. object will not link up with records). Backlogs are tackled using the SPECTRUM *Retrospective documentation Procedure*.

This fact sheet forms part of SPECTRUM Advice, a support pack which is published on Collections Link at www.collectionstrust.org.uk/spectrum/spectrum-advice-factsheets.



**ARTS COUNCIL
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Collections
Trust

The Collections Trust is the professional association for people working in Collections Management. Our mission is to be the leading organisation in the management and use of collections and technology in museums.

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