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Curation Preparation of Artifacts

Artifact Processing

- Prior to submission for curation, artifacts must be washed and dried according to Council of Texas Archaeologists ([CTA Guidelines](#)) (*2.4 Standards for Preparing Material Collections*).
 - Consult with CAS Curation staff if you have any questions about specific material types or cleaning methods.
 - Cleaning methods and any unwashed specimens must be documented on the **Collection Processing Record** form.
- Artifacts within a project/collection should be sorted by archaeological site, the analytical categories used for analysis and reporting, and the intra-site provenience (lot number).
- Unstable artifacts must be conserved and/or stabilized in consultation with CAS Curation staff.
- Consult CAS Curation staff regarding oversized and/or unique artifacts that need custom housing.

Artifact Labeling

Artifacts must be labeled using approved archivally-stable and reversible methods according to [CTA Guidelines](#) (*2.4.1 Labeling*) and the CAS guidelines listed below. Labeling methods must be documented on the **Collection Processing Record** form.

Contact CAS Curation staff at casuration@txstate.edu for time-saving tips, detailed labeling instructions, and supply recommendations.

Label Placement

- Labels should be small, placed in an inconspicuous location, and not obscuring any distinctive features.
- Never place a label on the retouched edge of a lithic tool, the decorated surface of pottery, on the maker's mark or other diagnostic feature of an artifact.
- If in doubt, try to label the least "photogenic" surface.
- The labeling surface must be relatively smooth to ensure proper adhesion and legibility of the label.

Label Contents

- Label the artifact with the full site trinomial and the intra-site provenience (lot number). If feasible, also include the specimen number (preferred).
- Example (where 41HY163 is the site trinomial, 306 is the lot number, and 3 is the specimen number):
41HY163-306-3

Direct Labeling Methods

- The preferred labeling method at CAS is a two-coat method (i.e. the “sandwich technique”) using small paper labels and clear reversible lacquer.
 - Labels must be laser-printed on acid-free paper. Use a small sans-serif font, approximately 6pt in size.
 - When cutting out labels, make sure to round the corners (or use a slot punch tool).
 - For adhering paper labels, CAS recommends a solution of 15% Paraloid B-72 in acetone.
 - Apply a thin base coat of Paraloid B-72, then apply the paper label, then apply a thin top coat of Paraloid B-72.
 - Let the label dry thoroughly before placing the object in a bag or container.
- Alternatively, you may use black archival ink or pigmented pen to handwrite the label using the same two-coat “sandwich technique” described above.
 - Never write directly on the artifact – you must always use a base coat.
 - For handwritten labels, CAS recommends a solution of 10% Paraloid B-72 in acetone (Note: some inks may dissolve when exposed to the solvent in the B-72 solution).
 - If the artifact is dark in color, you may use a white-pigmented ink or white pigmented base coat.
 - Never use nail polish, whiteout, or other non-archival substances.

Materials Too Small to be Labeled:

- Artifacts smaller than a quarter (less than approximately 1 inch in diameter) do not need to be directly labeled.
- For these materials, the artifact tag will also serve as the artifact label.

Material Types Not Directly Labeled:

- Never directly label the following material types:
 - Organic materials such as bone, shell, wood, leather, fur, textiles, basketry, and botanical materials.
 - Friable materials such as daub, ocher, minerals, and charcoal.
 - Deteriorating materials including corroding metal, flaking/patinated glass, and eroding ceramics.
 - Bulk samples (e.g. soil, FCR).
- Instead, stable items belonging to these artifact categories may be labeled with a tie-on or sew-on tag made from acid-free paper or Tyvek affixed with undyed cotton string.
- For all other materials, the artifact tag will also serve as the artifact label.

Artifact Bags

- Sorted artifacts must be bagged in appropriately sized zip-closure clear polyethylene bags. All bags must be 4 mil in thickness.
- Bags must be clean and free from writing (no black marker).
- Bags should not be more than approximately 2/3 full.
- Do not squeeze all of the air out of the bags (some air helps cushion the artifacts).
- **Minimum bag size is 2.5 x 3 inches.**

Artifact Tags

- Each artifact bag must be accompanied by one paper artifact tag.
- Tags must be laser-printed and/or legibly handwritten in pencil on acid-free paper.
- Labels must be accurate at the time of submission. Any changes made to tags during analysis and reporting must correspond to the submitted Master Artifact Database.
- Artifact tags must include the following data:
 - Project Name
 - CAS Accession Number
 - Date(s) of Investigation
 - Investigating Company/Agency
 - Site Number
 - Intrasite Provenience
 - Lot Number
 - Specimen Number
 - Object Name (Analytical Category)
 - Description
 - Count
 - Weight – *highly recommended but optional, report only if recorded during analysis*
- Tags should not be folded and must be clearly visible from the outside of the bag.
- Tags must be encapsulated in their own clear polyethylene bag within the artifact bag for most material types:
 - Artifact tags DO need their own bag for metal, bulk samples (soil, FCR), bone, shell, organics, daub, ocher, charcoal, etc.
 - Artifact tags DO NOT need their own bag for small bags of clean, stable artifacts with a relatively smooth surface (most lithic artifacts, ceramics, and glass).
- Suggested tag size is 2.5 x 3 inches or less.

Collection Organization

- Individual artifact bags should be grouped into larger secondary bags and organized into boxes.
- For analyzed collections:
 - First separate artifacts by archaeological site.
 - Then group artifacts according to the analytical categories used for analysis and reporting (i.e. material class and object name).
 - Then within each analytical category, organize the artifacts by provenience/lot number.

- For unanalyzed collections:
 - First separate artifacts by archaeological site.
 - Then group artifacts according to provenience/lot number.
 - Then organize the artifacts by basic material/artifact classes.

Group Bags (Secondary Bags)

- Individual artifact bags should be grouped into larger secondary bags according to analytical category and/or provenience – see **Collection Organization** above.
- Artifact bags should not be folded within the secondary bags.
- When filling secondary bags, place larger/heavier artifact bags towards the bottom and smaller/lighter artifact bags on top.
- Suggested secondary bag sizes are between 6 x 8 inches to 13 x 18 inches.

Secondary Bag Labels

- Each secondary bag must be accompanied by a printed bag label.
- Bag labels should be typed and laser-printed on acid-free paper or cardstock.
- Bag labels should include the following data:
 - Project Name
 - CAS Accession Number
 - Site Number
 - Analytical Category(ies) Represented
 - Lot Number(s) Represented
- Bag labels should not be folded and must be clearly visible from the outside of the bag.
- Bag label dimensions should be tailored to the size of the bag:
 - Bag labels should span the full width of the bag.
 - Bag label sizes and font sizes should be similar throughout the collection.

Storage and Packaging

- Artifacts must be packed into boxes measuring approximately 15 x 11 x 12 inches.
 - Submitters can use archival-quality boxes provided by CAS (picked up in advance) or they can use any cardboard banker's box of the same size for temporary storage and delivery.
 - Small artifact collections (measuring less than half of a standard box) can be packed into any appropriately sized container.
 - Artifacts will be transferred into standard CAS archival boxes upon receipt. This needs to be a 1:1 transfer without the need to change the assigned box numbers, so it is imperative that any non-archival boxes used to store and transport the collection are of the same size (15 x 11 x 12 inches) and they are packed appropriately (not over-filled).
- Artifacts should be organized into boxes by analytical category and/or provenience – see **Collection Organization** above.
 - Multiple analytical categories may be housed in the same box as long as they are in separate group bags (secondary bags) that are clearly labeled as described above.

- Boxes should be arranged and numbered in a logical order. If an analytical category spans multiple boxes, then these materials should be placed in consecutive boxes.
- Avoid mixing heavy materials (e.g. FCR) and delicate materials (e.g. shell) within the same box.
- Avoid stacking or layering artifacts within boxes.
 - When possible, “file” secondary bags vertically rather than stacking them horizontally on top of one another.
 - If layering is necessary, place larger/heavier artifact bags towards the bottom of the box and smaller/lighter artifact bags on top.
- The total weight of each box must not exceed 25-30 pounds, and weight should be distributed evenly across the bottom of each box.
- Do not overfill boxes – the box lid must close completely without compressing any of the materials inside (when materials are safely packed as described above).

Temporary Box Labels

- Attach a temporary label to each box of artifacts – do not write directly on the box. CAS staff will assign a permanent box label after the collection is received.
 - Typed labels are preferred, but temporary box labels handwritten in pencil are also accepted.
 - Box labels should be printed or handwritten on acid-free paper. Post-it notes are not acceptable.
- Box labels must be attached to the archival boxes using a reversible non-destructive method such as paper clips or binder clips (or request archival label holders from CAS). Never use tape, glue, or staples to attach box labels to the archival boxes.
- Temporary Box Labels should include the following data:
 - Project Name
 - CAS Accession Number
 - Site Number(s) Represented
 - Analytical Category(ies) Represented
 - Lot Number(s) Represented
 - Box Number (example: “Box 1 of 5”)
- Suggested box label size is 3 x 5 inches.

Electronic Catalog (Master Artifact Database)

Submitters must provide one master database in the form of an Excel spreadsheet. The master database should contain all artifacts submitted for curation under a single CAS Accession Number. Databases must be formatted according to the guidelines listed below. Examples of approved databases are available upon request by contacting casuration@txstate.edu.

Note: The master database must be accompanied by a brief document explaining the cataloging system used for the submitted collection (titled “Explanation of Catalog”). This document should explain how the collection was organized and cataloged, the different data fields (columns) listed in the master database, and any special jargon or abbreviations used.

- Every bag, whether it contains one artifact or many, must receive its own artifact tag and each tag must have its own entry (line item) in the master database.
 - Submitters are responsible for conducting a thorough inventory verification of the collection prior to curation submission.
- Assign a unique Object ID number to each line item in the database.
 - Object ID numbers include the CAS Accession Number, the Lot Number, and the Specimen Number separate by decimals.
 - For example, the Object ID number is **CAS.2023.100.136.025** where CAS.2023.100 is the accession number, 136 is the lot number, and 25 is the specimen number.
 - Use placeholder zeros for Object ID numbers so that the lot number and specimen number consist of 3 digits.
 - For example, CAS.2023.001.2.15 is not acceptable – it should be written as CAS.2023.001.**002.015** instead.
 - An additional digit may be added if lot or specimen numbers exceed 999.
- Assign a Box Number to each line item in the master database.
 - Box Numbers must accurately reflect the organization of materials when they are submitted to CAS for curation.
- The master database must include columns for all data fields recorded on the paper artifact tags and (in general) all data fields recorded during analysis.
 - Contact CAS Curation staff at casuration@txstate.edu for how to handle collections with lengthy analyses and/or multiple large analysis spreadsheets.
- Master database must include separate columns for the following data (at minimum):
 - CAS Accession Number
 - Project Name
 - Site Number
 - Site Name (if different from site number)
 - Box Number
 - Object ID Number
 - Lot Number
 - Object Name (analytical category)
 - Object Description
 - Material
 - Provenience – *include all available information in separate columns*
 - Count
 - Weight – *highly recommended but optional, report only if recorded during analysis*
- Clearly identify any missing and/or discarded artifacts in the master database, including items sent away for destructive analysis.
 - If artifacts have been discarded, discard approval documentation from the permitting agency must be included with the records collection.
- Submitters must thoroughly review the artifact database for accuracy and consistency of data entry prior to curation submission.

- Use Excel tools such as Conditional Formatting, Sort & Filter, Data Validation, and Spell Check to check data for spelling errors, duplicate Object IDs, and other typos.
- Make sure to clear/remove Conditional Formatting, Sort & Filter, and Data Validation before submission.
- In general, the first word of each data field should be capitalized.
- Make sure numbers are formatted properly (Excel will flag numbers that were saved as text instead – click on the warning flag to resolve).
- Make sure all dates are formatted M/D/YYYY or MM/DD/YYYY.
- Formatting suggestions for compatibility with our collections management software:
 - Use the same font size and style throughout (remove bold text, italics, etc.).
 - Remove any highlights, shading, or borders.
 - Remove any additional worksheet tabs.
 - Unfreeze all panes, unhide all columns, and remove wrap text.
 - Remove all comments and embedded notes.