CONDITION REPORTING

Access a current edition of Spectrum (available in 8 languages), which has up to date information regarding a variety of museum documentation procedures. The current version is 5.0 and is available from Collections Trust.
You should also consult your museums documentation procedures and policies.

Things to find out before you begin:

1. What is the aim of your reporting exercise:
   Loan, display, relocation, research access, acquisition, emergency preparedness, collections risk assessment, review and rationalisation, collections care, conservation housekeeping etc.

2. Who is the recipient
   - Is there a known recipient
   - What is their level of understanding
   - What are they going to use the report for
   - How do they need to use the data
   - Will the recipient be able to examine the object in person – virtual couriering and remote consultations are increasingly being used – consider what needs to be highlighted in these circumstances

3. Information
What is the required format
   - Directly into a computer
   - Recorded on paper
   - Transferred from paper to computer

Do you need to take photographs
   - Understand what size and format is required
   - Use a suitable background, scale, lighting
   - Purpose of photograph – inventory or condition check – what are you trying to show.

What kind of records already exist/don't duplicate effort
   - Photograph
   - Drawing
   - Weight
   - Number of parts
   - Measurements
   - Materials list
   - Name
   - Description
   - Existing condition report – are you just looking for change or starting from scratch
   - Does the institution have a glossary which is already in use

- Know the procedure for sets, parts, multiples, unnumbered, detached parts
- Location and location history (may help understand what conditions it has been in
- Are there good digital photos/can you take some. Is there access to a printer? Annotated photos (on a print out or using software for mark making) are excellent for speeding up complicated reports and very useful for loans in and out.

4. What is the available time scale
   - Work out what you can do productively in the time
   - Suitable sample size – do you need to check every single object in order to answer your question, do you have time
   - Can you do a representative or statistically valid sample
   - What size and distribution will give the information you need
   - Don't forget to include preparation time (finding equipment) input time (adding to computer records etc), and time for moving objects around and returning them

While condition reporting:

5. Normally you will be reporting on at least some of the following:
   - **How stable is it (Has it changed, is it going to change)**
   - How damaged is it
   - How complete is it
   - What can it be used for (safe to travel, safe to display, condition good enough to display now, condition good enough for display with minor cleaning, condition good enough for display with some conservation work, only useful for research – retain in store)

6. Do you need to move objects around
   - Moving items round the building to inspect them can cause an insect infestation to spread
   - Plan the handling and movements of the objects so no damage occurs during the condition reporting

7. Make it obvious and repeatable.
   - If someone repeats this work in three months will they come up with similar results? If in doubt, test with a colleague.
   - If you give the condition a word, number or letter rating (1A, 4D, Fine, Poor) this must relate to an easily accessible pre-set glossary or definition within your organisation.
   - Statements about feature which could be reasonably expected for this item but are not present i.e. 'no scuff marks' can be useful
   - Giving three options normally results in everything being categorised in the middle. Try to use an even number of options rather than odd.
   - Be descriptive. Pre-set glossary/controlled vocabulary and use of fields are normally needed to assist with search for computerised records

and their definitions must be agreed and available across your institution. Establish a protocol for capturing free text (searchable if possible) for instances which your glossary and field system cannot collect sufficient data
- You must be able to comment on stability, completeness and damage in any system you use

8. Suitable space and equipment may include
- Lighting
- Pencils
- Table
- Measure
- Magnifier
- Gloves
- Computer
- Power supply
- Camera
- Personal protective equipment

9. Safety
- Examples of hazards:
    - Organics, especially taxidermy, may have been treated in the past with toxins such as arsenic, which are hazardous to human health.
    - Metals may have been treated in the past with substances which are hazardous to human health. i.e. copper may be treated with BTA which is now known to be a carcinogen.
    - Dust on objects and boxes may contain mould spores and substances hazardous to human health
    - Radioactivity is a hazard also found, typically in geology and technology objects
    - For examples and illustrations see: https://hazardsincollections.org.uk/ from the Museum of London regional collections care team
- Your safety – safety precautions may include:
    - Always wear gloves - nitrile/latex/vinyl are much better barriers than cotton
    - Dust masks with FFP 2 rating at least should be made available and worn if needed – follow your local risk assessment carried out by a competent person, seek advice/training
    - Wash hands before and after eating
    - Work in a ventilated space
- Safety of the object
    - Most objects must never be handled without nitrile/latex/vinyl gloves as moisture, salts and acid from the skin will negatively affect the surface. This is most obvious on metal and gilt objects but it is true of almost everything.

- As a general rule therefore, always wear gloves. Exceptions are made for objects which are difficult to handle with gloves on and more damage would be caused by wearing them. This includes fragile paper and also objects which are hard to lift (heavy industrial, glass etc). In the case of paper, wash hands well and frequently, where lifting is the consideration rigger gloves may be required. Do not wear gloves with grip dots on the surface as these tend to dig in, although these are useful for the moving of storage containers. Rubber dipped gloves are a washable option for some circumstances.
- When returning an item to storage, ensure it can be safely removed again
- Wash hands before and after eating, remove protective clothing such as lab coats and coveralls.

- Safety of others
  - Take care not to create trip hazards and obstacles for others
  - Mark up records and containers appropriately to notify others about any hazards you identify in your work
  - Restrict access to your work area to limit exposure

10. Environmental sustainability considerations:

- Use disposable supplies and equipment only when necessary, prioritise reusable supplies. i.e. washable cotton sheet over acid free tissue to work on, reusable coveralls over single use. Many gloves can be carefully washed at least once.
- When acquiring equipment, prioritise second hand items – for example; work lighting, tables, magnifiers, technology.
- When making recommendations about object needs based on your assessment, consider how best to work with existing environmental conditions in your building before assuming environmental control is required. This might mean relocating objects by material type or relaxing tight boundaries.