

The Manuscript Society Criteria for Describing Manuscripts and Documents

For decades the manuscript market was an integral part of the book trade. With the rapidly evolving interest in autographs, manuscripts and documents, a large independent market has opened up with many dealers handling only manuscript material. Through this rapid growth period, there have been no general standards available for describing and grading manuscripts and documents. Although there are examples in many catalogues of good descriptive criteria, collectively there are many differences in the criteria used from one dealer to another. Often much is left to the imagination of the buyer and collector. It was clear that there was a pressing need to adopt a standardized format for describing and grading manuscript material.

In 1967 *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (AACR) was published which provided a guide for cataloging archival manuscript material. In 1988 a revised AACR 2 was published by the American Library Association. Neither publication met the complete needs in the manuscript field. In 1983 the Library of Congress modified Chapter 4 of AACR 2 and published *Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts—A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries* (APPM). This is the current standard system used by the Library of Congress and recommended for use by the American Library Association, Society of American Archivists (SAA) and others to catalog archival papers. APPM has been revised again by Steven L. Hensen under the auspices of the SAA and was published in December 1989.

Unfortunately for dealers and collectors of manuscripts and documents, APPM has been oriented primarily toward cataloging and retrieval of manuscripts and documents. Greater emphasis is placed on

collections of papers, rather than on detailed descriptions of single items. Its primary purpose was to create a dependable system for cataloging material of historic value. As such, little attention was directed toward describing the condition of manuscripts and documents or other features which are of more interest to private collectors.

Accordingly, the Manuscript Society has prepared a set of criteria for describing manuscripts and documents designed primarily for the collector, institutional buyer and dealer. The rules and criteria elaborated in APPM are far too detailed and cumbersome for descriptive cataloging of autograph material in the marketplace. Extensive use has been made, however, of APPM and the abbreviations in AACR 2 in developing our criteria, in order to maintain uniformity in the archival field. The intent has been to encourage the use of standard terminology and a uniform system for describing manuscripts and documents, primarily for private collectors and dealers.

There can be no simple or perfect system to achieve this end, as each manuscript and document (unlike grading of stamps, coins or books) is unique unto itself. The length of this presentation is mandated by the many variables that must be taken into consideration for accurate descriptions. It is felt, however, that by using this system, the collector and institutional buyer will have a better description of the manuscripts he wishes to acquire and the dealer will feel more comfortable in marketing his material.

To those newly acquainted with the manuscript field, these criteria will introduce you to important tools which are essential in communicating with your associates.

General Format

A format is presented here which sequentially handles the data necessary for a uniform system of recording the description of manuscripts and documents.

Name (Dates of birth and death). Biography. Descriptive Code, number of pages, dimensions in inches, place, date. Address. Grade. Defects. Description.

e.g. **Lincoln, Abraham** (1809-1865). President of the United States (1861-65). ALS, 1p, 9"x6", Washington, D.C., 1863 Oct. 2. Addressed to Edwin Stanton. Fine. Slight foxing blank right margin. Concerns military appropriations.

Name, Dates of Birth, Death and Biography:

1. Last name first, preferably in bold type. Pseudonym in parentheses e.g. **Clemens, Samuel (Mark Twain)**.
2. Place the author's name in parentheses if the document or manuscript is entirely in another hand.
3. If the subject is other than an individual, place in parentheses. e.g. **(American Revolution)**.
4. Note the year of birth and death, if known, in parentheses after the name.
5. Biographical data on author. Pertinent data. Length of description is optional.

Descriptive Code (Abbreviations and Definitions):**Abbreviations**

S	Signature (hand of the author), when used alone. Signed, when used with another code letter.
M _S S	Manuscript signed (text in the hand of another person; signature in the hand of the author).
AM _S S	Autographed manuscript signed (entirely in the hand of the author).
TM _S S	Typed manuscript signed (signature in the hand of the author).
AM _S	Autographed manuscript unsigned (in the hand of the author).
LS	Letter signed (text the in hand of another person; signature in the hand of the author).
ALS	Autographed letter signed (entirely in the hand of the author).
TLS	Typed letter signed (signature in the hand of the author).
AL	Autographed letter unsigned (in the hand of the author).
ANS	Autographed note signed. A very brief message (entirely in the hand of the author).
AES	Autographed endorsement signed (an endorsement on another person's letter or document entirely in the hand of the endorser).
AQS	Autographed quotation signed (entirely in the hand of the author).

DS	Document signed (text in the hand of another person; signature in the hand of the author).
ADS	Autographed document signed (entirely in the hand of the author).
TDS	Typed document signed (signature in hand of author).
MuQS	Musical quote signed. An excerpt from a musical score (in the hand of another person; signature in the hand of the composer).
AMuQS	Autographed musical quote signed. An excerpt from a musical score (entirely in the hand of the composer).
AMuQ	Autographed musical quote unsigned. An excerpt from a musical score (in the hand of the composer).
AMuDS	Autographed musical document signed (musical score entirely in the hand of the composer and signed).
MuDS	Musical document signed (printed or in the hand of another person; signature in the hand of the composer).
PS	Photograph signed (in the hand of the subject).
IPS	Inscribed photograph signed (dedication and signature in hand of the subject).
FDC	First day cover (postal cover cancelled on the first day stamp is issued; these frequently bear souvenir autographs).
n.d.	No date.
n.y.	No year.
n.p.	No place.
p	Page - a single side of a leaf or one of the leaves of a book. In the manuscript field it generally refers to sides of each leaf.
pp	Pages.

Definitions

autograph	Written with one's own hand. <i>Autograph</i> is not a noun when used as the code letter A. In this case, it is a transitive verb and means <i>autographed</i> .
document	Anything printed, typed or written, relied upon to record or prove something.

foxing	The discoloration of a manuscript by spotty or diffuse yellowish brown stains.
frank	The signature of a sender on an envelope, wrapper or folded letter indicating the right of the sender to free mailing.
holograph	Entirely in the hand of the author.
integral leaf	The second leaf of a folded letter, often the address leaf.
inlay	The technique of inserting a manuscript or document into a mat or other reinforcement.
leaf	A sheet of paper, especially as part of a book, with a page on each side.
manuscript	A handwritten or typewritten composition. In many cases this term is used interchangeably with <i>document</i> . <i>Manuscript</i> is a noun and should not be used as an adjective or transitive verb in a code (e.g. Incorrect: MsLS).
letter sheet	A sheet of paper, which when folded and sealed, contains a letter inside and the address outside.
recto	The side of a page that is to be read first.
silked	Backing or lamination of a manuscript leaf with fine semi-transparent silk mesh.
typescript	Typewritten manuscript.
verso	The side of a page that is to be read second.

Additional suggestions:

1. Additional codes can be created from combinations of the above (e.g. TQS, AN, &c.).
2. If more than one manuscript or document is being described, add an “s” to “L”, “Q”, “N”, “Ms”, “D”, “S” or “P” (e.g. ALsS, ANsS, Ss,).
3. Note if manuscript or document is printed or partly printed. Enter before code, e.g. partly printed ADS (handwritten portions entirely in the hand of the author); partly printed DS written portions in the hand of a secretary or clerk but signed by the author).

4. If it is wished to establish incumbency at the time of writing, include after code (e.g. ALS as president).
5. Note if media other than sheet paper is used (vellum, parchment, cards, cardboard, books, stamps, linen, silk, postal covers, phonograph records, wood &c.). Enter after code (e.g. ANS on block of four stamps).
6. Note if writing instrument other than a pen was used (pencil, crayon, &c). Enter after code (e.g. ALS in pencil).
7. If entire surname is not given in closing or in the text, indicate in quotes after code (e.g. ALS "George"; LS "F.D.R."; DS "Nap[oleon]"). An option would include the entire name as signed (e.g. "Th: Jefferson", "Go: Washington").
8. If written in 3rd person (name in text of letter; e.g. "Th: Jefferson sends his thanks to..."), enter after code (e.g. ALS in 3rd person).
9. If language is other than English, specify after code (e.g. ALS in French).
10. If name is written in text as in a receipt, deed, will, &c, (e.g. "Received of Josiah Bartlett 9-5-9..." enter after code (ADS in text).
11. Note significant watermarks, especially with dates. Enter after code. (e.g. DS with 1776 American watermark).
12. Note if document or manuscript is a carbon copy, letterpress copy (ink transfer from original), a fair copy (a complete copy in author's hand), a true copy (exact copy of original in another person's hand), a contemporary copy (a true copy known to have been made in another person's hand at or about the same time as the original), or a retained draft by the author. Enter after code (e.g. AQS, fair copy).
13. Note name of photographer after photo code in square brackets (e.g. PS [Mathew Brady]).
14. If only a signature, note if it is clipped from a letter or document or in some other form.
15. Note any other significant features of the document or manuscript not noted above.

Number of pages:

The number of sides of a leaf or sheet exhibiting writing. The number should be to the nearest $\frac{1}{4}$ (e.g. $3\frac{1}{4}$ pp). Note if the

writing is on separate leaves (e.g. 1^{1/2}pp, separate leaves), or note if writing is only on one page of each leaf (e.g. 2pp, on 1st and 3rd leaves).

Dimensions:

1. Record the size of the manuscript or document to the nearest inch (height X width). If any dimension is less than 3", record to the nearest 1/2". (Option: Measurements may be recorded in centimeters).
2. Note any shape at variance from a rectangle.

Place:

Indicate town, state or country. Use United States Postal Service abbreviations for states. If place is not indicated but is revealed by content of the document or manuscript, place in square brackets, e.g. [New Salem, IL]. If the place is unknown write n.p.

Date:

1. Give Year, month, day (e.g. 1809 Feb. 12).
2. If date is unknown, indicate with n.d.
3. If year is unknown, indicate with n.y. (e.g. n.y. Mar. 9).
4. Estimated dates based on internal evidence (show in square brackets).

[1872?]	Probable date
[ca.1872]	Approximate date
[not before 1872]	Terminal date
[not after 1872]	Terminal date
[1872/1873]	One or the other
[1872-1898]	Between these dates
[187-]	Decade certain
[187-?]	Decade uncertain

5. Note presence of seals embossed in paper, mounted embossed seals, wax seals, embossed and adhesive revenue stamps. Enter after date. (e.g. 1832 April 1. Mounted blue embossed stellate seal of U.S. Navy present).

Address:

Note addressee and if address portion is on envelope, wrapper or folded letter. Note if holographed or franked and pertinent philatelic features (circular date stamp, other postal stamps, rate, adhesive stamps, handwritten postmarks,).

Grading of Manuscripts and Documents:

The grade of each document or manuscript should be entered after the address followed by an enumeration of the defects.

Extra fine. Absolutely new in appearance without any folds, soiling, wear or fading of ink.

Very fine. New in appearance with only minimal wear and minor folds. If old rag paper, slight browning is acceptable.

Fine. Attractive with sharp clear wording. May have slight localized defects not affecting the text including foxing, stains, wear, abrasions, very slight browning, minimal archival repairs and minimal fading of ink.

Very good. May show slight generalized defects including foxing, stains, wear, slight browning and abrasions. Folds may be weak and slightly worn. Minor trimming and the absence of very small fragments or portions may be present if not affecting the text. Minor archival repairs may be present. Ink may be slightly faded but text entirely legible.

Good. Well worn and a few words may be difficult to read. The following may be present: Moderate browning, minor fold breaks, moderate generalized foxing, staining, wear or abrasions. Moderate portions or fragments may be missing, not affecting the text. There may be moderate archival repairs and trimming, not affecting the text and moderate fading of ink.

Fair. May be well worn with marked browning, moderate brittleness or chipping. Folds may be broken or worn. There may be marked foxing, staining, abrasions and fading of ink which may affect the legibility of a few words. Trimming may be present and large portions or fragments may be missing, minimally affecting the text.

Poor. Extremely worn. Words and portions of the text may be missing. May have complete fold separations, marked browning, brittleness, chipping, abrasions, foxing, stains. Ink may be badly faded making reading of text difficult.

Defects:

All defects of manuscripts and documents must be noted unless they are trivial, barely visible and do not affect the appearance or value. Note particularly if they affect the text or signature(s). List all the defects following the Grade.

Paper or other writing medium

Browning. Darkening of paper, “Age toning”, “yellowing”. Note degree (slight, moderate, marked). Note discoloration from previous matting.

Brittleness. As evidenced by fragility (marginal chips and breaks in material). Note degree (slight, moderate, marked).

Folds. Note if prominent or if they do not flatten with ease. Note if folds are weakened, partially broken or separated (extent). If repaired, note extent and whether archival paper, Japanese paper, plastic transparent tape or other materials were used.

Foxing, water stains, dampstaining, soiling, other stains. Specify type, location and degree (slight, moderate, marked).

Missing portions or fragments, separations, holes, tears and trimming. Describe extent of damage and any loss of text. If repaired, note nature of materials used and extent of repairs. Note if there is any trimming (reduction from original size) and if narrow margins were created.

Wear. General, worn margins and abrasions (slight, moderate, marked).

Bleaching from exposure to light and chemicals. Note degree (slight, moderate, marked).

Mounting. Indicate if partially or totally mounted to other material. Note if there are mounting traces, their location, degree and on which surfaces.

Inlaying, backing, laminating and silking. Note if document is inlaid, backed, silked or laminated. Note condition of these repairs and the nature of the backing (Japanese paper, silk, &c) and lamination materials (paper, silk, plastic, &c).

Framed manuscripts. Note if not examined outside of frame and mat.

Photographs. Note if creased (degree), evidence of oxidation (degree), abrasions and other defects.

Seals. Note defects of or absence of wax and mounted embossed seals.

Encapsulation. Note if present and type of envelope (e.g. Mylar).

Collodion coating. When used for reinforcing, this should be noted as it is destructive of paper.

Decidification. Note if done and, if known, the date of the process.

Inks or other writing materials

Types of ink. Note particularly felt tip pen inks since they are very unstable and fade rapidly in the presence of light.

Smudging and splattering of inks. Note degree of these defects.

Bleeding of handwritten and typewritten manuscripts. This often happened to letters when letterpress copies were made. Note degree.

Fading of ink. The degree should be noted (slight, moderate, marked).

Ink erosion. Old acidic inks may cause erosion and holes in paper. These should be noted.

Show-through of ink. This should be noted (slight, moderate, marked).

Ink transfer. Transfer of ink from folding a letter before drying, or after being folded in a damp state, should be noted.

Rubbing of penciled writing other defects in penciled and typed documents should be noted.

Description:

This follows defects and essentially describes the content of the document or manuscript, particularly as it relates to the author. Observations of historical significance should be noted. Square brackets should be used within quotes to point out corrections or explain portions of the text (e.g. “the guns were fired at Ft. Sumpter [Sumter]”; “Secretary of State [Robert] Smith &c”). The length of the description is optional.

It is suggested that dealers in manuscripts and documents include the more important descriptive codes and abbreviations used here in their lists or catalogues. Most dealers already use some of these descriptions for the convenience of their customers. It is further suggested that *The Manuscript Society Criteria for Describing Manuscripts and Documents* be made available to their customers, upon request, by those dealers subscribing to these criteria. It is hoped that the criteria will become generally used as a standard for dealers and collectors alike. As often happens with new systems, as evidenced by the revisions of AACR and APPM, changes and revisions of these criteria may become

necessary in time. We welcome comments and suggestions in this regard.

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