



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Grimwade Centre for
Cultural Materials
Conservation



CONDITION REPORTING

Capturing the current condition of an artefact is an important aspect of documentation. Condition reporting is a valuable tool that assists to better understand objects and inform the housing, handling, environmental and conservation needs of objects in your collection.

A condition report is a detailed physical assessment of the condition of an object. Condition reports can be undertaken digitally or on paper.

WHY CONDITION REPORT?

- The main purpose of a condition report is to document an objects current condition so any changes in its condition can be tracked over time.
- Condition reports also enhance the interpretation of the object or collection by the client, owner, custodian, or authorised agent and society as a whole.
- This detailed documentation also assists to formulate exhibition and other types of use and access.
- Condition reports can inform the need for conservation intervention

WHEN TO CONDITION REPORT

Condition reports can be undertaken at many times on a single item:

- When it enters the collection
- Before and after being on display
- Before and after going out on loan
- When a loan arrives at or departs from your institution
- A conservator will complete a condition report before and after undertaking treatment also

RESOURCES



reCollections – Caring for Collections Across Australia – Managing Collection, Heritage Collections Council, available online:
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/32wi>



Visual Glossary, Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Materials, available online:
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/z2wi>



Condition Reports, Museums & Galleries of New South Wales, available online:
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/q2wi>

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

- Condition report template - digital or paper copy
- Pencil - pens should be avoided around collection objects
- Gloves (if required for handling) - well fitting, preferably nitrile
- Good lighting - may need lamp/torch
- Magnifier/microscope
- Tape measure - soft fabric is preferred
- Digital camera
- Clean, uncluttered, stable work surface that is big enough to accommodate your object
- Supports for 3D small objects to prevent rolling, eg: leather weights, small beanbags made from washed cotton fabric, foam

INFORMATION TO DOCUMENT

- Type of object – i.e., ceramic, watercolour, textile, book
- Title of object – if any
- Registration number
- Date and place of manufacture – if known
- Dimensions – Height x Width x Depth
- Number of parts
- Inscriptions – record any words, lettering or numbers
- Materials – i.e., ceramic, watercolour, wool, paper, oil paint, wood
- Methods of manufacture – i.e., carved, woven, painted, engraved
- Any damage or deterioration, fragile or unstable areas, missing parts, unoriginal material – i.e., crack, stain, hole, faded, dust, corrosion, mould growth
- Location of the damage or deterioration. Be specific – i.e., centre of front surface, bottom of handle, inner right cuff
- Previous repairs – these could be modern conservation treatments or historical repairs
- Name of the examiner and date the condition report took place
- Take photographs – Photographs are an extremely useful accompaniment to a condition report. It is best practice to take a photograph of all sides of the object, and close-up, detail photos of specific damage.

CONDITION REPORTING TIPS

- Locate or create a condition report template that is appropriate for your collection. Save a master copy of this template in a safe place.
- Keep your terminology consistent throughout the report.
- Looking using different sources/angles of light, i.e., raking light, is helpful to show changes in surface appearance and surface degradation
- Locate damages on a photo using a Mylar overlay or drawing program on an iPad