



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

Grimwade Centre for  
Cultural Materials  
Conservation



# WRITING REGISTRATION NUMBERS

Each item in the collection should be assigned a unique registration number as part of the cataloguing process. It is important this number stays with the object, the best way of ensuring this happens is to physically number each item.

There are many factors to consider when physically numbering items. The registration number should be durable, but also removable, and the numbering method should not damage the object in any way.

Some objects are good candidates for having a registration number written directly onto their surface. Others are more suited to their registration number being written on a swing tag and tied to the object or being written on cotton tape and stitched to the object. The suitability of the method of application should be assessed on a case-by-case basis depending on an object's materials and condition.

## DIFFERENT NUMBERING METHODS

- Number written directly on surface of object with a graphite pencil.  
Suitable for items such as:
  - Photographs
  - Unframed works on paper
  - Books
  - Posters
- Clear varnish barrier layer applied to surface then number written on top.  
Suitable for items such as:
  - Metals
  - Ceramics
  - Glass
  - Stone
  - Bone
  - Ivory
  - Paintings with no hanging system (panel paintings, stretched canvases)
  - Some wood

- Number written on a swing tag and tied to object. Suitable for items such as:
  - All object types
  - Fragile items
  - Framed paintings
  - Framed works on paper
  - Paintings with a hanging system
  - Plastics and rubber
  - Leather
  - Wood
  - Basketry
  - Natural Science
- Number written on cotton tape and stitched to object. Suitable for items such as:
  - Textiles
  - Hats
  - Basketry
  - Accessories
- Old paper and metal tags that have faded or discoloured should be replaced with new labels. The Collection Manager will need to ascertain if the old label has historical value and should be kept. If the old label is removed and retained, place into a Ziplock bag and keep with the object.
- Practice using the different pens on blank paper before using them on your object.
- If you make a mistake using the varnish and ink method, a small amount of acetone on a cotton swab will remove any varnish layers and ink.

### NUMBERING KIT CONTENTS

- Gloves (nitrile)
- Graphite pencils – 2B is softest
- Pencil sharpener
- Mars eraser
- Black archival ink pen – e.g. Sakura Pigma Micron pen, Artline Drawing System pen
- Black and white coloured good quality artist's ink
- Dip pen with spare nibs
- Small paintbrush
- Paraloid B-72 (synthetic resin) in acetone (available from conservation suppliers)
- Paraloid B-67 (synthetic resin) in white spirits (available from conservation suppliers)
- Small bottle of acetone
- Cotton wool
- Bamboo skewers
- 100% cotton tape
- 100% cotton string
- Archival quality swing tags
- 100% cotton thread – white and black
- Sewing needle
- Scissors
- Microfibre cloth

### APPLYING REGISTRATION NUMBERS

- Number written directly on surface of object with a graphite pencil:
  - Write directly on surface using soft pressure.
- Clear varnish barrier layer applied to surface then number written on top:
  - Avoid painted surfaces as the varnish may solubilise original material.
  - Apply a small rectangle of B-72 varnish slightly larger than number you intend to write. Allow to dry.
  - Use dip pen and black or white ink to write the accession number using soft pressure. Allow to dry. Use black ink on light coloured items and white ink on dark coloured items.
  - Apply a layer of B-67 varnish over the top. Allow to dry.
- Number written on a swing tag and tied to object:
  - Write number on tag.
  - Thread hole in label with cotton tape/string.
  - Tie tag to stable area of object.
- Number written on cotton tape and stitched to object:
  - Write number on cotton tape using archival ink pen.
  - Iron label on 'cotton' setting to set ink.
  - Submerge in container of water and swirl around. Remove.
  - Iron label to dry.
  - Turn raw edges.
  - Stitch to stable area of object using a few loose tacking stitches in each corner of the label.

### TIPS FOR NUMBERING COLLECTION MATERIAL

- Write registration numbers in discreet locations that will not be visible if the item is on display.
- Keep the numbering location consistent – for example bottom right corner on the reverse for photographs or inner left cuff for shirts. This will minimise handling when looking for the number.
- Choose a clean area to apply the number to and wipe the surface with a soft cloth or soft brush to remove dust prior to application.
- For plastic and rubber objects always use tie on registration labels as any inks or varnishes will damage the surface.
- Use an archival pen to ensure the accession numbers do not fade over time.
- Scale your registration number to the size of the object:
  - Small to medium sized object: 3-5mm high
  - Large sized object: 5-8mm high.
- Avoid sticky labels, post-it-notes or paper with sticky tape as they can stain and leave damaging residue on objects. Adhesives used in white sticky labels are prone to failing and pose a risk of object disassociation.

### RESOURCES



Small Museums Cataloguing Manual, Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) Victoria, available online: <http://go.unimelb.edu.au/8hwi>



Labelling and Marking Museum Objects Booklet, Collections Trust, available online: <http://go.unimelb.edu.au/2hwi>



Numbering Collection Items, Western Australian Museum, available online: <http://go.unimelb.edu.au/4hwi>