

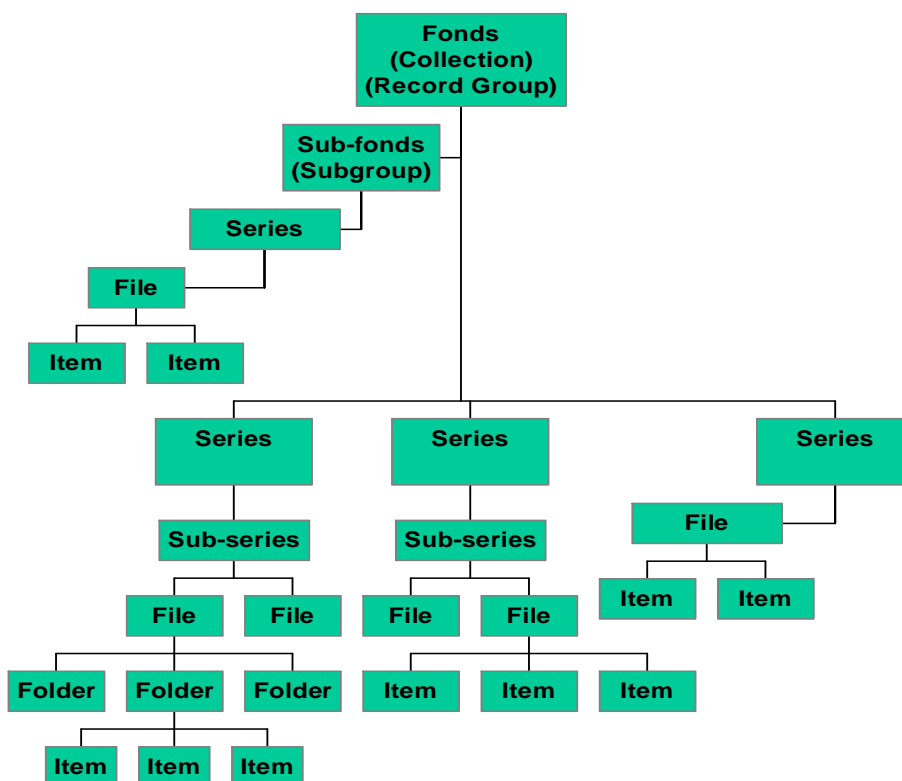
# Physical Processing

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## Arrangement

### General Principles

Archival notions about arranging collection materials are predicated on the linked precepts of *Respect des fonds* and *original order*. The first precept tells us to have a care in maintaining together the whole of the materials created by an entity, along with evidence of the context of their creation. The second one instructs us that, in dealing with this organic whole, we need to preserve the existing order and interrelationships (to whatever extent they still exist) among the physical units comprising the materials, whether series, files, or items. This organic order is the true intellectual basis for arrangement of collection materials, and is the objective we ought to be pursuing when we arrange them. Archival theory generally conceives of this organic whole as a hierarchical structure made up of a number of interrelated parts with clear parent-child relationships. The representation of this structure is the objective of both arrangement and description. The International General Standard for Archival Description (ISAD(G)) depicts this hierarchy in the following manner:



How does this play out in the real-world act of processing? Archival theory moves in a clear, whole-to-part, sequence as it considers the nature and organization of records. First, understand

the whole of the materials. Then, identify the major organic groups (subgroups, series) that comprise the whole, and present them in a way that expresses their natural relationships. In looking at arrangement in this top-down way, one sees that the work at the top of the chain is much more important than the work at the bottom. Why is this significant? Since one of our principal objectives is to process collection materials as *economically* as possible, it only makes good sense to focus our attention on getting the most bang for the processing buck. We can achieve that end by doing less work at the bottom of the chain, where tasks multiply greatly but are each less significant, and more work at the top, where each unit of input produces a greater effect.

*In normal or typical situations, then, the physical arrangement of materials in archival groups and manuscript collections should not take place below the series level.* This means that the principal physical units that comprise the series—files and/or folders—are the lowest level of collection materials that we should routinely be manipulating. With regard to the “typical” collection, there should be no manipulation of individual items solely for the sake of improving their literal arrangement. Nor should weeding, conservation, or photo housing tasks be performed automatically at a sub-file level. Ultimate decisions about the intensity and level at which such tasks will be performed should be dictated by the perceived importance and research value of the collection materials. Exceptionally important and exceptionally disorganized materials may certainly demand work at a lower hierarchical level. But, failing these sorts of exceptions, a given collection—and especially large, modern collections—should not receive arrangement work below the file level.

## **Procedures**

As suggested in the chart above, arrange the collection materials in a hierarchical fashion, working from the top down. First, identify the major sections or components into which the collection naturally (or, failing that, *logically*) divides, whether they happen to be subgroups or series. Organize each of those components into their own constituent sections, whether series or files. Continue the process until you have reached the level of individual file folders or other filing units (e.g., volumes).

In *typical* projects, arrangement below this level should not be necessary. It should not be necessary, and is generally not justifiable, to manipulate individual items within folders or other filing units. However, if particular series or filing units are especially disorganized, are especially valuable or likely to generate high levels of use, or—as in the case of *minutes*—have content that depends upon their correct filing sequence, then you may decide to perform work in those components at a more detailed level. When in doubt, discuss the matter with your supervisor. In typical situations, however, expect only to riffle through the contents of file folders, in a superficial way, to identify or verify:

- Accuracy or usefulness of file title
- Span dates
- Serious preservation problems
- *Sizeable and obvious* glumps of duplicates, weedable printeds, or non-archival material

## Weeding and Appraisal

### General Principles

Users of archival collections are measurably helped when the research materials are not larded with junk or with duplication. Having said that, the identification, removal, and disposition of unnecessary material takes time and effort that could be used for other tasks. It is therefore important that this activity is approached from a cost-benefit perspective, with weeding and appraisal efforts focused on getting the most bang for the buck.

### Removal

We can almost always expect that significant *high-level* appraisal work (e.g., work at the subgroup and series levels) has been performed by the archivist(s) who acquired the materials. Processing archivists are therefore usually concerned with weeding activity at file and item levels. As a general rule, in order to achieve the greatest economies, *do not weed collection materials at a lower level than that at which you perform arrangement work*. In most situations, this means that weeding will take place on a file or folder level, and not at an item level. If you are already arranging items within a folder, however, it makes sense to weed out nests of duplicate copies and things that are obviously without enduring value.

### Disposition

Materials removed from collections must be disposed of in accordance with provisions in the donor agreement form or the records schedule. If the weeded materials may not be discarded, inform the acquisitions archivist that they have been segregated and need to be dealt with. If MHS has been given disposition authority, either add the weeded materials to the pallet of materials to be shredded, or else simply discard or recycle them. Most government records need not be shredded, the exceptions being items with a collectible look (especially older items and those bearing notable signatures). Manuscripts are less easily categorized. Publications and commonly available materials can simply be discarded; correspondence and older things with a collectible air should be shredded. Our goals here are to avoid angering our donors and to prevent the weeded materials from ever being re-donated to the Society.

Transfer of weeded items to another repository is also an option, though it must be an exception that is only infrequently resorted to because of the amount of time typically expended in doing so.

### Reporting

Complete a disposition memorandum for weedings that result in a measurable shrinking of the collection size. A disposition form template is located in the Department network folder for *Forms and Labels*. A printed copy of the completed form is filed in the collection's accession file; the electronic version is not retained.

## Preservation and Conservation

### General Principles

Preservation is very time consuming. Therefore, we will rely to a great extent on our storage area environmental controls to carry the conservation burden. Your preservation recommendations—even the recommendation to refolder papers or remove metal fasteners—must be defensible on the basis of the collection’s research value and the degree of physical deterioration of the records.

As a processor you will not do elaborate preservation work. Some of the procedures you *may* carry out include reboxing and refolding records, removing paper clips and rubber bands, flattening documents, cleaning documents with wallpaper cleaner, making photocopies of fragile documents, and using various kinds of special enclosures, such as photoprint and negative envelopes and polyester L-sleeves. Supplies and equipment for preservation are available in the archival supplies room.

In general, *do not perform any conservation tasks at a hierarchical level lower than that at which you perform arrangement work*. For example, if your arrangement work stops at the series level, then conservation work should stop there, as well. Therefore, the following conservation tasks represent exceptional, rather than typical, actions.

### Housing

*Boxes.* For the sake of long-term preservation, records are housed in acid-neutral boxes, usually record center cartons (bacases) or gray manuscript boxes (Hollingers). Both types come in several sizes. Reboxing collection materials into acid-neutral containers is the only rehousing action that is universally applied; all others are applied selectively.

Generally speaking, *manuscript collections* housed in Hollinger boxes meet several tests: (1) they are smaller than three or four cubic feet; (2) they are quite rich in informational content or monetary value, (3) they house collections that are not expected to increase in size; (4) they comprise a form or medium that needs greater physical protection; and (5) they are expected to attract above-average levels of use. The great majority of collections are therefore housed in bacases of various sizes and are stored in the archival stacks (Room 205).

The great majority of *government records* are housed in bacases or oversize/double oversize bacases, even if they are only several folders (particularly if they were produced by an agency for which we hold other records). Hollinger boxes are used mainly for (1) series of photographs that would be too heavy if placed in bacases; (2) small series (several folders) that are either the only records we hold from a given agency or are very high use; (3) or annual reports. Other special housing solutions that may be used, depending on the material, include map case drawers, filing of very large volumes loose on the stack shelves, map boxes (for rolled oversize items), extremely oversize items in folders loose on the stack shelves, and card file boxes/drawers.

Whether bacases or Hollingers, boxes containing folders should always be filled to capacity so as to prevent collection materials from slumping and curling. If the unfilled space is much larger

than the thickness of your hand, fill the void with some sort of spacer—smaller boxes, bent-up folders, etc. Just as important, do not overfill boxes so that folders cannot be removed and replaced easily. Doing so will frustrate users and cause damage to the collection materials as they are repeatedly used.

*Folders.* As a general rule, do not refolder unless the original folders are in poor condition or the collection is supremely valuable. When refoldering is elected, it should be performed on a folder-by-folder basis, that is, replacing only the poor folders and not *all* the folders in the series or file. Folders should be replaced if they are brittle, torn, or badly overstuffed. If its label is falling off, either reattach the label (stapling usually works) or replace the folder. When refoldering, use legal-size folders if more than a few items are that size, or if the series or file is already housed in folders of that size. Put into each folder only enough items so that all can stand up straight along the bottom of the folder, filling it (depending on where it is creased) but not bulging. Badly overstuffed existing folders should be broken into sensibly-sized chunks, but it is usually not necessary to do any subsequent rearrangement of the items in the file. See the *Labeling* section for information on labeling folders.

*Photographs.* Do not, as a general rule, remove photographic items from the files of which they form a part. There is no reason to bring together photographs from a variety of separate locations simply because of their form. Remember that an unidentified photo does not have more inherent value than any other unidentified or miscellaneous item, and they should be weeded aggressively, assuming that you already have reason to be doing item-level work within that folder. Multiple prints within a single folder can be agglomerated into one or more unbuffered photo envelopes. Film negatives can be placed in polyethylene negative sleeves, and slides in the multiple-window viewing sleeves.

*Fragile items.* Torn or very fragile items of notable value can be placed in either bond paper folders or polyester L-sleeves. Because of their lower cost, the bond paper folders are the preferable choice in most situations, though the L-sleeves will better protect items that are truly falling apart, or which may receive heavy usage. Bound items in a fragile state can be rehoused in either acid-neutral wrappers (made of .020 folder stock) or phase boxes. Since both of these must be custom-made by the paper treatment lab staff, discuss the advisability of this alternative with your supervisor. If only a small fraction of the volume's pages have been written upon, a space-saving alternative is to disbind the volume and place the retained pages in a file folder. A group of clippings in a file can simply be placed in a bond folder to segregate them from other materials.

### **Item-level Preservation Tasks**

As a general rule, conservation tasks will not be performed at a hierarchical level below that at which arrangement work is performed. The effect of this is that, for most processing projects, the archivist will not be closely examining collection materials within individual file folders for preservation problems. However, in the course of casually flipping through folders to determine or verify basic content information, preservation issues may be observed. If the issues are *significant*, and especially if the affected items are particularly valuable, the archivist should either perform the necessary work or else complete a Condition of Collections form identifying

the issue as a target for conservation work at a later date. Following are some common preservation conditions that might necessitate conservation work.

*Metal fasteners.* As a general rule, do not remove staples, brads, paper clips, or other ferrous or nonferrous metal fasteners. An exception is any badly rusted or corroded metal that is clearly damaging the paper. In such cases, replace the existing fasteners with staples, or with bond folders if the item comprises more than a few leaves, or simply leave the pages unfastened.

*Fragile paper.* Included here are a number of situations in which paper appears to be in a fragile state due either to its inherent composition or to damage it has suffered. Although photocopying is frequently identified as a solution, remember that this applies primarily to materials with high research value. One must always weigh the costs (in time) against the benefits when deciding to photocopy materials. Here are the most common situations:

- *High-lignin paper.* Items yellowing because of acid-producing reactions caused by poor paper stock may or may not require action. Once stored in good environmental conditions, the chemical reaction responsible will slow down considerably. Therefore, they should only be treated if they are becoming so discolored as to jeopardize legibility, or if the paper has been so weakened that it is starting to fall apart. In such cases the items should be photocopied and the originals removed.
- *Torn items.* If the items are already in separate pieces, or likely to become so with a little more handling, then place them in a bond folder or an L-sleeve, depending upon their fragility. An L-sleeve gives better protection and more usability, but is a costlier alternative. The item can also be photocopied in lieu of retaining the original, if the original form has no inherent value. Ignore less serious tears and abrasions.
- *Fading originals.* Onionskin, letterpress, thermograph, and spirit duplicator copies tend to keep fading over time, so photocopying is the only long term solution. However, since modern collections tend to be littered with them, such materials should not be copied unless they have compelling informational value.

*Rubber bands.* Rubber bands always dry out over time and end up sticking to the paper they surround. Therefore, they should routinely be removed whenever they are encountered.

*Mold.* Inactive mold spores are unlikely to pose further problems, since the records will henceforth be stored in an environment that will inhibit their resurgence. Active mold infestations, however, are an issue for both collection materials and the health of their users. Report active mold evidence to your supervisor.

*Animal droppings.* These signs of animal infestations are ubiquitous in older collections. While trace amounts can be ignored, rodent droppings, in particular, may be a real health hazard and notable amounts should be removed whenever encountered. Protect yourself with a dust mask and gloves.

## Labeling Containers

### Boxes

Every box of processed collection materials must have a permanent MHS label. The 3x4-inch MHS label is a unit label: all labels across a given collection contain the same information—excepting box numbers. *[As of November 2008, the use of pre-printed MHS labels for manuscripts (blue) and State Archives (green) will be discontinued once the current supply is exhausted. Henceforth, single sheets of 6 foil back 3x4-inch labels will be used.]* The standard pieces of information are: collection name, collection title, and box number. In addition, catalog numbers must be included for “P” collections. Other pieces of information—e.g., accession number, box contents—are optional and used only as required by some unusual circumstance. Here are samples for an ALPHA collection and a “P” manuscript collection:

MHS MANUSCRIPTS COLLECTIONS
SCHOOL NURSE ORGANIZATION OF MINNESOTA.
SNOM Records.
Box 3
MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MHS MANUSCRIPTS COLLECTIONS
WOOD, IRENE K.
Irene K. Wood Papers and Weaving Sample Books.
<b>P2424</b>
Box 1
MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

To save time in larger collections, use the Envelopes and Labels tool in Microsoft Word to create a page of folder labels (Avery 5161 format) with the appropriate unit label content on each. The printed labels can then be affixed to blank box labels, to avoid typing each label individually. For this purpose, use the foil-backed labels that are kept with the archival supplies. Templates for the labels are available in the *Forms and Labels* network folder.

*Locator Labels.* ALPHA manuscripts and government records boxes all bear a locator label, in addition to the box labels described above, which identifies their exact physical location in the archival stacks and which is printed in large, bold characters so that the locator numbers can be read from a reasonable distance. The four parts of the label, separated by periods, are from left to right: row number, section number, shelf number, position on shelf:

**145.E.17.5**

(Example of locator label)

*Restricted Labels.* When dealing with restricted materials, a pink RESTRICTED label must be added to the outside of the box.

**RESTRICTED**

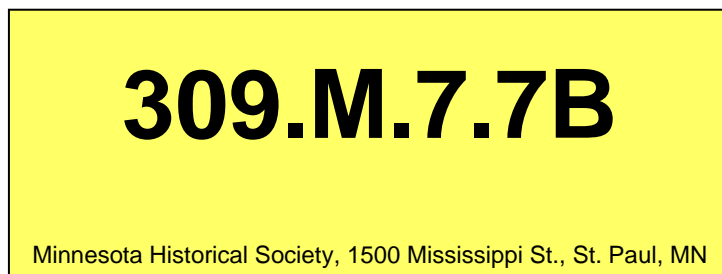
(Example of restricted label)

*Positioning labels on boxes:*

- On full-width Hollinger boxes, box labels are positioned on the front (end) of the box, below the flap.
- On half-width Hollinger boxes, box labels are positioned on the front (end) of the box, below the flap, and the excess wraps around onto the adjacent long side. Try to keep the content information onto the left portion of the label as much as possible.
- On bacases (15x12x10) and oversize (20x15x10) boxes, box labels are on the front (long) side of the box, in the lower right corner, with locator label placed directly above the box label.
- On half-oversize boxes (20x15x5), box labels are on the front (long) side of the box, in the lower right corner, with locator label placed directly to the left of the box label.
- On double-oversize boxes, (33x19x5) box labels are on the short end of the box, in the lower right corner, with locator label placed directly to the left of the box label.
- Restricted labels are placed directly above the 3 x 4 box contents label, except in the case of half-oversize and double-oversize boxes, where it is positioned directly to the left of the box contents label (so as to not be covered by the box lid).



- Labels for the off site (remote) storage location at 1500 Mississippi Street are fluorescent yellow and should include the following information at the bottom of the label: Minnesota Historical Society, 1500 Mississippi St., St. Paul, MN.



(Example of locator label for 1500 Mississippi Street)

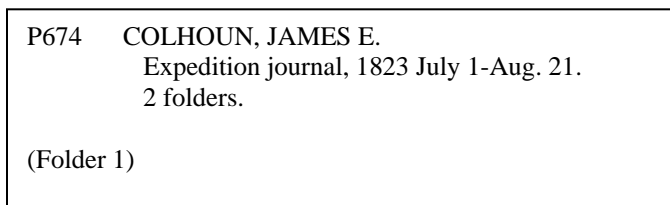
### Folders

In most situations, folders should be labeled—*darkly*, so that they are easily read—in pencil, on the upper left portion of the folder tab. Usually, the folder label need not include the collection name and need only contain enough information (1) to distinguish it from the other materials in the same box (since we assume that the user will only have access to one box at a time) and (2) to easily correlate it to its description in the collection inventory. This usually means recording the file title and span dates, as well as the folder number if the file comprises multiple folders (e.g., *1 of 3* or *1/3*, etc.). In future, if the series is expected to grow, a single number (e.g., *1, 2, 3*, etc.) will eliminate the need later to correct the numbering sequence (*1 of 7* instead of *1 of 3*).

However, in boxes that contain more than one collection (or series, if labels in more than one series could be the same, e.g., minutes or correspondence), the collection (or series) name should be included in the folder label. In the case of government records, the folders in the last box of any collection that may later hold another collection should include the collection name. Also, when more than one collection or government record series occupies the same box, the processor should place a separator before each such unit to clearly distinguish it from the other materials. A pressboard file divider containing the name of the unit usually works well.

### Letter or Legal-Size Folders in Shared Boxes

The main exception to handwritten folder labels occurs with very small manuscript collections that *share a box* with other small collections. In that situation, each folder in the collection should have a typed label clearly identifying the folder contents and distinguishing it from the other collections in the box. Use foil-back labels found with the processing supplies. The standard format for such a label is:



If, as occurs in rare cases, you need to create a larger number of typed folder labels, use the sheets of foil-backed labels noted above. A template is available in the *Forms and Labels* network folder.

### **Oversize Folders Filed in Shared Boxes**

For *folders filed in shared half-height, oversize, or double-oversize boxes*, place a printed foil-backed label in the lower right corner of the folder. The locator number of the host box is indicated on each label, as are the name of the collection and the folder title. The standard format for such a label is:

<p><b>138.E.4.8</b></p> <p>Mould and McNichol (St. Paul, Minn.) Architectural drawings for residence designed for Mrs. Robbins, 1887. 7 items.</p>
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### **Oversize Folders Filed in Map Drawers**

For *oversize folders filed in map drawers*, place a foil-back folder label in the lower right corner of the folder. It need only contain the catalog/location number of the oversize item(s), unless other information is needed to distinguish the folder from others in the same drawer:

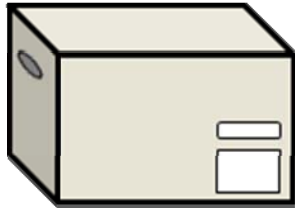
<p><b>102.A.27</b></p> <p>Folder 1</p>
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<p><b>+248</b></p>
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## Appendix

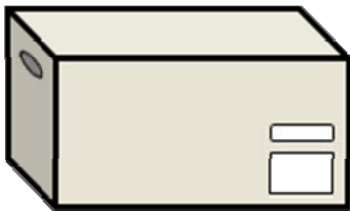
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### Containers - Four standard box sizes



#### Regular

- 15 x 12 x 10"
- Holds 1.0 cubic foot
- Used for letter or legal size vertical files



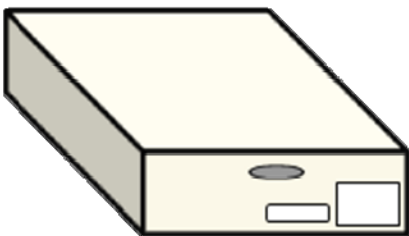
#### Oversize

- 19 x 15 x 10"
- Holds 1.5 cubic feet
- Used for oversize volumes stored vertically or flat



#### Half-height

- 19 x 15 x 5"
- Holds 0.75 cubic feet
- Used for oversize volumes or oversize folders (15 x 19 ½") stored flat



#### Double Oversize

- 20 x 33 x 5"
- Holds 1.5 cubic feet
- Used for large format flat storage (19 x 31 ½" folders)

### Volumes:

Calculate cubic footage: Multiply the length of the volume in number of inches by the width of the volume in number of inches by the height of the volume in number of inches and divide the total by 1,728.

$$\text{Length X Width X Height} / 1,728 = \text{Cubic footage}$$

## Locator Numbering System

Boxes are shelved back to front, bottom to top, left to right.

Locators consist of a 4-part number that includes the number for the stack row, range, shelf, and slot where each box is stored.

Stack Rows: 101-155

Ranges: A-L

Shelves: 1-20

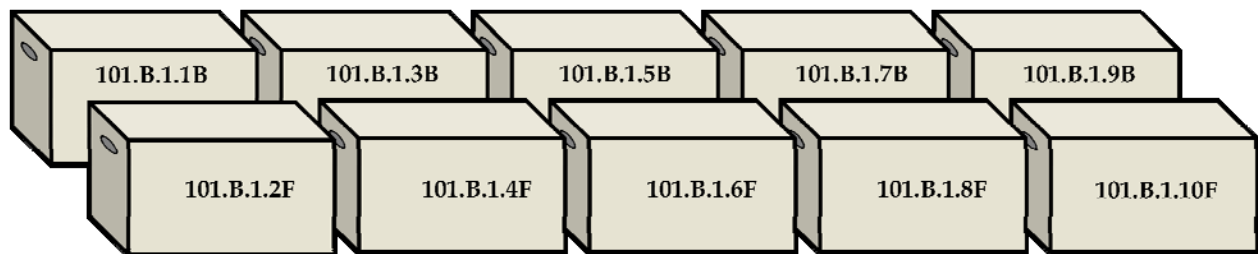
Slots (90' shelf):

Regular: 1B – 10F (*B = Back; F=Front*)

Oversize: 1B – 8F

Half-Height: 1B-1 – 8F-2

Double Oversize: 1 – 8

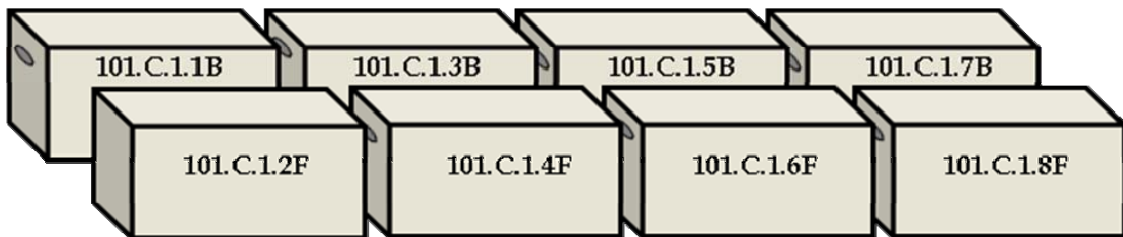


## Shelving and Locator Sequence (90' shelf)

### 10 Regular Boxes



### 8 Oversize Boxes



### 16 Half-height Boxes



### 8 Double Oversize

