

## Recording Objects in Archaeology

Recording objects, whether on site or in the lab, is a central archaeological activity. It is important that recording is both systematic and carefully chosen to suit the object you are studying and the location where you are recording it. The following two activities that will help you understand how and why archaeologists record objects.

### Activity 1 What should be recorded?

Match up the categories of information that need to be recorded on the left hand side, with the information on the right hand side.

Excavation	Sandra Wilson
Context	5.1 x 0.8 x 0.8 cm
Finds number	Weston Villa
Date of excavation	Almost complete, cut from a sheep metatarsal (identified by Sarah Smith) to form a slender tube, decorated with scratched cross shapes.
Name of recorder	n/a
Short description	7/11/1993
Longer description	Sent for drawing 12/3/1995
Length, width, breadth in cm	Worked bone
Weight	[4178]
Material	WV93Bone103
Illustration	Bone Needle Case

### Answers:

#### Excavation - Weston Villa

Excavation – This is the name of the excavation, which is often identifiable as the name of a place

#### Context - [4178]

Context – The context number is unique within each excavation and allows the object to be geographically located, and dated. It is identified by being placed in a circle (in hand writing) or in square brackets (in typed text).

**Finds number - WV93Bone103**

Finds number – Most important objects are given a finds number by the specialist examining them, to track them within their own recording systems. The number may relate to the site, year of excavation and find type.

**Date of excavation - 7/11/1993**

Date of excavation – The date of excavation is important as a cross check if other information such as the context number is copied incorrectly.

**Name of recorder - Sandra Wilson**

Name of recorder – If there are any queries the person who filled in the sheet can be traced

**Short description - Bone Needle Case**

Short description – A two or three word general description

**Longer description - Almost complete, cut from a sheep metatarsal (identified by Sarah Smith) to form a slender tube, decorated with scratched cross shapes.**

Longer description – This can vary from a couple of sentences to a short paragraph, and may mention the shape, the completeness and the manufacturing technique, as well as any other relevant information such as decoration or evidence for use. There may be space in this part of the recording form for a sketch of the object if this is necessary. Some objects such as this may be looked at by two specialists, and this should be recorded.

**Length, width, breadth in cm - 5.1 x 0.8 x 0.8 cm**

Length, width, breadth in cm – These may also be taken in mm.

**Weight - n/a**

Weight – This is not always applicable and is more often used for bulk finds such as pottery shards.

**Material - Worked bone**

Material – As well as categories such as ceramic, metal, and bone there are also categories such as worked bone which are looked at by a small finds specialist.

**Illustration - Sent for drawing 12/3/1995**

Illustration – It is important to note whether the object will be drawn or photographed, and this also keeps track of the current location of the object.

## Activity 2 Choosing the appropriate recording technique.

In this activity, you have to choose the most appropriate recording techniques for these three archaeological scenarios. It is presumed that you will already have noted the excavation name, the context number, and date.

A) During an excavation you uncover a complete, but extremely fragile glass vessel. Before lifting it, you decide to record it immediately in-situ in case it falls apart before it can be analysed in the lab. What recording techniques do you use?

- Digital photography
- Short description
- Measuring length, width and breadth
- Profile gauge to record the vessel shape

### Feedback

On the context sheet you would write a **short description** of the glass (e.g. complete glass vessel), and include **measurements** as best you can take them. You wouldn't use a profile gauge to do this as the vessel would be too fragile. You should also take a **digital photograph** in case the vessel disintegrates.

B) You are given a bag of medieval ceramic fragments to record. All you have are body shards; the decorated pieces, rims, bases and handles have been removed. How do you record them?

- Weighing
- Counting
- Short description
- Measuring length, width and breadth
- Sketch

### Feedback

These bulk finds need minimal recording. Record the **weight** and **count** them (this will give an idea of the average size of the shards), and give a **short description** (e.g. sand red-buff ceramic body shards). There is no need to measure them individually, or to make sketches.

C) How would you record a Roman shoe? Both sides have been squashed flat, the toe is incomplete, and there are stitches and a stamped design that are very faintly visible.

- Long description
- Digital photograph
- Measured drawing
- Schematic drawing
- Measuring length, width and breadth
- Weighing

This is an interesting object that deserves to have a **long description** discussing its construction and use. **Measurements** should be taken, but it should be noted that these would not be the original dimensions of the shoe, and there would be no point in weighing it. A **digital photograph** would be useful to record its current condition, a **measured drawing** would record tiny details not caught on camera, and a **schematic drawing** could show how the shoe was constructed or originally appeared.