

CHAPTER 11. SAMPLES

Archaeological assemblages typically include samples. These are materials that represent site activities but are not necessarily discrete artifacts. Samples can include things like wood charcoal from a fire pit, a smear of red ochre, the soil from the base of a pit, pieces of grass from the floor of a structure, a feather, a strip of bark, a chunk of wood, animal remains, and shells. Archaeologists collected these materials to maintain a record of the contents of a site and for analyses that can provide additional information on a site’s history and use.

All samples should be cataloged following the museum’s procedures manual. To standardize sample cataloging, we developed the following general categorization with a list of material types. Please select one of these material types. If you are not certain about the material a sample represents, check the raw material kit boxes for comparison or ask a museum staff member.

Table 11.1. Sample identification and cataloging

STEP	CATALOG COLUMN(S)	DATA
1	Catalog Number	Assign a sequential catalog number, with one number per sample. For subsamples removed from a larger sample for analysis the sample can be assigned catalog number +a, and the subsample catalog number +b, e.g., AM5000:12a, AM5000:12b.
2	Alternative #	Record a field number if there is one. Often there is not.
3	Weight	Weigh each sample in its bag in grams rounded to the nearest tenth.
4	Object	Use the term “sample” for all types of samples.
5	Subcategory	If the sample bag says “bulk” or “screen” record that information here. This is typically recorded for midden samples.
6	Condition	Leave this column blank
7	Material	Assign one of the following broad terms in bold: Biologic (e.g., baleen, hair, insect, fur, feather, leather) Botanical (e.g., bark, grass, moss, seed) Charcoal (for carbonized wood) Faunal (e.g., antler, bone, calcined bone, shell, tooth) Geologic (e.g., FCR, mineral, pigment, root cast, stone) Soil (for sediments, e.g., clay, sand, sediment from a structure floor) Wood
8	Site #, Field #, Context (TP), Square, Level, Component, Feature, Date, Excavator	Record all relevant provenience data
9	Comment	Add a description – e.g., a clump of fur, a smear of ochre, and any other relevant information.