

Unit AE3 Identify and describe archaeological items

Elements

AE3.1 Provide a description of an item

AE3.2 Identify and classify an item

AE3.3 Describe the potential significance of an item as an archaeological resource

Unit Commentary

This unit is for archaeologists who are required to have knowledge of a class of items or specific groups of items, e.g. curators, conservators, finds officers. It includes people who have to identify and describe items either in their own organisation or in the collections of others.

This unit covers describing the items, which involves examining them in an appropriate fashion, and then describing their features and how they relate to other items as well as identifying items, i.e. stating what they are (as far as is possible), and providing a rationale for how the identification has been made.

AE3 Identify and describe archaeological items

AE3.1 Provide a description of an item

Performance Required

This will involve:

- a) Examining the **item** without putting it at risk
- b) Summarising accurately the history, significance, age and provenance of the item in sufficient detail to meet the requirements of **users**
- c) Describing accurately any unusual and distinctive features of the item
- d) Describing clearly the item's relationship to other **relevant items**
- e) Describing accurately the item's condition and the care it needs
- f) Recording descriptions in **formats** that are suitable for users
- g) Complying at all times with health and safety procedures

Occupational Context

1 Items

- Incomplete/complete
- Undamaged/damaged
- Artefacts
- structures

2 Users

- curators
- education officers
- conservators
- archaeologists
- collectors

3 Relevant items

- in technical or compositional context
- in a historical or temporal context
- in a situational or geographical context
- in a social or cultural context
- in an interpretational context

4 Formats

- Graphical/ visual
- Verbal/ written
- Formally documented
- Attractively/ educationally described

Knowledge Requirements

You need to know and understand how to:

- Research further relevant information e.g. on previous owners ; on other similar items
- Access information on conservation needs, including interpreting conservation reports
- Describe the item for different people and purposes
- Use and combine description formats, e.g. photographs and text

You need to know about:

Risk

- The normal and specific risks to the item
- The examination processes that cause the least risk to the item

Supplementary research

- Where to locate data, how to access it
- Presentation of complimentary research information

Interpretation/ Description for an audience

- The normal features of the class of item
- What people wish to know about the item
- The problems involved with identifying incomplete items

Health and Safety regulations and requirements

AE3 Identify and describe archaeological items

AE3.1 Provide a description of an item

Required Skills

You should demonstrate:

- Handling fragile items

Evidence Required

You should provide evidence that you can provide a description of an item

The candidate should be questioned, based upon the documentation provided, to explore how they

- supply a description of complete, damaged or incomplete items.

The description should be written, with photographic records and illustrations where necessary.

Evidence Rules

N/A

AE3 Identify and describe archaeological items

AE3.2 Identify and classify an item

Performance Required

This will involve:

- a) Examining the item without putting it at risk
- b) Collecting all available **information** relevant to the identification of the item, and assessing the information for its reliability
- c) Assessing any **deficiencies or discrepancies** in the information and seeking reasons for them
- d) Identifying accurately any unusual and distinctive features of the item
- e) Identifying clearly the item's relationship and significance to other **relevant items**
- f) Using all relevant information to identify the item
- g) Identifying the item clearly and providing a justification for the identification
- h) Recording the results of the identification process accurately and clearly in an **appropriate format**

Occupational Context

1 Information

- location of discovery
- associated find data
- composition/ features
- historical/ cultural/ educational significance

2 Deficiencies or discrepancies

- lack of specificity in identification
- inconsistencies in historical profile
- unknown or unreliable sources
- inconclusive explanations

3 Relevant items

- in technical or compositional context
- in a historical or temporal context
- in a situational or geographical context
- in a social or cultural context
- in an interpretational context

4 Appropriate format

- as part of a portfolio/case log book
- within site record system
- for purposes of explicit presentation and interpretation
- in terms of its immediate or long term use

Knowledge Requirements

You need to know and understand how to:

- Assess the reliability of information, and to identify discrepancies
- Provide a justification for an identification, and what people need to assure them of its accuracy
- Record the results of the identification
- Use and combine description formats, e.g. photographs and text

You need to know about:

Research Resources

- Supplementary information sources that must be explored include: previous owners/holders, libraries and archives, databases, people such as colleagues, publications and other similar sources

Methods of identification

- Where to find the main sources of information on types of item
- What information is normally required to identify an item
- The level of accuracy that is likely from the sources investigated

Classification systems

- The normal features of types of items classified

AE3 Identify and describe archaeological items

AE3.2 Identify and classify an item

Required Skills

You should demonstrate:

- Research and comparative skills

Evidence Required

You should provide evidence that you can identify and classify an item

The candidate should be questioned, based upon the documentation provided, to explore how they identify an item and determine its features and significance.

Evidence Rules

N/A

AE3 Identify and describe archaeological items

AE3.3 Describe the potential significance of an item as an archaeological resource

Performance Required

This will involve:

- a) Examining an item without putting it at risk
- b) Collecting all available **information** relevant to the identification of the item and assessing its reliability
- c) Assessing **discrepancies** in the information and seeking explanations
- d) Accurately identifying **complex features** of the item
- e) Clearly identifying the item's **relationship and significance to other items** in its group
- f) Using all available information to identify the item
- g) Clearly identifying the item wherever possible and providing a rationale for the identification
- h) Accurately and clearly recording the results of the identification process in an **appropriate format**

Occupational Context

1 Information

- location of discovery
- associated find data
- composition/ features
- historical/ cultural/ educational significance

2 Deficiencies or discrepancies

- lack of specificity in identification
- inconsistencies in historical profile
- unknown or unreliable sources
- inconclusive explanations

3 Complex features

- composition and state
- status and ownership
- risk
- value
- utility and function

4 Relationship and significance to other items

- in technical or compositional context
- in a historical or temporal context
- in a situational or geographical context
- in a social or cultural context
- in an interpretational context

5 Appropriate format

- as part of a portfolio/case log book
- amongst site records
- for purposes of explicit presentation and interpretation
- in terms of its immediate or long term use

Knowledge Requirements

You need to know and understand how to:

- Synthesise information

You need to know about:

Potential significance in archaeological terms

- Contribution to research, understanding and knowledge base
- Contribution to reputation and profile of the organisation
- Contribution to organisational/ local/ national archive collections, inventories and databases

Research and information systems

- Developments in information :technology/ capabilities of IT systems - Such as the national collections database
- Sources: organisations, experts, previous item holders, publications, the organisation's collection, catalogues, reference works and written reports
- Access and availability of resources: recording, and storage procedures, classification systems
- Purposes of research: research strategy, methodology, techniques, and body of research
- Methods for analysing information

Classification

- Items' history and significance
- Scope and content of classified collection
- History of class of item
- Features and qualities of class of item

AE3 Identify and describe archaeological items

AE3.3 Describe the potential significance of an item as an archaeological resource

Required Skills

You should demonstrate:

- Research and comparative skills

Evidence Required

You should provide evidence that you can describe the potential significance of an item as an archaeological resource

The candidate should be questioned, based upon the documentation provided, to explore how they identify an item and determine its features and significance

Evidence Rules

N/A