

ACA EXAM

STUDY GUIDE 2025



ABOUT

Divided into sections based on the [Role Delineation Statement for Professional Archivists](#) (RDS), this guide is intended to help you prepare for the Academy of Certified Archivists certification examination. It includes study tips and highlights select archival terms and concepts that may be found on the ACA exam. Keep in mind that this study guide will not include all items that may be found on the exam.

STUDY TIPS

These are general tips that you can choose to use; they are not specific instructions that guarantee success in passing the exam.

Study for your learning style. If you're a visual learner, using pictures can help. Auditory learners can record their notes and recite them afterwards. If you are a physical person, lecture to yourself (out loud) while also using your hands or moving around; this way it will be easier for you to memorize. Creating flashcards (on paper or using an app like Quizlet) enables quick and easy review.

Focus on the domains you feel less confident about. You do not necessarily need to have read every resource on the suggested reading list but do pay attention to concepts and terms that may not be as familiar to you. Don't ignore the ones you are more confident about; take time to skim/review the literature for a refresher.

Find the main concepts in the literature and delve into the ones that don't make sense to you. Below are some concepts and terms within each domain but add your own! Make notes, create flashcards, find multiple definitions, and so forth to learn the breadth of the concepts. Focus on synthesizing the information in a way you can remember it instead of trying to remember exact wording.

Ask questions! There are [Teams Channels](#) available for you to connect with other exam candidates and ACA members.

Create a study group. Also on the [Teams Channels](#), ask if anyone wants to be a study partner or form a study group. Sharing study tips and talking about the content can help, whether via chat, virtually, email, or other means.

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GENERAL KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Term/Concept	Definition/Explanation	Source
record		
provenance		
archival standards		
records management		
life cycle of records		
value of archives		
archival administration		

functions of archives		
records management vs. archives		

DOMAIN 1: SELECTION, APPRAISAL, AND ACQUISITION KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Term/Concept	Definition/Explanation	Source
appraisal		
macroappraisal		
functional analysis		
acquisition		
selection		
deaccessioning		
accessioning		

documentation strategy		
collecting policy		
accessioning		
enduring value		
retention schedule		

DOMAIN 2: ARRANGEMENT AND DESCRIPTION KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Term/Concept	Definition/Explanation	Source
arrangement		
description		
provenance		
respect de fonds		
original order		
levels of arrangement		
finding aids and their components		

MPLP		
levels of description		
types of descriptive standards		

DOMAIN 3: REFERENCE SERVICES AND ACCESS KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Term/Concept	Definition/Explanation	Source
reference interview		
reference		
digitization		
use permissions		
user's information needs		
public programming		
digital access		

virtual reading room		
access policy and procedures		
access restrictions		

DOMAIN 4: PRESERVATION AND PROTECTION KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Term/Concept	Definition/Explanation	Source
preservation		
conservation		
disaster and emergency preparedness, response, and recovery		
environmental controls		
handling procedures		
reformatting		
preservation management		

digital preservation		
OAIS reference model		

DOMAIN 5: OUTREACH, ADVOCACY, AND PROMOTION KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Term/Concept	Definition/Explanation	Source
outreach		
advocacy		
activist archivist		
loan agreement		
exhibition		
teaching with primary sources		
fundraising		

crowdsourcing		
community archives		
public relations		

DOMAIN 6: MANAGING ARCHIVES KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Term/Concept	Definition/Explanation	Source
space/facilities planning		
grant writing		
project management		
archival policies and procedures		
mission and vision statements		
donor relations		
assessment		

solo archivist		
interpersonal communications		
personnel and volunteer management		
strategic planning		

DOMAIN 7: PROFESSIONAL, ETHICAL, AND LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Term/Concept	Definition/Explanation	Source
professional core values		
ethics		
copyright		
fair use		
privacy		
U.S. laws governing archives: e.g., FERPA, HIPAA, FOIA		
rights statements		

National Archives Act		
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DOMAIN 8: CULTURAL COMPETENCY KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Term/Concept	Definition/Explanation	Source
repatriation		
Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act		
community archives		
postcolonial		
cultural competency		
radical empathy		
cultural property rights		

decolonize		
archival silence		
diversity, equity, and inclusion		
reparative description		