**Tool #9: Creating and Using Unique ID Numbers**

What is a Unique ID Number?

* A numbering system unique to your archive. It functions like a library call number system, helping you find items and relate them to information in inventories or catalog records.
* Unique ID Numbers are applied to physical items. For tips on creating filenaming conventions for digital files, see the [Records Management Guide](https://www.danceusa.org/archiving-preservation-artists-legacy-toolkit-records-management).

How to use Unique ID’s:

* In general, video and audio materials should receive individual ID numbers for every item. (See [How to label](https://www.danceusa.org/archiving-preservation-artists-legacy-toolkit-organize).) For paper materials in boxes or drawers, you can simply number the box or drawer, or at most the folder. (Example: Cabinet 2, Drawer 4. Example: Box 17, Folder 3) Unless you are actually creating catalog records for individual photos, programs, etc., you do not need to give ID’s to these items.

Tips for creating a Unique ID system:

* Keep it simple! Remember that creating a very long ID will make it harder to physically label items, and increase the likelihood of confusion or errors.
* A Unique ID # does **not** need to encode a lot of information about the item. This information (date, title of work, type of material, etc.) will be stored in your inventory. A basic system might look like this:
* Short prefix for the format + a number (0001, 0002, 0003, etc.)
* Example: V0037 = video, item number 37
* Since assigning unique numbers is often done in conjunction with creating an inventory, the number will likely correspond to the order in which the item was inventoried, i.e., item 0301 was the 301st item added to the inventory. See [tips and templates](https://www.danceusa.org/archiving-preservation-artists-legacy-toolkit-organize) for creating inventories.
* When assigning numbers to videos, if you have multiple copies of the same content on different formats, you can assign a single ID number to all of them, with an added decimal number for each individual item. This helps to document how many unique *titles* you have, versus how many physical items. Example: V0037.2 (second copy)
* Tip: put numbers on items with post-it notes while creating the inventory. When you are finished, go back and add the numbers with acid-free labels or tape and acid-free marker. This way, it will be easier to make any changes during the process.
* The most important thing is to be sure that each item gets a *unique* number that is not duplicated anywhere in the collection, and that this number is correctly recorded in the inventory.
* Document your system so that future staff will be able to implement it consistently.