**Misunderstood activity:**

Image of a messy desk: <https://unsplash.com/photos/5v69Vl62NCM>

Learners commonly misunderstand the concept of the Archive. They often assume “everything” is archived and expect them to be complete meaning holding on to all information with gaps. I use the analogy of cleaning out a messy desk to explain.

Instead, archives are curated collections that are incomplete by nature and targeted in scope. When researching in an archive, it is important to understand the provenance of all data. Provenance refers to how an item entered into the archive, and where it was stored or created before that. Another related concept students usually misunderstand is that once an item enters an archive it doesn’t always stay there. Sometimes items are destroyed or their format is changed (i.e. physical documents to digital or in the past to microfilm or microfiche).

An analogy that I share with learners is about a messy desk. I ask, how many of you have had to clean out your desk or old paperwork, either digital or in person? Perhaps a combination of both? How do you decide what stays and what goes? And, how often do you do it?