Article: Addendum to Guidelines for Care and Identification of Film—Base Photographic Materials
Author(s): Andrew Robb
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Compiler: Robin E. Siegel

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Identification of Film–Base Photographic Materials: Flow Chart

Andrew Robb
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The flow chart on the following page supplements "Guidelines for Care & Identification of Film–Base Photographic Materials," *Topics in Photographic Preservation*, volume 5, 1993, by Monique Fischer and Andrew Robb. For best results, please refer to the background information and detailed instructions contained in that publication.

Identification of Film–Base Photographic Materials: Flow Chart

This flow chart is designed to introduce film–base identification to those with little or no experience in this important preservation activity. Definite identification is often difficult even for experienced examiners, particularly of film–base materials in excellent condition. A reference collection of known film–base samples in various deterioration levels can be an invaluable resource. ***Even if identification is uncertain, badly deteriorated film-base materials should be isolated from those in good condition.***

The identification procedures listed in this chart are divided into two categories, Examination and Destructive Testing. It is important to consider carefully your reasons for conducting a destructive test.

Please refer to "The Guidelines for Care and Identification of Film–Base Photographic Materials," *Topics in Photographic Preservation*, volume 5, for further information.

For each identification procedure mark the box that best describes your observations/results, and proceed according to the symbol following your selection. An arrow (→) means that identification is uncertain and the examiner should continue to the next step. A triangle (▼) means that identification is likely, but not certain, and further examination or testing should be considered. A square (■) indicates that the film–base is firmly identified.

Use ① to differentiate polyester from nitrate and acetates.
Use ②–⑦ to differentiate nitrate from acetates.

Examination

① Polarization Test

☐ red or green interference colors	Polyester ■
☐ no colors / uncertain	→

② Edge Printing

☐ "Nitrate"	Nitrate ■
☐ "Safety"	Acetates ■
☐ none / uncertain	→

③ Dating Information

☐ before 1920	Nitrate ■
☐ 1920–55	→
☐ after 1955	Acetates ▼
☐ uncertain	→

④ Notch Codes

For the two choices below, all three conditions must be met for definite identification; if not go to ⑤.

☐ "V" 1st notch from edge	☐ Kodak	☐ pre–1949	Nitrate ■
☐ "U" 1st notch from edge	☐ Kodak	☐ 1925–49	Acetates ■

☐ neither of the previous two choices →

⑤ Deterioration Characteristics

☐ none / uncertain	→
☐ noxious smell	Nitrate ■
☐ vinegar smell	Acetates ■
☐ yellowing	Nitrate ▼
☐ soft / sticky / adhered	Nitrate ▼
☐ bubbles / crystals	Acetates ▼
☐ channelling	Acetates ■

Destructive Testing

Do not conduct destructive testing unless you have been given proper instruction—you can harm yourself as well as your collection.

⑥ Diphenylamine or Float Test

For materials in good condition either test is usually sufficient. Materials in poor condition may give misleading results.

Diphenylamine

☐ intense blue	Nitrate ■
☐ faint blue / no color	Acetates ■
☐ uncertain	→

Float

☐ top	Acetates ■
☐ bottom	Nitrate ■
☐ uncertain	→

⑦ Burn Test

☐ burns down, yellow flame	Nitrate ■
☐ difficult to ignite, burns slowly	Acetates ■

→	Continue Identification
▼	Likely Identification
■	Definite Identification