

Measure for Measure



The Wallace Collection is full of all sorts of objects, from paintings and pottery to arms and armour. It's the job of our curators to organise and research these objects. With over 5,000 different objects in the collection, how do they begin to sort our Palissy from our Poussin and our swords from our Sèvres?

To make things easier, every object at the Wallace Collection is given a letter and number to help keep things in order. This is called an inventory number. The letter helps us sort our objects by type. We have 15 of these major types of objects, so 15 different letters or sometimes pairs of letters. For example, P represents paintings, so all of our paintings have a P in their inventory number. This sounds simple enough, but some of the objects are a little tricky to categorise! We don't have enough clothes in the collection to form a whole category but we do own a pair of pattens, which are a kind of medieval shoe covering – what category do they belong to? Objects like this are grouped under W, which stands for Works of Art, along with all the other collection objects that are too tricky to put in one category or another.

Once an object has been categorised and given a number, the next step is to try and learn as much about it as possible. One step in this process is to measure the size of the object. Having exact measurements is very important, especially if people can't see the object in person. After all, if you can only see a picture of a wardrobe, portrait or piece of armour, how can you tell if it is 1cm tall, or 100cm tall?

Are you an aspiring curator? Perhaps you're a collector who needs to bring a little order to your collection. Have a go at our measuring challenge below and see if your curatorial skills measure up.



These are pattens. Although they were made to protect shoes they're definitely not armour. What category would you put them in?

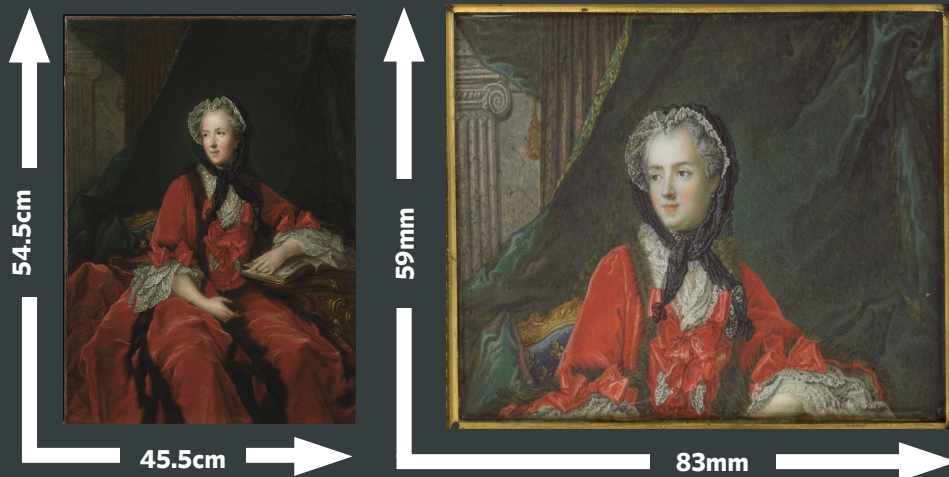
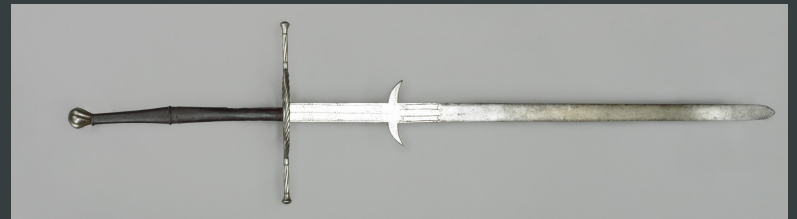
Activity

Answer the questions in our measuring challenge but be careful to check what units of measurement have been used.

Question 1.

Objects A469 and A854 are both weapons from our European Armoury. One is a huge double-handed sword and the other is a tiny dagger, called a stiletto.

Object A854 is 1.99m long and object A854 is 15.9cm long. Which object is longest?



Question 2.

Here are two portraits of Marie Leszczyńska, Queen of France between 1725 and 1768 and wife of King Louis XV. One of these two paintings is a tiny copy of the other, called a miniature.

Looking at the measurements given, which painting is the miniature?

Question 3.

Here are another two weapons from our armouries, A1221 and A1077. One is a huge musket, which we think was probably used for shooting rockets! The other is a tiny pocket pistol, which gets its name because it was so small it could be hidden in someone's pocket.

Look at the measurements below. Which one do you think is the rocket gun and which one is the pocket pistol?



Activity

Question 4.

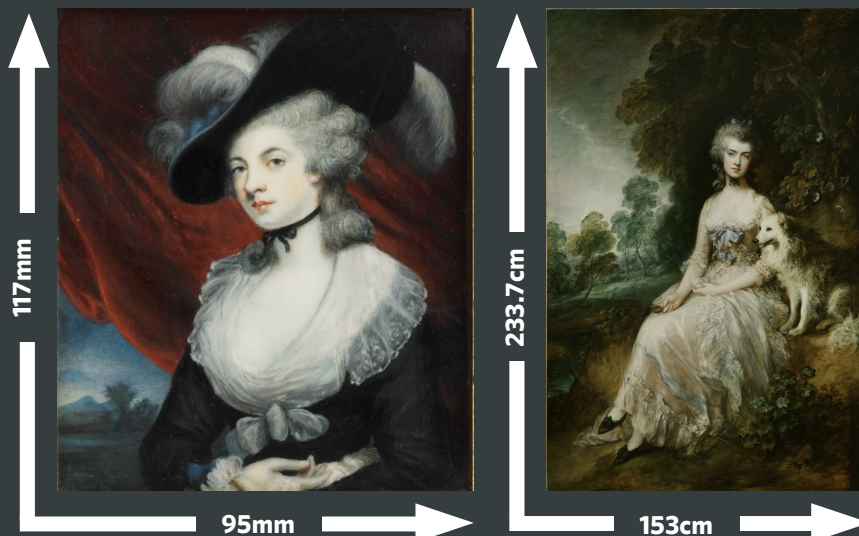
This miniature casket was made in the Netherlands in the late 1600s. It may look impressive but it's actually very small.

Use a ruler to measure the height and width of this miniature treasure chest.

Its inventory number is W166. Remembering what you read earlier about our inventory numbers, which category of object does this tiny treasure belong to?



This strange looking object is actually an early kind of ruler, made in either France or Germany in the 1600s.



Question 5.

Here are two portraits of an actor and writer who lived in the 1700s. Her name was Mrs Mary Robinson. She was famous for playing a character called Perdita, in a play by William Shakespeare.

This is another example of a full-size portrait and a miniature portrait of the same person. But can you tell which is which using the measurements given?

Try our measuring photo challenge at home.

Now that you've got the hang of it, why not try measuring a few objects in your own home? Gather up five or more objects and record their measurements. Once you've taken all your measurements why not share a picture of each object and it's measurements with a friend to see if they can order them from the biggest to the smallest?