
Digitizing Your Departmental Records: A Quick Guide

Digitization

There are many great reasons to digitize departmental records. Digitization can save space, consolidate disparate files, allow for ease in searches, and mitigate preservation risks of deteriorating physical originals. As more and more departments on campus begin to consider digitizing their records, there are a few items to consider before beginning.

1. Do I have a good inventory of the items I want to digitize?
2. Do I have appropriate resources to scan these items? (Staff, equipment, space to store the digital files?)
3. How do I want to organize the digital files? Do I have a good naming system and organizational structure that anyone could understand?
4. Where will I store my originals once they are scanned? Do I want to donate them to the Archives? (PLEASE DO NOT THROW AWAY UNIVERSITY RECORDS WITHOUT CONSULTING THE ARCHIVES!)

The archivists within Archives and Special Collections are experts at digitization and preservation of materials. Before the onset of any digitization project, please take the opportunity to discuss your plans with an archivist.

Below are three key technical specifications to consider when doing any digitization project: scanning resolution, formats, and metadata. Again, if you have any further questions about these terms or your own scanning project, please contact the Archives. Contact information is available at the end of this guide.

Optimal Scanning Resolution

Resolution refers to the sharpness or clarity of an image, or the ability of an imaging system to resolve fine detail. Original items should be scanned with long-term care, use, and access in mind in order to preserve details in archival quality. Not adhering to archival scan standards will result in a need to rescan items or complete loss of information.

The scan resolution is dependent upon the size of the original. A fixed number of pixels in an image might display adequately in a 2" x 2" passport photo, but if you attempt to display or print it at 8" x 10" those same pixels are inadequate. The result is an image of poor quality that may be blurry, with details difficult to distinguish.

The resolution of an image is measured by *dpi* or *ppi*, *dots* or *pixels* per inch, which are essentially interchangeable terms. All scanners and accompanying software offer identical resolution options.

Archives and Special Collections has set standards for the minimal resolution needed in scanning various types of media, which are below:

Photographic Prints

- Size up to 3.5x5" – 1200 ppi
- Sizes above 3.5x5" – 600 ppi

Negatives (Note: some scanners do not possess negative scan capability. Contact the Archives if you need assistance.)

- 35 mm negatives or slides – 1600 ppi
- Negatives up to 3.5x5" (excluding borders) – 1200 ppi
- Negatives sizes above 3.5x5" (excluding borders) – 600 ppi

Text

- All text should be scanned at a minimum of 400 ppi and a maximum of 600 ppi.

Format Recommendations

While there are many format options available, only a handful are considered to be sound archival options that will still be accessible into the future. Many common file types compress information to reduce file sizes. While this is good for quick access, the file compression will damage the scan over time. Best practice dictates that the first scan, or master scan, be completed in an archival format. A secondary, or access file, can then be created from the master scan. The most widely-accepted master scan format is a TIFF file. Access formats can include JPEG, PNG, GIF, and PDF.

Be sure to first scan your images or text to TIFF files. Then choose the best access option for your needs.

For more on best formats for digitization, including formats aside from images and text, please visit our website: <https://www.lib.purdue.edu/spcol/file-format-recommendations>.

Metadata

Information about the items scanned, or metadata, is essential to understanding the content and context of the information at hand. Without knowing the date, department, subject, or people involved even a recent event may lose its place in history. In order to ensure that digital files keep their background details, be sure to capture this metadata. Content to capture may include the following:

- Title
- Description
- Subject(s)
- Creator
- Date/Date Range of Original
- Marginalia
- Height (in), Width (in)

- Collection Title/Record Series Title/Folder Title
- Digital Specifications (scanner, scan resolution, date digitized)

This is a short list; there are many types of metadata across every discipline. If you have any questions, please consult the Archives or Purdue Libraries. We have staff trained to work specifically with metadata and are happy to assist you with your digitization projects.

Further questions or concerns? Contact:

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