

Creating a Personal Digital Archive

Whether you use iCloud backup, Google Photos, or another cloud based storage solution, digital preservation is becoming more and more important in our rapidly changing world. Most of the content we create today, whether at work or for personal use, is created digitally. With software moving away from traditional hard drive formats to web based cloud computing it is now vitally important to have a good understanding of digital preservation best practices. As always, if you have questions please contact the Heritage Room at heritageroomref@athenslibrary.org or (706) 613-3650 ext. 350.

What is a Personal Digital Archive?

Personal digital archives refer to any *digital content* created by individuals in their day-to-day lives. These might include emails, Word documents, calendars, music, websites, saved articles, recipes, or social media interactions. Everyone's personal documents, photos, and videos are valuable personally, but also to friends and family.

Why Keep a Personal Digital Archive?

Unlike paper and analog formats, which can be put aside for generations and remain intact, digital records will not survive the same *benign neglect*. Without *active management*, personal digital content could become inaccessible in only a few years, due to the rate of technological change and the fragility of some digital formats.

Stay Organized

Develop a method for keeping active projects and resources organized. Consider the PARA method or this more traditional method from Wirecutter. Regardless of the method you choose, creating a folder structure in which EVERY file belongs in a folder, utilizing tags, and setting a file naming protocol will keep you organized thus making the annual archiving process much, much easier.

Steps to Get Started:

1. Identify and Select:

- a. Identify all digital files on cameras, computers, phones, tablets, and other removable media such as memory cards or external hard drives;
- b. Include any files on the web or in the cloud;
- c. Review social media platforms;
- d. Locate significant correspondence in email;
- e. Pick the files you feel are especially important;
- f. Choose as many or as few as you want, but save the highest quality, final versions, or drafts that document process in a notable way. Save the item in the most **lossless** format.

2. Organize:

- a. Give individual files descriptive file names. The North Carolina State Library has created a great in depth resource to help: <https://archives.ncdcr.gov/best-practices-file-naming/open>
- b. Create a directory/folder structure on your computer to organize the files you have selected. Write a brief description of the directory structure and the files. Keep this in digital format and in PRINT format.

3. Manage and Store:

- a. The 3-2-1 Rule: 3 copies, 2 different types of storage media, store 1 backup in a different location. Avoid relying on third party applications or websites completely;
 - i. One copy can stay on your device.
 - ii. Another can be saved to DVDs, CDs, portable hard drives, or thumb drives.
 - iii. Back up another copy in the cloud (Dropbox, Google drive, Amazon Web Services, and others) or using an external RAID (Redundant Array Inexpensive Disks) drive.
- b. Store copies in different locations that are as physically far apart as practical. If disaster strikes one location, your files in the other place should be safe. The cloud counts.

4. Protect:

- a. Check your files at least once a year to make sure you can read them;
- b. Create new media copies every five years or when necessary to avoid data loss;
- c. If digitizing content, avoid destroying the original paper version;

5. Establish a Routine & New Practices:

- a. Keep files organized and delete old files if not being used;
- b. Consider PARA or another document organization process;
- c. Download important Google docs or other cloud based documents periodically;
- d. Periodically save "images" of all devices on a computer, copy that content into your archive;
- e. Don't forget your social media content;

Lossless Formats

1. Image: TIFF, PNG, SVG
2. Audio: WAV, FLAC
3. Video: MPEG-4_FF_2, AVI
4. Text: PDF/A, DOCX
5. Data: XLSX, CSV

Resources and Links

<https://digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/index.html>

<https://archives.ncdcr.gov/best-practices-file-naming/open>

<https://statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/digital-information-management/personal-digital-archiving#WorkshopsTools-468>

<https://www.dpconline.org/docs/knowledge-base/1867-dp-note-6-personal-digital-archiving/file>

<https://www.loc.gov/preservation/resources/rfs/format-pref-summary.html>

<https://guides.osu.edu/rdm-best-practice/file-formats>

<https://guides.lib.umich.edu/c.php?q=992751>

<https://helpx.adobe.com/photoshop/using/file-formats.html>

<https://fortelabs.com/blog/para/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/wirecutter/guides/how-to-organize-your-digital-files/>

Download Google Data: <https://support.google.com/accounts/answer/3024190?sjid=9788798601199294889-NA>