

## **THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS: DIGITAL PRESERVATION VIDEO SERIES**

**TITLE:** Why Digital Preservation is Important for You

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Our personal photos, papers, music and videos are important to us. They record the details of our lives and help define us.

But increasingly our possessions and our communications are no longer material: they're digital.

Digital files are encoded to represent text, images, audio, video and more.

They are fragile and completely dependent on software and machines to make them accessible

We CAN preserve our digital possessions and keep them accessible for years to come, but we have to archive them and actively manage them.

No matter what type of file you want to save – audio, video, text and so on – they all require the same essential preservation strategy:

- Identify what you want to save
- Decide what is most important to you
- Organize the content
- Save copies in different places

The first step is to identify what you want to save.

Where are the files located? On your computer? On your camera? Online? Are they scattered around on unmarked CDs?

Identify everything that you want to collect.

It may not be practical to save every single file, and some may be useless to you by now, so the next step is to decide, or select, exactly what you want to save.

This step will help you reduce the number of files that you have accumulated over the years and help reduce the storage size of your digital archive.

Once you've decided what to keep, you need to gather everything into one place...organize it all in one container. Create a main archive folder and title it something like, "My Archive."

Then, if you want to organize your files further, create other folders inside the master folder and name them with simple descriptive titles such as "video," "audio," "photos" and "documents."

It may help to include the date and subject in the folder titles. And try to keep your title scheme consistent.

Next, transfer your files from wherever they are – your camera, cell phone, drives, CDs and so on – into the archive folders you’ve just created.

If you have several copies or versions of a file and always save the highest-quality, larger-size master version. You can always make additional copies from the master version

You can even give each file a descriptive name to help you find the files again in the future.

Once you've transferred all of your files to the main “Archive” folder, it's time to make backup copies.

You can copy the main archive folder to a CD or flash drive, but those media may be obsolete and useless in a few years. An external hard drive is still your best and most convenient choice.

An external hard drive can hold a lot of content – maybe all of the digital files that you have – so it makes a good central repository. And it’s portable.

Make a copy of the hard drive and store that copy in a different geographic location. This is simply good insurance. If something happens to the content in one place, it's safe in another.

Drives can decay or become outdated in time, so at least once every ten years transfer the content from the old drive to a newer storage technology. This helps ensure ongoing access to your archives.

And always make a backup copy of your archives in case the unexpected happens.

In addition, you can also backup your personal digital collections with online services. But don’t use an online service as your only backup. Diversify. Keep a copy on a drive at another location.

“Print” is still a good backup option. Print out copies of important documents and photographs, so that you can have the document in an alternative and durable format: paper.

So, to recap, there is no easy way to ensure that your digital files will last. But it is possible to reduce the risk if you:

- Identify what you want to save
  - Decide what is most important to you
  - Organize the content
  - Save copies in different places
- ...and manage your archive.

Following these guidelines will help protect your personal digital files for years to come.