

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS: DIGITAL PRESERVATION VIDEO SERIES

Why Digital Preservation is Important for Everyone

Digital information drives our economy, spurs our culture and connects our community. It has changed how we communicate and learn. But what if this information disappears?

For centuries we have saved books, photos, maps and other sources of knowledge. Our digital assets are just as valuable.

Traditional information sources can easily survive for years, decades or even centuries...but digital items are fragile and require special care to keep them useable.

Digital content is encoded to represent text, images, audio, video and more. It takes software and machines to present the content; you can't just pick up a DVD and see what's on it.

This dependence on technology puts digital content at great risk. The smallest error — software, machine or human -- could harm digital items and result in their complete loss.

Rapid technological changes also affect digital preservation. As new technologies appear, older ones become obsolete, making it difficult to access older content.

What if you try to access an important digital document and you can't? Is it gone forever? What if your computer drive fails and you lose your valuable photographs?

Now, imagine this on a massive scale...a loss of thousands — or millions — of items. Libraries face these issues every day.

To ensure ongoing accessibility, digital content requires active management. Digital preservation cannot be addressed by a single institution, so the Library of Congress is working with many partners worldwide to preserve digital heritage.

So, in summary:

- Digital items are fragile and require special care to preserve them and keep them usable.
- Digital items depend on technology to make them available.
- Digital content requires active management to ensure its ongoing accessibility.

To learn more about digital preservation at the Library of Congress and elsewhere, please visit digitalpreservation.gov.