

Guidelines for Donating Digital Materials

This document provides introductory information on points to consider when donating computer-based files

Communication with the repository staff – prior to acquisition and, sometimes, afterward – is important to ensure that your donated files are well cared for and available to researchers.

If you are considering donating computer-based files it is important to work with repository staff to:

- Understand what you are donating to the institution
- Negotiate the terms of acquisition and access to your digital content
- Provide descriptive information about your files, computing environment and how the files were created

Your digital files contain a broad amount of information – information that may not be as apparent as it would if you were leafing through paper files. Files often included hidden metadata, or data about your data, including when the file was created, when it was last opened and when it was last modified. These unaltered metadata points are useful to researchers.

Ideally, collecting institutions prefer that you not modify your digital papers prior to donating them. This includes copying files to a different format. Depending upon the file type and underlying software function some files can be altered by opening and viewing them, which could modify the metadata or file quality. Despite this, these are your materials – you ultimately have the right to do with your collections as you wish. We encourage you to contact repository staff for assistance prior to modifying files or how they are organized.

Preserving digital materials is dependent upon accessing and rendering the computer files which are also dependent upon layers of hardware and software. If you have original hardware and software that you used to create the files and no longer have a use for it the repository may be interested in retaining it.

The repository will take appropriate action to preserve your files. In some cases complete preservation – where the functionality, original look and feel of the document, and other features are retained - may not be possible. Our various levels of digital preservation depend upon available resources and appraisal decisions made by the repository staff.

Your computing environment, if captured as a single snapshot, or disk image, may contain traces of your computing history including fragments of deleted files, log files, intellectual property belonging to you and to others and sensitive information such as social security numbers, sensitive emails, and medical records. Properly controlled access to Intellectual property and sensitive information is a great concern to us. In order to maintain a trusted relationship with our donors every effort is made to ensure that access limitations are followed. However, due to the quantity of digital files found in a typical computing environment some content may be inadvertently overlooked in processing. If you know there is sensitive information stored within your files – including emails – or you would prefer not to provide access to certain parts of your computing environment discuss access options and limitations with the repository staff.

If you have any questions, concerns or would like to learn more about our digital preservation services please contact (University Archives/Rare Books and Manuscript Library/Born Digital Content Preservation).