

Preserving Your Digital Heritage



What's on your hard drive may be as important to your scholarly legacy as what's in your file cabinet. What can you do to ensure its survival? Make a plan.

A data plan documents what digital materials you have and how you plan to organize, preserve, and share them. You will work through important questions of copyright and permissions.

A data plan could begin by answering some of the questions on the right . . .

What digital materials do you have?

- A. Canvass your hard drive and other storage you use for important materials: images, oral histories, transcriptions, texts, and word-processing files, etc. Look also for print materials that may warrant digitization.
- B. What file formats are your digital materials in?
- C. How many do you have? How much disk space do they take up?

How are your materials structured and organized?

- D. Have you described your digital materials? When were they made? By whom? Where?
- E. Are your materials organized by project? Date?

Who owns intellectual property rights?

- A. How many of your digital materials were created by you?
- B. For those you didn't create, do you have permission to reuse and share them? Are they in the public domain?
- C. Have they been published? Was copyright assigned to the publisher?

How will your materials be preserved?

- A. Will you donate the materials to an archive? Does the archive accept digital materials and know how to store them?
- B. Does your institution offer digital-archiving services?
- C. Are you prepared to put your materials in shape for proper digital archival?

Who can access your materials?

- A. Do your materials present any privacy or confidentiality issues?
- B. Do your materials present any unresolved copyright issues?
- C. Can the digital archive you chose manage these issues appropriately?