Guide to Personal Digital Archiving

Assembled by
Archivists of the Houston Area

What is Personal Digital Archiving?

PDA is a way of organizing and preserving your digital records. Consider your digital media: phone or camera photographs and home videos, emails, audio, and letters or records such as certificates (once they have been digitized). If they are important, archive them!

Why Should You Practice PDA?

Once family photos, letters, and certificates are digitized and organized, they will be preserved and easily found even if disaster strikes and the physical items are lost. PDA allows you to reprint (digital or digitized) family photos or keep track of certificates that may need replacement from official sources such as birth or marriage certificates as long as your storage (external hard drive or cloud) is not lost or damaged during disaster events. Once all your items are in digital form, consider following the Library of Congress easy instructions to Personal Digital Archiving provided here.

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🔍 Find & Identify

Search for your files on **hard copy** (CDs, DVDs, and memory cards), computers, portable devices such as external hard drives, laptops, phones, and cameras.*

⚓ Decide

Select files based on what you feel is important. What sort of documents, audio and video files, and photographs will you need in the future? If you have multiple copies of the same item in multiple formats (.jpgs, .png, PDF), select the files that are **higher quality**. If you have the same file in .jpg and .png, save the .png file. Refer to **resource 1** for more formats.

↗ Export

Move files from multiple sources to specific, properly labeled locations. Use the "Save as" function if downloading from a cloud based service. Save with descriptive names that include the **date**. If possible, add information to the file that includes **names** and **locations** related to the file. Refer to **resource 2** for examples.

Separate files by type into different folders/directories labeled with dates and event names. Refer to **resource 3** for folder structure example.

📄 Make & Manage Copies

Once you have selected and properly labeled all your files, make **multiple** copies (at least two) and store them in **separate** locations. For example, keep one photo folder (and all its contents) on your computer and another copy of the same folder uploaded into a **cloud service**.

Free and popular cloud services include: Google Drive, OneDrive, iCloud and Dropbox. (*Always check the privacy policies and security settings to protect your private information.*)

Keep physical copies in different locations in case of emergency or climate disaster. For example, one copy on your computer and the second copy on an external hard drive in storage or at work. **Label your hard copies.**

Tip: If your second copy of files is stored/copied into a memory card, external hard drive, or DVD/CD, you must make a new copy every **5 years** to prevent any loss of data.

Check your files once a year to make sure they are still legible/intact.

Note: If you have chosen a memory card, external hard drive, or DVD/CD as your second copy, it is important to protect them from the elements. Keep these items at stable **low temperatures** and **low humidity**, away from heat, water, or food. Refer to **resource 4** for more.

🖨 Digitizing Tips

*Use scanning equipment to make digital copies of your paper documents and physical photos. For details, refer to **resource 2**.

If you do not have access to scanning equipment such as a scanner/copier/printer or your document is too large for smaller scanners, consider using a scanning app on your smartphone. (*Always check the privacy policies and security settings to protect your private information.*)

Free and popular scanning apps include: Adobe Scan, Abbyy FineScanner (iPhones only), Genius Scan, CamScanner, Tiny Scanner.

Adapted from The Library of Congress, Personal Archiving materials: http://digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/.

Resources & Examples

1 https://www.loc.gov/preservation/digital/formats/fdd/browse_list.shtml

2 http://digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/documents/PA_scanning.pdf

3 **Example**: Users\admin\Pictures\2019\Wedding\20191031-chickendance-001.png

4 http://digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/documents/media_durability.pdf