

THE
FEMINIST
INSTITUTE

MEMORY LAB



TFI TEACHES:
PERSONAL DIGITAL ARCHIVING

WHAT IS THE FEMINIST INSTITUTE?

The Feminist Institute (TFI) documents and celebrates feminist contributions to culture by preserving and digitizing archival materials for public access. TFI promotes information activism and gender equity by infilling the cultural record to reflect fuller truths.

Through our partnership program, our staff works closely with institutions, feminist creators, and organizations on archival projects with both physical and digital records. Our partnership with supersisters, a 1970s feminist trading card collection, is a perfect example of this.

In August 2022, TFI staff traveled to Indianapolis, IN and worked closely with the mother-daughter duo, Lois and Melissa Rich, to organize and digitize their collection of ephemera, press, mock-ups and more.

WHY ZINES?

Zines are emblematic of DIY feminist practices that have preserved and recorded marginalized histories when large institutions excluded their narratives from the larger cultural record. Here at TFI, we always want to pay homage to the DIY roots that have given us so much feminist history to work with. Also—we love zines!

We envision a future where gender-marginalized individuals and organizations' equal contributions to culture are known and recognized, and their rights are protected. As part of this vision, TFI aims to provide free educational programming and resources to individuals and collectives looking to create their own archival collections—which is why we've created this zine series.

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WHAT IS PERSONAL DIGITAL ARCHIVING?

Personal digital archiving is the practice of collecting and preserving personal materials in both digital and analog formats. This can include photos, videos, audio, letters, poetry, buttons, activist materials, artistic works, and more. Personal digital archiving is intrinsic not only to a nuanced cultural record but also to creating and reflecting on your own personal history or collective histories. It empowers individuals and communities to have autonomy over their own narratives and materials.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Personal digital archiving is important for several reasons, some being:

1. Technology can become obsolete, as such, your data can be erased. Through personal digital archiving and understanding different tools for storage, you can minimize your risk of losing data.
2. Big tech platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter all have community guidelines that target marginalized communities and remove their content. Often Black people, PoC, queer + trans people, sex workers, artists and leftists, and those who find themselves in several of these categories have their content taken down with little to no warning. Personal digital archiving can ensure that this content is not lost forever and can be reposted to different platforms, though it does not address the loss of livelihood and connection people build on these platforms despite their deep-seated flaws.
3. In a similar vein, personal (digital) archiving has been instrumental to the preservation of marginalized histories. Without the personal archiving marginalized communities did, we wouldn't have nearly as much of an infilled cultural record as mainstream institutions systemically excluded these narratives and materials from the mainstream cultural record. Further, feminist and queer archiving practices wouldn't be nearly as developed without the foundation laid by these communities.

SCOPE AND PLANNING

Once you've decided you want to embark on a personal digital archiving project, it's important to determine the scope of your project. Some guiding questions to consider:

- What do I want to capture in this project?
- How many materials am I archiving?
- How much time do I have to dedicate to this project?
- How much money (if any) can I allocate to storage and/or digitizing tools?
- Is this project for my own personal collection, or something I want to share with the public?
- What roadblocks might I encounter?

Personal digital archiving can be time-consuming but rewarding! Projects can be long-term and may never necessarily "finished".



TOOLS

What tools will you need to complete your project? Depending on whether you're digitizing analog media or preserving born-digital media, many options are available to you. While digitizing analog media prevents permanently losing materials from physical decay, maintaining born-digital content is more about format maintenance to avoid digital decay.

ANALOG	PHOTO/PAPER	AUDIOCASSETTE	VHS TAPE
<i>Equipment</i>	Flatbed Scanner	USB Cassette Converter	VCR, Video-to-Digital Converter
<i>Preferred File Formats</i>	TIFF (.tiff) JPEG2000 (.jp2) JPEG (.jpg) PNG (.png)	WAVE (.wav) FLAC (.flac) MP3 (.mp3)	FFV1 v. 3 codec; .mkv wrapper H.264 codec; MPEG-4 AVC wrapper

How do I use these tools?

You can find digitization tips at thefeministinstitute.org/blog or by scanning this QR code:

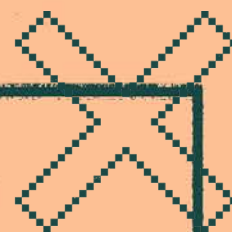


BORN-DIGITAL OBJECTS

Preserving born-digital media is about retaining the significant properties of the content. Significant properties are those aspects of digital media which must be preserved over time in order for the digital object to remain accessible and meaningful.

It may take more active maintenance to ensure long-term preservation. Some steps you can take include:

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1 Make sure your file formats are up-to-date

Unfortunately, (un)planned obsolescence is reality within our digital world. While a file format or software may be totally functional one year, the next it can be out of commission, rendering your materials unusable (e.g., Flash). Make sure to keep yourself in the loop of different file formats and migrate data when necessary.

2 Scraping your data from social media platforms

Big tech platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter don't prioritize long-term media preservation. As such, you'll want to download your data from these platforms using some of the resources listed below. If you want to go really bare-bones, you can always screenshot each of your posts and create your own time capsule.

3 Figuring out how to capture a social profile in its current state

Capturing a social profile in its current state is different than scraping its data. We recommend using one of the Webrecorder tools to download an interactive file of your social profile to capture more of a real-time feel.

Online Guides:
Preserving Social Media, Sara Day Thomas, <https://www.dpconline.org/docs/technology-watch-reports/1486-twr16-01/file>

Minimum Viable Station, bit.ly/mindigit

Archiving Social Media Data: A guide for archivists and researchers, <https://zenodo.org/record/5041072#.ZC8N5ezMKrd>

Digital Tools:
Archive It: <https://archive-it.org/>

Webrecorder: <https://webrecorder.net/>

Apps:
Save, <https://open-archive.org/save>

ORGANIZING MATERIALS

Now that you've identified the scope of your project and what materials you want to digitize, it's time to create an organizational structure and make choices about storage. By sticking to a system for file naming, metadata, and storage, your materials will remain findable and usable!

File Naming

File naming should help with findability and provide context for the materials you're working with. Keep it simple yet descriptive!

TIPS:

- **Use a prefix:** Use something that will describe the context of the content or the origin of the content. You can generally batch edit file names in File Explorer (Windows), Finder (Mac) or Adobe Bridge. For example, if you had several photos from a graduation, you could add the prefix "Graduation" and the rest of the file name would remain the same. It might look like this: "Graduation-IMG_0123.png"
- **Add a descriptive keyword:** If you want to take it a step further, you could add a descriptive keyword that describes the technical process the file went through as well as its origin. Building off the previous example, the file could be "Scan-2005Graduation-IMG_0123.png", implying that photos are from graduation in 2005 and were scanned into your device from their original analog state.

Folder Structure

Having a sound folder structure is just as important as file naming. Your folders should correspond with a file-naming system. An example would be having folders for different kinds of materials, i.e., photos, emails, and documents. You could also make folders on the basis of different events and, within those, include sub-folders that describe the kinds of materials in them.

Metadata

Metadata, or data about data, is used within archives to contextualize their materials. Metadata can help you to keep track of information about people, dates, locations and events within your photos.

ADDING METADATA:

You can add metadata without any software! On a PC, you can right click on an image and select Properties. On a Mac, you can right click on an image and select Get Info. However, if you do want to organize your materials using software, Apple Photos allows for more thorough metadata. Adobe Bridge, Adobe Lightroom, and Adobe Photoshop are a great option for more advanced users.

Best Storage Practices + Options

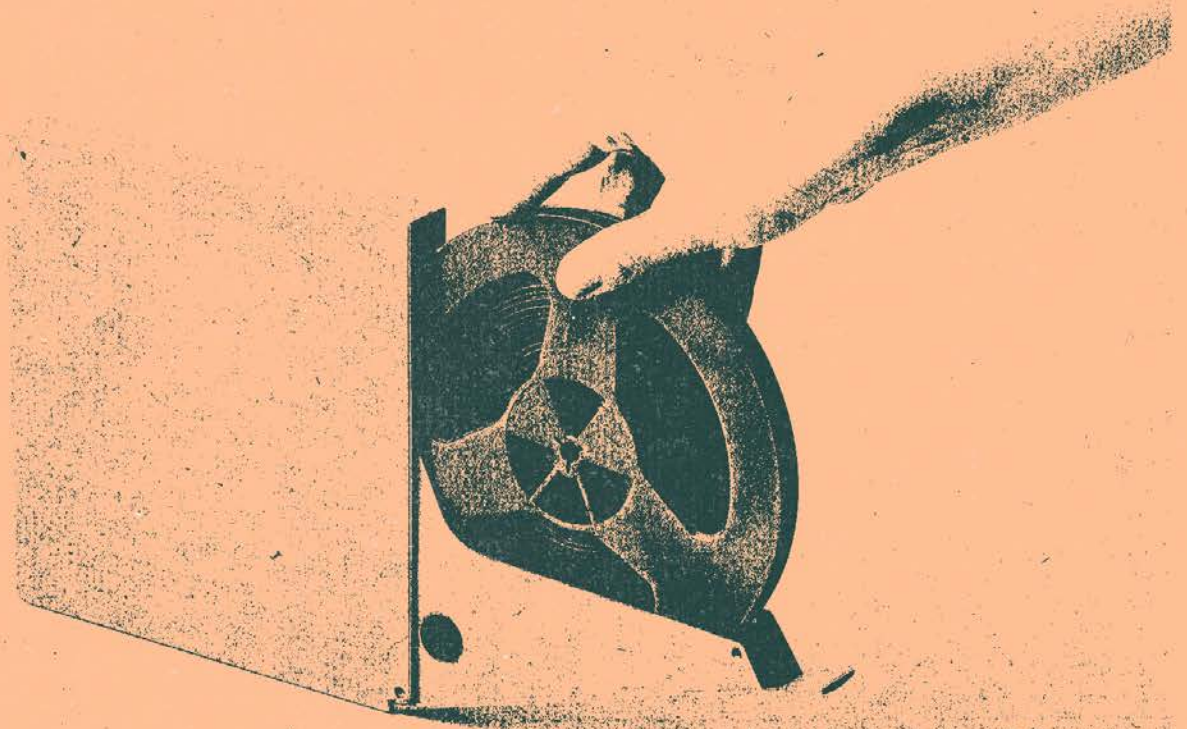
Once you've w your file-naming, folder, and metadata systems, you'll want to decide on a storage plan to ensure your materials are secure. Archivists recommend following the 3-2-1 rule: Keep three complete copies of all files, store two backups on different storage media, keep one backup in an off-site location. Of course, depending on your collection, you can decide which parts of the 3-2-1 rule work for you.

TFI recommends using cloud-based software and external hard drives for storage. For cloud storage, you'll want to pick software where you're comfortable with the costs, privacy standards and overall features. Remember, if the software is free, your data is the product.

We recommend backing up your collection once a month. For hard drives, make sure to use a reputable brand and be aware that you'll have to replace these every five to seven years and you'll need to migrate your data off the hard drive every few years.

CONCLUSION

All in all, personal digital archiving is personal. At the heart of your project is what personal and/or collective narrative + histories you and yours want to capture. Your project should be useful and meaningful to you, rather than trying to conform to a typical archival collection. Not only does this apply to the content you're selecting, but the ways you're naming files, storing items, and publishing them if you see fit. The best thing about personal archives is that they're customizable. TL;DR- take what resonates + leave the rest. Happy archiving!



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