

SELECTION CRITERIA FOR DIGITAL IMAGING

This is based upon the Columbia University Libraries Selection Criteria for Digital Imaging and is used with their permission.

Introduction

The reasons for making digital reproductions of audio and video recordings, films, maps, journals, photographs, manuscripts, and other items in a library or archive vary from purposes of detailed research to popular recreation and from individual items for the use of one person to mammoth groups of images for the use of many people. The costs for creating a digital collection are high and include selection, creation of the images, and storage. In this, creating images makes up about a third of the total. As a result, in addition to the importance of the items and what they contain, due consideration must be given to issues of technical requirements, intellectual property rights, and support by the institution.

The criteria as developed are not all that are possible and are not meant to be a narrow approach to the process. How they will be ranked in importance will depend upon the purpose of the digitization project. The major purpose for them is to make those planning a digitization project consider all important issues in the process.

Suitable means of capturing, accessing, and archiving of materials will be determined after a project has been approved for initiation. Additional technical directions may be required. It is possible that some items will have to wait for technological advances before digital images can be created, while others may not be suited to creation of images. In some cases, extremely high costs or not easily obtainable equipment or resources may hinder conversion of some materials. As stated by Columbia University Libraries:

“It is important to note that we cannot at present assure long-term access to digital resources; therefore, digital images cannot serve to replace original materials. Digitization is not a preservation medium, except insofar as surrogates can lessen or eliminate risk to documents.”

Intellectual Property Rights Criteria

Intellectual property rights must be managed in accordance with applicable laws, and any necessary restrictions to access must be able to be implemented through current institutionally-supported mechanisms.

Considerations include whether:

- the work or collection is in the public domain
- the goal/purpose of digitization lies within fair dealing limits
- Memorial University owns the legal right to make and disseminate digital copies
- Memorial University can get clearance from the holder of the rights

- privacy and ethics/ethical issues can be addressed
- access to the digital product can be appropriately controlled.

Criteria for Collection Development

The worth of the content of the materials, as well as the positive aspects of access to them in electronic form will rationalize the amount of time and effort spent in accomplishing a digital project. The subject matter should have enough inherent value to guarantee present and future use by a particular group in and/or outside Memorial University for a considerable time period.

Value

Many factors contribute, but certainly they include intellectual content, historic, and physical value:

- rareness or uniqueness
- value as artifact or by association
- importance for the understanding of the relevant subject area
- broad or deep coverage of the relevant subject area
- useful and accurate content
- information on subjects or groups that are otherwise poorly documented
- enhancement of historic strengths of the institution
- potential for enduring value in digital form

Demand

To justify the effort and expense, there should be a reasonable expectation that the product will have immediate utility for members of the Memorial University community and/or other appropriate audiences:

- support for current high priority activities
- importance for the functioning of the institution
- an active, current audience for the materials
- advocacy for the project from the Memorial University community
- realistic expectation of attracting new users even if current use is low
- requests from potential partners in collaborative or consortial efforts

Non-Duplication

There is no identical or similar digital product that can reasonably meet the expressed needs.

Added Value Criteria

Digital conversion may encourage new scholarly and/or curricular use through:

Collaborative Potential

- part of a collection split among a number of institutions that could be united online as a virtual collection
- contribution to development of a "critical mass" of digital materials in a subject area
- contribution to online research or curriculum tools
- flexible integration and synthesis of a variety of formats, or of related materials scattered among many locations

Enhancement of intellectual access

- enhancement of intellectual control through creation of new finding aids, links to bibliographic records, and development of indices and other tools.
- ability to search widely, manipulate images and text, and study disparate images in new contexts
- widespread dissemination of local or unique collections

Enhancement of image quality

- improved quality of image, e.g., through improved legibility of faded or stained documents.

Preservation Criteria

While digitization does not in itself constitute preservation, there are preservation aspects to be considered, both in terms of the original materials and in terms of the files which will be created.

Providing surrogates

- significant reduction in handling of fragile materials
- access to materials that cannot otherwise be easily used
- protection of materials at high risk of theft or mutilation

Safe digitization

- condition of originals allows them to be digitized safely
- condition of originals requires conservation/rehousing for safe digitization; funding must be secured for this work
- possibility of scanning photographic intermediaries instead of the originals

Preservation of the digital versions

If the digital resources are deemed to be of long-term value, provision must be made for archiving and maintenance of images through time and technological change.

Technical Feasibility Criteria

Potential projects should be evaluated as to whether it is technically possible with current equipment and software to capture, present, and store images in ways that meet user needs.

Considerations include:

- degree to which a digital version can represent the full content of the original
- understanding of how people will use the digital versions and the level of image quality that that implies
- whether the materials will display well digitally
- capacity for accessing images from current institutionally supported platforms and networked environments, and delivering them with reasonable speed
- anticipation of future users with better equipment, to avoid a need to rescan in a few years
- authentication of images, if appropriate
- staff and resources to support programming, user interface design, and search engine development to assure that the project can fulfill the functions for which digitization is planned

Materials that require special consideration include:

- materials that require unusually high resolution
- materials for which fidelity to original color is essential
- oversize items
- three-dimensional objects
- items with poor legibility

Intellectual Control Criteria

Potential projects should be evaluated as to whether appropriate intellectual control can be provided for the original materials and the digital versions:

- degree to which the materials are organized/arranged in a way suited to online use
- cataloguing, processing and related organizational work is already accomplished or is to be accomplished as part of the project
- staff and resources to support creation of appropriate metadata relating to document identification, technical capture information, provenance, and easy navigation within the information resource

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