

Penn State Guidelines to Select Levels of Digital Preservation Commitment

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Introduction

These guidelines were established to facilitate informed decision-making by collection stewards for prioritizing the preservation of digital content. Framed by existing selection and appraisal model criteria for general and special collections, these guidelines are meant to encourage collection stewards to use their existing expertise regarding subject and collecting priorities to aid digital preservation practice and help inform digital preservation decisions.

These guidelines and the selection method described here offer only one way to select a Level of Digital Preservation Commitment. Collection stewards should feel free to use their professional judgement to use other selection methods.

Levels of Digital Preservation Commitment

The [Penn State Digital Preservation Policy](#) outlines four [Levels of Digital Preservation Commitment](#). Levels of Digital Preservation Commitment are a gradient of classes, each increasing with the amount of preservation management and activity performed on the class. It is not feasible to treat all digital materials the same at our scale. For long term sustainability, collection stewards must appraise digital content and select Levels of Digital Preservation Commitment that describe the effort to be attempted. These choices will inform the preservation actions taken.

Selecting

Selection decisions can be made at any level in the content hierarchy: [content stream](#), collection, or digital object. I.e., it is possible to assign the same level to an entire content stream or collection, but it's also possible to assign specific objects in that stream or collection a different level. Selection decisions may also change over time and should be reviewed on an ongoing basis. A five-year cycle for reviewing selection decision is recommended.

The Digital Preservation Program provides a [rubric for making Levels of Digital Preservation Commitment selections](#). Criteria in the rubric and their points are described below. The maximum number of points is 100 and the total points indicates the appropriate Level.

- 00-24: Level 0 (No Action)
- 25-49: Level 1 (Bit-Level)
- 50-74: Level 2 (Logical)
- 75-100: Level 3 (Object)

The selected level should be recorded in collection and object metadata records, along with the date the decision was made. Evidence documenting the reasons for selection (such as a filled in rubric) should be saved with the

collection files. [A form has been created that implements the rubric](#) and recommends an appropriate Level of Digital Preservation Commitment and gives an estimated annual cost for preservation storage if disk. Completed copies of this form will be saved as evidence for future decisions.

Pragmatic Selection

If a born-analog digital object created before 2022 is within scope of the [digital preservation policy](#), it will be assumed to have at least a Level 1 Digital Preservation Commitment. Overtime, the digital preservation team will contact the appropriate selector/curator to affirm, downgrade, or upgrade this selection.[^1]

Criteria

These criteria are adapted from the paper, [Approaching Appraisal: Guidelines and Criteria to Select for Digital Preservation](#) presented at the 2018 International Conference on Digital Preservation by Nathan Tallman and Lauren Work. Rooted in decades of collection development theory, *Approaching Appraisal*, provides a framework for making digital preservation selection decisions for both born-analog and born-digital materials. Each criterion is described below, along with examples from general and special collections.

Research Value (25 points)

How well aligned the content is with collection policies or mission of Penn State, including curricular needs. The research value for current and potential future users in the Penn State community.

General Collections

Materials that fulfill or respond to curricular needs, add to collection strength, fulfil consortia commitments to a full body of scholarly materials

Special Collections

Material imperative to the volume and depth of content in areas of collection focus, may aid with reappraisal over time or movement of general collections to special collections

Legal & Fiduciary Obligations (25 points)

The requirement, by law, consortia, or donor agreement, to preserve digital materials over time.

General Collections

Government document repository obligations, data related to federal grants, journals.

Special Collections

University archives and/or operational records of an organization. Archival collections with donor agreement requiring a specified retention.

Uniqueness (15 points)

How singular or rare the content is. For digitized material (born-analog), the availability of an analog preservation copy decreases uniqueness.

General Collections

New research developments in a field, new publication methods and formats, local institutional research and scholarship preservation commitments.

Special Collections

Unique digital material in either/both content and context (e.g. author manuscripts on original laptop), one-of-a-kind systems or processes (e.g. born digital works of art), sole repository for digital material by legal agreement.

Replacement Cost and Investment (10 points)

The costs to acquire, to replace, to reprocess, or to re-digitize analog materials. Also, the political cost if the material is not preserved.

General Collections

Costs of replacing purchased or licensed materials (including digitized materials), costs to researcher/user for potential delays/interlibrary loan, cost of not having immediate access to journal articles.

Special Collections

Political or administrative costs of complete loss of digital content from donors or institution, costs of subscription services to allow for technical collection of digital content, costs for born-digital ingest, storage and access to unique materials.

Preservability (10 points)

The expected difficulty to preserve that materials. The simplicity or complexity of the content and transparency of formats and technologies used.

This criteria may require consultation with a digital preservation team member. It may also be difficult to assess this criteria at the collection-level for born digital collections. The curator may generalize a score for the entire collection or assign different Levels of Digital Preservation Commitment for different parts of the collection (e.g. series, component, or item-level.) If choosing the later, please consult the digital preservation team.

General Collections

Negotiation of legal agreements or contracts to allow for preservation of licensed digital materials, participation in efforts to preserve publisher content such as CLOCKSS.

Special Collections

Early intervention or review of computing context and creation with donors/record creators, preservation actions to ensure authenticity and provenance of born-digital materials, technical parameters for capture of content, review of networked or system environments.

Representation and Agency (10 points)

How the content advances the historical record of underrepresented peoples. The degree of control to which the creator of or subject therein had in deciding the disposition of the content itself.

This criteria is the most subjective and open to selector or curator judgement, the provided examples may not match exactly. In the past, "objective systems" have sometimes perpetuated structural inequities.

General Collections

The works already preserved about a particular people's history. Unauthorized biographies.

Special Collections

The demographics of creators whose content is already preserved. The role the creator or people described in the collection material had to do with its current disposition.

Provenance and Authenticity (5 pts)

The availability of information to demonstrate provenance, custodial history, and authenticity. This may take the form of metadata.

General Collections

Selection and acquisition records. Deposit and donor agreements.

Special Collections

Machine actionable metadata demonstrating authenticity such as provenance, custodial history, collection management events, and checksums.

Restrictions (-10 points)

Any rights or access restrictions on the digital content that will require periods of time without access. Restrictions are a negative-criterion, they count against the case for preservation.

General Collections

Availability of rights information for licensed or previously purchased materials.

Special Collections

Donor or institutional rights transfer, embargoes on access to content, state records laws.

Notes

[^1]: This rule was reviewed and approved by a representative group of selectors/curators in July 2022. STEM, Special Collections, Arts and Humanities, Business, Campus Curators, and Maps/GIS were all represented.