

Help Make Your Information Last through Good Information Management Practices

Digital information is more fragile than information produced on paper and most other tangible formats. Digital storage media such as CDs and DVDs have shorter life spans, and accessing digital information requires software and hardware that may no longer be available when the file is needed.

However, the choices that we make when we create and store documents, spreadsheets, databases, and other files can improve their likelihood of remaining usable (and findable) over long periods of time. Much time and the valuable documents that you are creating can be saved by following these steps as you work:

1 ***Appraisal:*** Ask yourself if the file that you're creating is one that you or someone else might want to use two years, five years or more in the future. Remember that one of the virtues and hazards of digital files is that they can be modified and used for new purposes.

√ Consider saving copies of earlier versions of your files.

√ Administrative Files: KU Record Retention Guidelines are being developed.

2 ***Select Secure Storage:*** In general, files stored on networked hard drives maintained by professional administrators adhering to best practices are more likely to remain accessible than files held on isolated disks (including the hard drive of your computer).

√ Ask your systems administrator how your data is stored and kept secure and what you need to do to insure that other people who need access to your data will indeed have access.

√ Academic Research: Consider depositing your dataset, working papers, or research publications in the KU digital repository KU ScholarWorks (<http://kuscholarworks.ku.edu>).

√ Administrative Files: KU Record Retention Guidelines are being developed.

√ If you must store important files on a workstation hard drive, back up regularly onto high quality removable media, such as CD-ROM, DVD, or DLT tape. Consider making redundant backup copies, perhaps in more than one format, such as DVD and DLT, and storing in different buildings.

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3 *Select Well-Supported Formats:* Some file formats are more likely to remain usable over long periods than others. In general proprietary formats – formats that are owned by companies – are less likely to be usable than “open” formats. Consider creating master formats of important files from which “deliverable” content can be derived.

Preferred formats for master files with a high likelihood of remaining usable:

- Text: PDF, Postscript, HTML, XML, ASCII (.txt), Rich Text (.rtf)
- Data: delimited ASCII, SGML, XML
- GIS files: delimited ASCII
- Image Masters: uncompressed TIFF, PNG
- Other Media: AIFF, WAV
- Databases: Databases are unique and pose special technical challenges for both preservation and future migration that require special consultation.

Common examples of formats with less likelihood of remaining usable:

- Text: MS Word (.doc), Word Perfect (.wpd)
- Data: Excel (.xls)
- Image: Photoshop
- Other Media: Powerpoint (.ppt)

4 *Describe What You Create:* Providing basic information about your files will increase the chances that they can be used over time. Try to include the **name of the creator**, the **date created**, the **last date modified**, the **name** of the file, and the **format** of the file.

√ For files stored on a server, create filenames and file folder titles that will be meaningful to users who come after you.

√ Create “Readme” files in .txt (ASCII) format to document what you have done.

√ Make data dictionaries that describe the data “fields” and expected contents – paper or online.

√ Add metadata (META tag) to HTML web documents to record the name of the author and the date.

√ For files stored on portable media (disks, DVDs, tape) attach label and print out a directory.

For Further Information ...

- *about Digital Preservation at KU:* **WEBSITE ADDRESS**
- *about Formats and Standards:* http://kudiglib.ku.edu/docs/dli_standards.shtml
- *for help with software contact ******