



Conserve O Gram

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Reformatting For Preservation And Access: Prioritizing Materials For Duplication

Reformatting is a preservation strategy that allows users to access the informational content of a vulnerable audiovisual, electronic, or textual document via a copy. Once duplicated, copies can serve as duplication masters (to make additional copies), and as reference material. The fragile or valuable original is then placed in stable storage, protected from handling damage, fire and theft. Determining what items should be copied first can be a challenge when faced with a large quantity of archival materials.

This *Conserve O Gram* presents three evaluation criteria for prioritizing individual objects or collections to be duplicated: value, risk, and use. Taken together these evaluation criteria form a useful tool. By assigning numerical values, a numerical total can be calculated to assist the curator in making duplication decisions.

Value

Parks keep archival collections because they are key park resources for site histories, interpretation, resource management, and research. Materials to be kept or acquired must have one or more of the following values in relationship to the park's approved Scope of Collection Statement.

Informational value refers to the material's topical content:

- High value collections offer significant information on the key site-related people, places, events, objects, periods, activities, projects, and processes (both natural and cultural).

- Moderate value collections tell something of the who, what, where, why, when, and how of the site history.
- Low value collections provide little information about the site history.

Administrative value refers to the document's functional usefulness to the creating organization on a regular basis, such as the need for architectural drawings for building renovations or aerial photos for rescue operations.

- High value collections are constantly being used for park management.
- Moderate value collections are occasionally referred to.
- Low value collections are rarely reviewed.

Artifactual value, as used by archivists, is the same as *intrinsic value* and refers to original materials that have value due to their nature as the following:

- High value materials include items in good condition that are rare or interesting objects of material culture, for example, well composed visual materials, holographic letters with unusual letterheads, or unique diaries; documents in rare historic processes such as platinum prints; materials in unusual genres such as psychic photographs or unusual formats such as daguerreotypes.
- Moderate value materials are common processes, formats that are in good condition.
- Low value materials are items in poor condition or copies or duplicates.

Associational value refers to original materials that have a relationship to an eminent individual,

place, event, or group such as letters created, owned, or signed by Thomas Edison or photographs taken by or of Civil War soldiers.

- High associational value refers to materials such as the personal papers of a notable individual or group, or those associated with a project like an archeological excavation.
- Moderate value collections might contain some correspondence or portraits of a notable individual.
- Low value materials include copies or duplicates.

Evidential value refers to the documents' ability to serve as legal or historical proof of an activity, event, or occupation, such as law enforcement, census, or personnel records; marriage or birth records; or wills.

NOTE: To have such value the materials must be unmodified or not altered.

- High value materials are the originals in an unmodified form.
- Moderate value collections might include some records of legal value such as birth certificates or legal copies of land records.
- Low value materials are modified records or copies.

Monetary value refers to the current market value of an item. **NOTE:** This value may change daily.

Copies lose much of their artifactual, associational, evidential, and monetary value but retain much of their administrative and informational value. Thus, materials with high administrative and informational values are the best candidates for reformatting.

How to Score Value. If an object has high value in any of the above categories score 6 points. If it has no high value categories, but it does have a moderate value in any of the above categories, score 3 points. Otherwise, if the collection has no high or moderate values, score 1 point for low value.

Risk

Determining whether to reformat is also contingent upon risk.

High Risk Materials (6 points). The highest risk materials are primarily chemically unstable which results in their self-destructing and damaging or contaminating nearby materials, as well as posing health hazards to staff and researchers who use them. Classic examples of high risk materials listed in *priority order* are:

1. Cellulose nitrate negatives and film self-destruct naturally over time and are also a fire hazard, pose health hazards, and cause damage to nearby materials. **NOTE:** Give particular priority to materials that are badly stained or have softening emulsions. If emulsions are powdered, dispose of the negatives via the park's fire and safety officer. All cellulose nitrate negatives must be properly handled and stored. (See NPS *Museum Handbook*, Part I, Appendix M, Curatorial Care of Cellulose Nitrate Negatives.)
2. Materials with biological or chemical contamination, such as mold, insect, and vermin, that pose risks of information loss **and** health hazards (for example, Hantavirus; see *Conserve O Gram* 2/8, Hantavirus Disease Health and Safety Update).
3. Materials that are self-destructing due to inherent fault such as iron gall ink, leather with red rot, very acidic and brittle paper, cellulose acetate film, and those items that may be causing damage to nearby materials, such as materials that have oozing tape.

Moderate Risk (3 points). Moderate risk materials are experiencing primarily mechanical or physical damage due to their housing and handling, and the characteristics of the materials of which they are composed (e.g., folding strength). Examples listed in *priority order* are as follows:

1. Materials that are deteriorating and losing their informational content naturally or gradually due to their component processes and materials such as:
 - most color slides, negatives, and prints
 - flaking, retouched, friable, or handcolored images
 - all electronic and digital data including CD-ROMs and diskettes
 - letterpress books
 - carbon copy correspondence
 - some tracing paper drawings

Other factors being equal, smaller format materials such as microforms should be given top priority as more information is being lost.

2. Materials that have holes, cracks, broken or ripped off pieces, rips, tears, punctures, or losses
3. Materials that are warped, folded, creased, wrinkled, cockled, buckled, or otherwise structurally damaged
4. Materials that are scratched or abraded
5. Materials that are staining, discoloring, or changing their original appearance (e.g., color balance)

Low Risk (1 point). Low risk materials tend to be the more long-lived processes in undamaged condition and adequate storage conditions. Examples listed in *priority order* follow:

1. Foxed documents that are in an adequate environment
2. Materials that are dusty or dirty
3. Slightly faded blueprints and cyanotypes in unbuffered acid-free sleeves and appropriate boxes or mapcases
4. Visual materials that are separating from a mount or support

5. Friable media (e.g., crayon, pastel, charcoal) that are correctly housed

How to Score Risk. If 10% or more of the collection is at high risk, per the criteria above, then count the entire collection as high and score six points.

If less than 10% of the collection is high risk, count the entire collection as moderate risk. Or, if there are no high risk materials and 10% or more is at moderate risk, then count the entire collection as moderate risk and score 3 points.

If there are no high risk materials in the collection, less than 10% of the collection is moderate risk, and the remaining material is low risk, count the entire collection as low risk and score 1 point.

High risk collections that are also high value merit immediate reformatting, while high risk collections of low value may not be treated.

Use

The third factor in determining a collection's priority for reformatting is use. High use materials are those that are requested most frequently for reference purposes by staff and/or outside researchers.

Generally, high use materials have high value. On some occasions, materials of no perceivable value may suddenly become popular because of a particular charm of expression, for example, a turn-of-phrase in a letter or a quirky angle in a snapshot, or linkage to a previously uncelebrated event or activity. As scholarship changes, the values placed on materials also change. When high use can be predicted, reformatting is a wise preservation solution.

How to Score Use. Each repository must set its own values for this field based upon reference statistics and visitor logs. To do this, establish a median collections use figure. For example, if

20 is the median number of uses annually, then a low use figure for the collection would be 1-6; moderate use would be 7-13; high use would be 14-20+.

Sample of How to Score Collections

Value, risk, and use, when considered together and assigned scores (based upon numerical values of high=6, moderate=3, and low=1), indicate the collections requiring reformatting.

After assigning numerical values to the ratings of value, risk, and use, you can begin to prioritize the collections by their numerical scores. In the case of an identical score, it might be advisable to deal with the collection with the higher risk and value factors first (collection 2). Thus, in this chart the collections are listed in priority order.

	Value	Risk	Use	Score
Collection 1	High (6)	Moderate (3)	Moderate (3)	12
Collection 2	Moderate (3)	High (6)	Low (1)	10
Collection 3	Low (1)	Moderate (3)	High (6)	10
Collection 4	Moderate (3)	Low (1)	Moderate (3)	7
Collection 5	Low (1)	Low (1)	Moderate (3)	5

In collections where the range of values is extreme from high- to low-value materials, it may be advisable to weight the rating by giving high risk materials 7 instead of 6 points. Such weighing of the risk category would not affect the prioritization of the five collections described here, except that collection 2 would now have 11 instead of 10 points.

Once collections have been prioritized for reformatting, the next step is to select an appropriate reformatting technology (see *Conserve O Gram 19/11*, Preservation Reformatting: Selecting a Duplication Technology), write a request for proposals, obtain estimates, and arrange for duplication. After duplication the materials must be inspected to ensure that original and copy match (see *Conserve O Gram 19/13*, Preservation Reformatting: Inspection of Copy Photographs). Microfilm and photographs must be tested for residual chemicals and image density, while electronic materials must be verified and certified. Finally, the duplicates and originals are reboxed and labeled before being refilled and stored.

References

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