University of Pennsylvania Libraries
Preservation Statement of Values

As a core research investment of the University of Pennsylvania, the Penn Libraries recognize their responsibility in preserving information resources of enduring value for the University. Preservation is defined by the policies, actions, and plans to extend the life and usefulness of library resources in all formats. All Libraries staff and patrons have responsibilities in helping ensure that collections are preserved ranging from basic handling to in-depth conservation. As stewards of the University’s intellectual assets, Penn Libraries uphold preservation as a fundamental function of the Libraries. The Libraries strive to ensure that information resources will be available to students and researchers now and when they are needed in the future.

Making preservation assessments about what and how to retain information resources is integral to the University’s mission in research, teaching and learning through a system of institutional risk management practices; various pathways are possible and a range of factors inform decisions. While every effort is made to acquire, or in many cases to create, collections of enduring value, it is recognized that not all materials need to be preserved indefinitely at Penn. Permanent, and occasionally impermanent, materials are selected to support the teaching, learning, and research activities of the University. Preservation assessments are a collaborative process between those who perform preservation activities and those who select or curate materials. Preservation decisions are made in the context of collection policies, available resources, artifactual value, content, accessibility, institutional priorities, and technological limitations.

There is no single preservation panacea. Objects have varying needs because they have different formats and values. Preservation decisions can be applied to individual items or to collections as a whole and may include several individual actions. Preservation actions typically fall into two categories: preventive actions and reactive actions. Preventive preservation, such as proper handling, environmental controls, proper security, and planned data management preemptively address retention issues by designing programs around inherent risks. Reactive preservation activities, such as conservation and replacement are implemented in reaction to existing conditions or concerns. Reformattting crosses the boundaries and is a fusion of both preventive and reactive preservation making it a powerful and versatile option. Objects that inherently have a fiscal, artifactual, or historic value may be preserved in their original form whenever possible, though surrogates may be created to improve use thereby also preserving the original from further deterioration. Objects whose value is primarily based in its content may be preserved solely though reformattting to another media if continued care for the original becomes prohibitively expensive or cumbersome.

Digital files and software are preserved using similar approaches to their analog counterparts. For example, migrating a digital file constitutes transferring the information from one format into another but it may function differently, which is analogous to imaging a book and preserving the individual page images. Emulation surpasses the basic content to achieve the look and feel of a digital object, similar to conserving a map which provides access to information in the same way it was originally designed. Preserving digital content and analog materials are of equal importance. In both cases, it is advantageous to start preservation planning as early in the lifecycle of the objects as possible; ideally at, or even before, creation. Long-term preservation of digital assets typically relies on a multi-faceted approach combining local practice with national or international community partnerships. Preservation strategies must be dynamic and flexible to accommodate the constantly changing landscape and to incorporate new solutions as they arise.