

**DIGITIZATION PROJECTS:  
Key Issues for Archivists, Curators and Librarians**

*What is your purpose for digitizing the object, and how will you assess the potential of the materials?*

In thinking about goals of a digitization projects, the central questions and issues will be:

**CULTURAL INTEREST OF THE SOURCE MATERIALS**

- Is the source of sufficient cultural interest to warrant the level of access made possible by digitizing?
- Will digitization enhance this interest, or are the original materials sufficient for this purpose?

**CURRENT AND POTENTIAL USERS**

- Are visitors now using the proposed source materials?
- Are materials being used as much as they might be?
- Is current access to the materials so limited that digitization will create a new audience?
- Would digitization create an opportunity to show interrelated materials in context?
- What type of hardware and software will your visitors be using and will they be able to access the type of formats and file-sized your project would necessitate?
- Are you intending to create a printed publication, an online exhibit, an image, text or audio database, and/or embark on a digital preservation project?
- Will the digitized object serve as a surrogate for a deteriorating original, or will it be used for online presentation?

These issues will directly affect decisions over file formatting. Doing a virtual exhibit and creating an digital preservation database can be two very different ventures, with the latter being by far the most complex of the two. If you are scanning only for an online exhibit then the process can go quite quickly, with images such as photographs scanned at around 100dpi as a JPEG or GIF, and shorter length audio recordings streamed in a format such as Real Audio. These formats are best for online presentation, but are not recommended if the purpose for digitization is preservation. In this case, images should be formatted as TIFFs and audio as WAV. Our section on Best Practices provides more detailed information on these processes of digitization.