

The Digital Archives Handbook: A Guide to Creation, Management, and Preservation. Edited by Aaron D. Purcell. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019. 270 pp. Hardback. \$125.00. Softcover. \$56.00.

The Digital Archives Handbook, edited by Aaron D. Purcell, PhD, professor and director of Special Collections at Virginia Tech, is a collection of essays aimed at archivists responsible for establishing and maintaining policies and procedures to address digital materials. The book provides guidance on the place and scope of digital materials within the current archives and special collections landscape. Students training for archival careers will also find the book a useful overview of the impact of digital technologies on the archives profession and will learn some of the common terminology archivists use and issues that arise in the context of digital archives management.

The book is organized into two sections. The first section focuses on reevaluating policies and practices to address the new complexities that digital materials introduce to an archival repository. The second section provides specific examples of different types of repositories/collections where digital materials are especially prevalent and provides insight on the ongoing and evolving challenges posed by digital materials. The introduction contextualizes both sections well and introduces digital records as just another material type that can be managed within standard archival workflows with a little bit of extra planning, investment, and care. Chapter authors include several leading archival professionals with a strong mix of higher-level management and hands-on processing experience in public, academic, and government institutions. Chapters are based on applied theory and navigate the reader through the work of addressing the “digital” aspect of the chapter’s topic.

The first section includes the chapters “Acquisitions, Appraisals, and Arrangement,” “Description and Delivery,” “Digital Preservation,” “Digital Forensics and Curation,” and “Contracts, Intellectual Property, and Privacy,” making it easy for readers to refer to different aspects of archival workflows as needed and to reflect on which ones would be most relevant for their own institution. Each chapter is written to address how digital materials may need special considerations in each step of the archival process, and the authors contextualize their case studies with an overview of how digital materials have impacted or fit within their own institutional policies. Authors also outline how to discuss with key interest groups (including archives staff, donors, researchers, etc.) changing or updating policies to reflect the incorporation of digital materials within certain institutional contexts. The case studies are mostly free of technical jargon or overly specific local practices, and most archivists should find them broadly relevant and useful. Even the chapters delving into the most technically complex side of working with digital materials, such as “Digital Preservation” and “Digital Forensics and Curation,” are clear and approachable, focusing on policies and general workflows rather than diving too much into specific tools and technical processes. A common theme throughout the first section is the importance of archivists taking a proactive role and being as prepared as possible to address the complex issues related to digital materials *before* they are transferred to an archives, rather than waiting until after digital materials arrive. Throughout the section is an underlying recognition that not every institution

can or should handle every type of material “perfectly” and an emphasis that doing *something* to get a handle on digital materials is better than doing *nothing*.

The book’s second section shifts to more specific and technical case studies, with chapters titled “Performing Arts Collections,” “Oral History Collections,” “Architectural and Design Collections,” “Congressional Collections,” and “Email.” These chapters are more packed with technically complex details than those in the first section, introducing specific tools and file formats that are associated with managing particular types of collections. At the same time, the authors explain the resources and/or policies for which archivists should advocate to appropriately process digital collections and make them accessible, ensuring that these technically laden chapters will not become outdated too quickly. For example, in “Oral History Collections,” Douglas A. Boyd explores not only the actual technical processes of handling digital files, but also how to navigate the potential rights and privacy issues inherent in making oral history interviews available online, especially those that were recorded in a pre-Internet era and never intended for such widespread public use. A benefit of the variety of topics in this section of the book is that they are case studies that stand on their own; if readers find any to be too “in the weeds” or not relevant to their own roles, they can just focus on those that are relevant. While these case studies may be too specific to be immediately applicable for some readers, they do provide interesting insights into how archivists in particular repositories have handled the increasing prevalence of digital materials within their collections.

The key takeaway from this book that sets it apart from others focusing on digital collections is its emphasis on discussing digital materials with donors. The most technical aspects of the book may become outdated quickly, but the authors still offer invaluable insights into the importance of archivists advocating for the tools and resources necessary to facilitate early interventions with respect to digital content and to ensure materials are collected, processed, and made accessible in a useful way. Descriptions in the case studies of how decisions were made in different parts of the archival process will likely prove especially helpful for archivists in any type of institution in assessing the relevant stakeholders and resources needed to successfully handle the growing number of digital materials headed our way.

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