

Quick and Dirty Guide for Home Digitization

This is meant as a rough guideline for getting the most from your home scanning efforts, based on what you intend to do with the files.

Before you scan...

Look at the item(s) you want to scan. What condition is it in? Is it in remarkable condition? Gently worn? Or does it have a few pieces falling off already? Digitization, even in the best hands, is a physically stressful process which may damage an item in the best condition, or ruin one that's already falling apart.

What's more important to you? Keeping the original as it is now? Or digitizing it to capture the content before the physical item turns to dust or fades completely?

If you want to keep the item as it is, talk to someone who does conservation first. If you still want to digitize, read on...

Books, documents, newspapers (anything with printed text):

Black and white text (books, newspapers):

- Scan at 150 ppi 8-bit grayscale;
- If you have really small text on a page, scan at 300 ppi 8-bit grayscale.

Magazine pages or anything with color on them:

- Scan at 150 ppi 24-bit color;
- For pages with really small text or photos/graphics with fine details, scan at 300 ppi 24-bit color.

How to reduce gutter shadow: Lay the book on the flatbed scanner so the spine runs the length of the scanner. You will only be able to scan 1 page at a time, but your pages will have less shadow. Be sure to support the other half of the book with something else (more books, a box) to hold it up while you scan.

Photographs:

Email: Scan at 72 ppi 24-bit COLOR (even for black and white photos).

Print:

- For glossy prints or enlargements, scan your original photograph at 300 ppi
- For most other printing needs, scan at 72 ppi

Photo albums: If you want to scan photographs that you have in a photo album or scrapbook, then keep all of the photos on the pages. Scan each entire page as one image and save it. This way, you have both the photo and any writing with names or dates that you might need. To make individual files for each photo, open the album page file, and draw a selection box around the photo(s) you want, copy it and paste it into a new image file of its own.

Slides/Slide Film/Film Negative:

Before you go buy a scanner to start scanning slides or film strips yourself, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) Do I have 200 or more slides/film strips?
- 2) Do I want to spend a lot of my free time scanning them myself?
- 3) Do I want to spend a lot of money to get a good flatbed scanner or dedicated slide scanner?

If you answer “Yes” to all three questions, then do some research before buying a new scanner for slides. See what the OPTICAL resolution of each scanner is, and how long it takes to scan a single slide. Kodak, Canon, and Minolta have the better scanners for slides and film strips.

If you answer “No” to any of the above questions, then your best option is to send the slides or film strips to a commercial slide scanning vendor. It’s much easier, much cheaper, and far less hassle.

Recommendations for flatbed scanners:

Reliable brands:

Canon, Epson, Kodak, Microtek, Plustek, Umax

Hit or miss brands:

Dell, Fujitsu, HP, Minolta, Lexmark, Visioneer, Xerox

Should I get a flatbed scanner or a scanner/fax/copier/printer? Multipurpose scanners (scanner/fax/photocopier/printer) do all right, but they're not as good as dedicated scanners (all it does is scan). Dedicated scanners are designed to do nothing but scan well, many times in a row, over a long time. Unlike multipurpose scanners, if a dedicated scanner dies, you don't lose everything else as well.

Should I get a scanner with an Automatic Document Feeder? Automatic Document Feeders (ADFs) are similar to the document feeders on photocopiers. There are downsides to ADFs, however: most document feeders roll the paper around to lay them on the scanner. If your ADF has a duplex feature, it has to roll the paper over a second time to scan the other side. That adds to the wear and tear of the documents. As with photocopiers, the paper can get caught in the rollers and get crunched up or torn, which ruins your original document.

If you have a lot of papers in storage boxes to scan, you will save yourself time, money, and headaches by taking them to a digitization vendor and having them scan the material for you. The vendors have specialty document scanners and can offer you a good price.

If I have a digital camera, do I really need a scanner? Consumer-grade digital cameras (the kind you use while on vacation) do not work well as scanners. The quality of images generated by those digital cameras cannot compare to what you can get from a flatbed scanner (An 8.5 x 11 flatbed scanner scanning at 300 ppi is equal to a 33 megapixel digital camera).

If you're scanning with the intent to preserve the image long-term, invest in a good flatbed scanner. If you have a high-end digital camera, or if you are not allowed to scan something on a flatbed, and you just want a copy of something to read the text, then a digital camera will suffice.