Home Media Preservation Guide

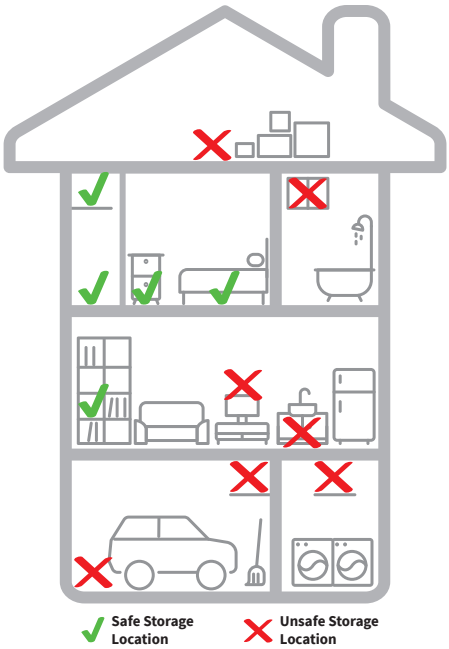
TEXAS ARCHIVE OF THE MOVING IMAGE

STORAGE

Storing your media in the proper containers and conditions will greatly slow deterioration of your items. Ideally, all of your media should be stored in a clean, cool, dry, dark environment. Excessive heat, humidity, and light will accelerate the normal deterioration of any media format and quickly destroy film and video.

LOCATION

- ✔ Clothes closets tend to be low in humidity, maintain a stable temperature, and have limited lighting.
- ✔ The area under a bed is typically dark and cool, but can become dusty. If you store your media here, invest in covered plastic containers to protect your items from dust.
- ✖ Pantries, laundry rooms, or other small, enclosed spaces used to store household chemicals.
- ✖ Most attics are not climate controlled and experience dramatic fluctuations in temperature throughout the day.
- ✖ Garages tends to be dirty and have an unregulated climate. In addition, chemicals in the air from automobiles and household substances typically stored in the garage can create a hazardous atmosphere for media.



FILM STORAGE

Storage in proper containers is one of the most basic and effective methods of protection from dust and dirt collecting on your film, which can permanently scratch or otherwise damage the images. Whenever possible, store your films in their original containers. If the original cans have been destroyed or damaged (such as rusting), the best option is to replace them with new cans. If buying new film cans is not possible, a simple plastic bag is still better than nothing. Film can be stored in frost-free freezers or refrigerators as long as they are securely sealed in laminate or heavy-duty freezer bags. Storing film at a cold temperature (below 32 degrees Fahrenheit) will actually extend its life.

SPECIAL ATTENTION

Nitrate Film

Nitrate film stock was used for 35mm motion pictures from 1889 – 1951. It is highly flammable (it can burn under water), and should be handled accordingly. If you suspect that you have nitrate film (it is usually labeled along the side edge), store it in a cool place such as the freezer, and contact a film lab or archive to learn how to properly handle it. Do not try to project the film, and never smoke around it.

Vinegar Syndrome

When acetate film stock begins to decay, it can release acetic acid. This condition is known as "vinegar syndrome," and it can spread to all of the films in your collection. If you have films that smell like vinegar, they should be quarantined from the rest of the collection. Ideally, vinegar "infected" films should be kept far apart from "healthy" films, but quarantine can be as simple as sealing them in plastic bags.

VIDEOTAPE STORAGE

Since all video signals, analog and digital, are written on magnetic tape, keep all tapes as far from magnetic sources as possible. The most common magnetic sources in your home include stereo speakers, televisions, and other home theater equipment.

If you are not watching or recording a videotape, remove it from the player/recorder.
Store videotapes on their end, like a book on a bookshelf; do not stack tapes one on top of the other. Uneven pressure on the cassette can deform or warp the tape, rendering it unplayable. Store your tapes in plastic cases rather than cardboard sleeves.
Frozen storage is not recommended for videotape, films with magnetic sound tracks, or DVDs; the magnetic components of these materials can be damaged in a cold environment.

DVD STORAGE

Follow the same storage guidelines as for videotape: store the DVDs upright in hard plastic cases, in a clean, cool, and dry environment, away from direct sunlight.

www.texasarchive.org | @texasarchive

Texas Archive of the Moving Image
501 N. IH-35, Suite 204, Austin, TX 78702
512-485-3073 | info@texasarchive.org

HANDLING MEDIA ITEMS

As a general rule, all of your media should be handled as little as possible, with clean hands, and returned to its case or can immediately after use. Below are some tips to help you safely handle specific items.

HANDLING FILM

Ideally, you should only touch your film when you are going to project it or clean/repair it. When you handle your film:

Clean the container

If your film has been sitting undisturbed for a long period of time, thoroughly wipe off any dust or dirt from the film container before opening it. Oftentimes the plastics that comprise the film base have a static charge that will attract any dust particles near it. In addition to making your film look dirty during projection, dirt and dust particles can scratch the film and cause permanent damage.

Hold the film by the edges

Always wash your hands before handling film and only hold film by the edges. Not only will the oils on your skin leave smudges and fingerprints that affect image quality but they can also cause permanent damage. Furthermore, any dirt or dust left on your hands can harm the film.

Clean film properly

Film-cleaning is best done by a skilled professional with the proper equipment. If you must clean your film yourself, we strongly urge you to purchase the correct film-handling supplies. Cleaning film without following accepted procedures, or using the right supplies and equipment, could cause far more harm than if you let the film remain dirty.

HANDLING VIDEOTAPE

All video cassettes have a plastic gate on the front of the cartridge that can be lifted to access the tape. NEVER EVER lift this gate and touch the tape behind it. Any care that requires directly touching the tape should be left to a professional.

HANDLING DVDS

Always handle DVDs by their edges; never touch the shiny side of the disc, and never set the disc down outside of the case. The only safe places for a DVD are inside of a player and inside its case. If cleaning is necessary, use an ultra-fine polishing cloth and wipe outwards from the center. Never wipe in a circular motion around the disc. When labeling a blank disc, use only a soft, non-solvent type, felt tip pen. Do not use a ballpoint or hard-tipped pen.

LINKS AND RESOURCES

Texas Archive of the Moving Image, https://texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=Preservation

The Association of Moving Image Archivists, https://amianet.org

Council on Library and Information Resources, “Magnetic Tape Storage and Handling”
https://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub54/

Little Film, http://www.littlefilm.org/Primer3.html

National Film and Preservation Foundation, “The Film Preservation Guide”
https://www.filmpreservation.org/preservation-basics/the-film-preservation-guide

The Video History Project, “Video Preservation — The Basics”
http://www.experimentaltvcenter.org/video-preservation-basics

DIGITAL TRANSFER

Transferring film and videotapes to a digital format is the best way to preserve the content of your movies long after the original medium has deteriorated. The benefits of digitization include the ability to: migrate to new digital formats as needed, create multiple copies that you can store in different places, and view the videos on your computer without putting wear and tear on the originals.

FILM TRANSFER

Although it is possible to set up a video camera and record movies as they are projected onto a screen, this method does not produce high quality images. For the best results, hire a professional service that will transfer your films using scanning or telecine equipment.

VIDEOTAPE TRANSFER

You may already own all of the equipment necessary to digitize your home videotape collection: a computer, capture software, a digitization device, and a playback device, such as a camcorder or VCR. Most home computers are capable of digitization, and currently the Mac and Windows operating systems come pre-loaded with video capture and DVD creation programs. Consult the software instruction manual/help file for more information.

Most video cameras come equipped with the cable that connects it to a computer for digitization; usually all you need to do is plug it in and download your video. To digitize videotape from a VCR, you will need a capturing device that connects to your computer and converts the analog signal from the deck to a digital one in the computer. Some video camcorders have an analog to digital feature built in.

AFTER DIGITIZATION

To protect your digital files from hard-drive failure, make backup copies of your digital files and store them in multiple places. Consider investing in an extra hard-drive or an online storage services. Most importantly, do not throw away the original! If properly cared for, they will be your highest quality version, and if you lose your DVDs or other digital copies, you will be able to re-transfer the items.

DO NOT THROW AWAY YOUR ORIGINALS!!!