

Caring for your collections: Digital prints

Many of the photographs we take with digital cameras, mobile phones, and iPods will, in time, become historical records. Traditional photographic images can be viewed without the use of any equipment, but digital images require current software and hardware to remain accessible and usable. Often files are left on unstable portable devices such as memory cards and CDs. Prints generated from digital files are commonly printed on printers using inks and papers that fade and discolour rapidly. To this end, preserving photographic prints can be very important, so this guide has compiled a number of recommendations to help minimise the potential risks to your digital prints.

Recommendations to help minimise potential risks to digital prints:

Creating an archival-quality print

- This is considered to be the best way to preserve a digital image. This means selecting printing inks and paper that are chemically stable and will not deteriorate quickly. As there is an overwhelming array of inks and papers of varying quality available, it is helpful to have a few tips to help you select the most suitable products.

Match the paper with the printer

- The printer's manufacturer will recommend specific papers to be used that best suit the ink.
- If buying a printer, select one that uses pigment-based inks as this type of ink is less likely to fade and discolour than dye-based printers. Do your research before buying (see websites listed below).

Ideal storage for prints

- Place prints in archival boxes to help protect from light damage, dust, and sudden changes in temperature and humidity.
- Ideally, prints should be housed in individual sleeves within a box to prevent the prints sticking together.
- A good paper choice for housing is sleeves made from pure cotton cellulose paper, often called 'rag' paper in art shops.
- Uncoated polyester (often called 'Mylar') or polypropylene sleeves are the safest plastics to use. Look for enclosures, including photo albums and plastic sleeves, which have passed the 'Photographic Activity Test' (PAT).
- Store your prints in a cool, dry environment with good air circulation.
- Limit exposure to light to minimise fading. Avoid long term display if you are unable to print another copy.

- Never laminate prints (or any other material) that you wish to keep for a long time as the process can cause irreparable damage as it ages. A safer option is to place prints in uncoated polyester ('Mylar') or polypropylene sleeves.

Digital file preservation

- Digital file preservation is another important aspect of caring for photographs. Refer to our guide "[Digital Content](#)".
- Refer to our guide "[Caring for your collections: Photographs](#)" for further general information on caring for photographs.

Useful Websites and Texts

- AICCM Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material www.aiccm.org.au
- AIC American Institute for Conservation www.conservation-us.org
- Image Permanence Institute, *Image Permanence Institute*, Rochester Institute of Technology, www.imagepermanenceinstitute.org/
- Jürgens, Martin C, *The digital print: Identification and preservation*, Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, 2009
- Wilhelm, H., *Wilhelm Imaging Research*, www.wilhelm-research.com/
- Find a conservator in private practice through the Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) <https://www.aiccm.org.au/need-a-conservator>

The procedures described here have been used by State Library of Queensland in the care of its collections and are considered suitable by State Library as described; however, State Library will not be responsible for damage to your collections should damage result from the use of these procedures.

Need further information?

(07) 3840 7810 | <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/preservation>



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