

Can you write that down?

A/V Preservation Documentation Strategies

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Public Broadcasting Preservation Fellowship Webinar

March 15, 2018 | 8pm Eastern

Thanks for having me! Today we'll walk through some general principles of documentation, I'll share lessons learned from building and documenting our work in the archives at my current job.

What? Why? How?
With who?

At the 10k foot level, these are the questions we try to answer when we create, share, and manage documentation.



PLANNING

**WHAT WE'RE
BUILDING**

**HOW WE
MAINTAIN**

What type of documentation are you creating?

Thinking about type of documentation you're creating is important, and in my experience they fall into three categories.

PLANNING

- Ask for examples.
- Define context.
- Define requirements.
- Who is responsible?
- Who is reading?
- What is this version's purpose?
- Clarify!

WHAT WE'RE BUILDING

HOW WE MAINTAIN

What type of documentation are you creating?

- Ask to see other docs from your organization. Do some exist? Great! Ask what is liked about these. None? Ask what people would want to know about this and other activities - use this as a foundation. REDUCE REUSE RECYCLE.
- Projects and workflows don't start in a vacuum. Why is this being created? What initiatives is this related to? Add some narrative. Assume reader is new to project.
- What "dependencies" are required to understand this new process? Are these technical or cultural?
- Define your requirements. What is this project and why is it happening. What do you need to achieve, and how are you meeting those requirements? Can you crossmap the functional and business needs?
- Why do you need to communicate information?
- Who is writing it? Who can review it? Who is the intended audience?
- What is this version's reason for being created - What are you communicating? What do you need the individual to take away from what you're sharing (including if that individual is you, in the future!)
- Draft, review and modify with your colleagues! Welcome clarification - start as an open and welcoming effort so you can continue to gather

- productive and constructive critical feedback. (that's a handshake emoji)

PLANNING

WHAT WE'RE BUILDING

- Dependencies?
- Restate purpose.
- Draw/write it out.
- Replicable?
- Be open, but be safe.
- Clarify!

HOW WE MAINTAIN

What type of documentation are you creating?

- Again, what are the dependencies (technical and contextual) for this process to work? Document the known exceptions, address known unknowns.
- Revisit the reason you're documenting. What do you hope to share or gain from this process?
- Next, lay it all out. Go thru step by step and define and document the process. This could be in narrative form, a combination of technical writing and diagrams, or whatever makes sense for your project. Add footnotes to everything from ISO standards to where you accessed the tool source code.
- Seems simple, but based on your documents could you recreate your current environment? Yes? Incredible. No? Why - and add that why to the documentation.
- Make it as open as possible. Not everything documentable is, or should be, public or available to a wide audience. Be critical - can you share 1% of it? 10%, 50%?
- Circle back to Planning crew, and ask for review. Make sure everything you have at this stage is as accurate and comprehensive as reasonable.

PLANNING

WHAT WE'RE BUILDING

HOW WE MAINTAIN

- Answer your own ?s
- Set strategy and schedule.
- Share & clarify!

What type of documentation are you creating?

- Important: how did YOU learn this stuff? What was your process? If you saw your documentation, would it answer questions you had? Go to the beginning and look at what you've created as a whole.
- Document who is responsible for maintaining the docs (and the activities) and how often this will happen. It's ok to say annually! Put it on a shared calendar, assign to a distribution email with more than 2 members. Align it with another annual event (e.g., a security audit or daylight saving time!).
- Don't be shy - get this document out to folks. Ask for feedback, do the work. Make the corrections (or document them atleast in a tracker!).



- Effective documentation starts out messy. Creates an opportunity to be more specific.
- You will uncover LOTS of assumptions. Document the results of those conversations and reactions.
- You will misrepresent things or misstep. Thank the people who identified the shortcomings, move on and do better.
- Still bad? Throw your computer into the ocean.

Gif: <https://gph.is/1XOBMag> "GOODBYE WORLD BEACH GIF BY TOPSHELF RECORDS"

Digitized Materials Quality Control Workflow

Below is a working draft of the phases and individual steps we take upon receiving digitized material on hard drives from our digitization vendors (specs for reformatting are available [here](#)). For ease and control, batches of information are based on the hard drive they arrived on. We track the progress of the hard drive as it moves through the steps in a shared tracking document, gathering additional information (or exceptions) as necessary.

The ultimate goal following QC is to move materials into an Asset Staging area, where they will be uploaded, along with any additional metadata records, into our Digital Asset Management System (DAMS) for access and transcoding for distribution.

Activity: Make sure both the harddrive and the box are labeled with content, vendor, and date information. Confirm that what was expected from the vendor was received.

Hemingway Editor

Readability

Grade 13
OK. Aim for 9.

Words: 142
Show More ▾

0

adverbs. Well done.

5

uses of passive voice. Cut to 1 or fewer.

2

phrases have simpler alternatives.

1

of 7 sentences is hard to read.

3

of 7 sentences are very hard to read.

Hemingway Editor
www.hemingwayapp.com

Write intentionally and actively. Try to write in a way that's simple and understandable. A friend told me about the Hemingway editor, which i use frequently for brevity and clarity. Here's one of our docs in the free online app - the highlighted areas could use some improvement. Nice tool which helps if you are cutting down on apologetic or passive tone, including using the word "just" too much. Very helpful but annoying for people who like to write run on sentences, like me!



“Technical writing”



instructional/explanatory

I have to include this technical writing term. I only recently figured out what this means - essentially its instructional or explanatory writing. It's workflow documentation and diagramming, its step by step guidance and tutorials. It's alot of things, there's an entire field of professionals doing it - but also you've probably already done it in some capacity. If you want resources, try searching this term to see examples.

We're information professionals!



Helen 侯-Sandi
@helenhousandi

Does anybody document their OSS maintenance strategy in-repo? Like CONTRIBUTORS .md, only maybe like MAINTAINERS .md instead? Or should it all be one doc about project expectations?

12:18pm · 20 Feb 2018 · Twitter Web Client

1 REPLY 4 RETWEETS 3 LIKES



Above:

<https://twitter.com/AmeliasBrain/status/943928962995994624>

Right:

<https://twitter.com/jmddrake/status/969419903328452609>

Left:

<https://twitter.com/helenhousandi/status/965999032828071941>



phd student pookie
@jmddrake

i am witnessing scholars blatantly and flagrantly erasing the intellectual and other forms of labor done by organizers, activists, and protestors on a myriad of topics. and their poor students, by and large, have no idea about the theft that they are witnessing.

10:51pm · 1 Mar 2018 · Twitter Web Client

1 REPLY 9 LIKES



Twitter as a resource for conversations around documentation strategies, learning about new projects, and seeing what work is being done & shared. Examples of a few of the topics that have come across my feed recently:

- Ideas for ongoing maintenance strategy transparency
- Ways to acknowledge labor and thank project creators/maintainers
- Identifying dangerous habits in erasing contributions, especially in circles where 'citing your work' is critical

Comb thru your recent likes/retweets/saved tabs/unread listserv emails to see whose voices you're consuming and amplifying. How does this impact your work, and how you understand your work? Whose documentation do you gravitate towards? What do you like about it? How can you emulate those qualities?



2016 AMIA/DLF Hack Day

Recent examples of org-centric documentation

1. Internal documents ill review at a high level.
2. Carnegie Hall Github repos: github.com/carnegiehall (focusing on quality-control: workflow overview doc, technotes which are really for my own reference)
3. 2016 AMIA/DLF Hack Day:
https://wiki.curatecamp.org/index.php/Association_of_Moving_Image_Archivists_&_Digital_Library_Federation_Hack_Day_2016

Carnegie Hall Archives DAMS Docs Sampler

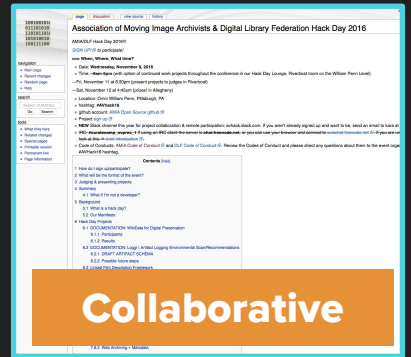
- *Narrative*
 - 2 pg overview + context (great for new hires!)
 - Digital Collections initiative history + policies
 - Tracking documents + tools
- *Diagrams*
 - Infrastructure: Overview of SaaS-ish set up
 - Procedural: Data flow from authority system into DAMS

- Narrative taken from and informs grant writing.
- Great opportunity to work on skills of writing heavy tech for non technical audiences.
-

12 Issues (28 Comments) 3,124 Views				
New · Share · History				
Digitized Materials Quality Control Workflow				
Below is a working draft of the phases and individual steps we take upon receiving digitized material on hard drives from our digitization vendors (specs for reformatting are available here). For ease and control, batches of information are based on the hard drive they arrived on. We track the progress of the hard drive as it moves through the steps in a shared tracking document, gathering additional information (or exceptions) as necessary.				
The ultimate goal following QC is to move materials into an Asset Staging area, where they will be uploaded, along with any additional metadata records, into our Digital Asset Management System (DAMS) for access and transcoding for distribution.				
Step #	Phase	File Location	Activity	Tool
QC-001	Receive harddrive from vendor	Vendor harddrive	Make sure both the harddrive and the box are labelled with content, vendor, and date information. Confirm that what was expected from the vendor was received.	
QC-002	Receive harddrive from	Vendor harddrive	Verify content on the drive matches what the vendor was supposed to send. Refer to the Statement of Work and existing project	
Internal/External				
004	checking	harddrive	harddrive, stored in a CSV file.	qa_cksum.sh

Carnegie Hall Archives using [Github](#)

Recent examples of org-centric documentation



2016 AMIA/DLF Hack Day

Recent examples of org-centric documentation

We are learning, not
“discovering”. Where or from who
did you learn this from? What is
the source’s background, bias?

AACK!

MLA, Chicago, copy&paste. Write
it, find as permanent of an
identifier as you can. Annotate if
you can (for future self + others)

Share your docs and invite others
to review + contribute. Assign
colleagues to add their expertise
and invest in the doc process.

Acknowledge

Atttribute

Collaborate

Keep it up!

Keep it editable. Make a recurring
calendar event, invite your team.
Review & refresh! Share with new
hires! Share with the field!

*Or, how I refuse to have a conversation without
creating an acronym.*

References & Resources Sampler

- **Write the Docs** is a “global community of people who care about documentation” - www.writethedocs.org
- **AMIA Open Source Committee's** GitHub (ffmprovizr and open-workflows are my favorites!) - <https://github.com/amiaopensource>
- **PBcore** (hello!) website is easiest navigation I've had researching schemas - example page of <http://pbcore.org/pbcoreassettype/>
- CFP for **CIDOC's** 2018 “**Provenance of Knowledge**” re: object and procedural documentation - <http://www.cidoc2018.com/call-papers>
- **StackOverflow** (great examples of how to/not to ask questions, receive help, and show your work) - <https://stackoverflow.com>
- **Ashley Blewer's Audiovisual Preservation Training** - <http://training.ashleyblewer.com>
- **The Recompiler** (feminist tech zine with technical writing) - <https://recompilermag.com/issues/issue-6/>
- **Julia Evans'** systems & debugging zines - <https://jvns.ca/zines/>

Thanks!



Say hi on Twitter: **@k_grons**