

PRESERVING YOUR MEMORIES

What to Do with Your Papers, Photographs, and Other Materials from Your Career Before They Deteriorate or Get Thrown Away by Accident

You've amassed boxes of paper, photographs, and publications over your career and now you need to do something with it all. Here's some basic advice and resources to help you get started.

Where Do I Begin?

- Rebuild or update your CV/résumé and include a copy in your papers. List all awards and major publications, if relevant. (If you have many publications, create a separate list.)
- Use a second copy of updated your CV/résumé to make a detailed outline. List the major issues and incidents, projects, and people under each job.

What Should I Save?

- Your Autobiography/Memoirs
- Correspondence
- Drawings
- Scrapbooks
- Film & Videotape
- Interviews
- Awards/Certificates
- Diaries
- Photographs
- Work-related maps
- News Clippings
- Brochures/Flyers

What Should I Throw Out?

- Published reports you didn't write
- Published magazines or journals you aren't in or didn't write
- Data sets without explanation or context
- Anything with personal information like a Social Security number. Destroy those!
- Books (Your textbooks in particular. But hold on to those rare books!)

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR ORGANIZING AND HANDLING MATERIALS

Organizing Your Papers

Using your résumé, organize your papers either by topic or chronology. You know better than anyone else what's important and what's not. Generally, do what makes sense to someone else so there's no guesswork about the logic. If you donate your papers to an archive, they typically do not reorganize them. That said, even the most rudimentary system goes a long way toward helping others make sense of the collection.

Storing Papers and Photographs

- When packaging family papers and photographs for storage, use boxes and folders (acid-free, if possible). Plastic sleeves, albums, and scrapbooks can damage paper!
- Store items at a low temperature and a low relative humidity
- Consider cold storage for acetate negatives, color negatives, prints, and slides
- If you can't safely remove the photograph from a scrapbook or album, leave them in there and try scanning the image directly from there

Handling Family Papers and Photographs

- Have a clean, clear space prepared to place the originals before you get them out.
- Don't eat, drink, or smoke around originals.
- Wash hands before handling paper and don't apply lotion as it can stain paper. Paper can be handled without gloves because clean, lotion-free hands will not stain the paper and gloves can make it hard to handle delicate paper.
- Handle photographs and negatives with gloves. Fingerprints can cause permanent stains on photographs and negatives.
- Record all relevant info on back of photo in pencil: who, what, where, when
- If scanning photos, do so at a minimum of 300 dpi; scan papers at 200 dpi. Create folders labelled either by topic or time period, or both (like by topic within a year or range of years). For each item, assign a file name that is associated with the folder name [Nantucket_beach_erosion_southfacing]. Be sure to include all identifying information with the photo in the file, or scan the backside and use the same file name and end it with "_B" [Nantucket_beach_erosion_southfacing_B]. Be sure to back up the files to an external hard drive or to the Cloud. Put the hard drive in a fireproof safe or box, or store it offsite.

For more information on donating your papers, see "Donating Your Personal or Family Records to a Repository" at: <http://www2.archivists.org/publications/brochures/donating-familyrecs>

On how to safely handle papers and photographs, see "How to Preserve Family Archives (papers and photographs)": <http://www.archives.gov/preservation/family-archives/>

CAPTURING YOUR EXPERIENCE

Now that you've updated your résumé and organized your papers, you may want to capture your experience to share with others. The three most common ways are: writing them up, being interviewed, and creating a memory book. We recommend using your annotated résumé as an outline for any project.

Before starting any of these projects, ask yourself: Why am I doing this? Who is my audience? Who will want to read or look at this? For example, in a memoir, writing just for family and friends may lead you to select different topics to include than if you're writing about your career.

If it's too overwhelming to think about covering your entire life, you can pick a few topics or events to highlight and focus on that reveal something or are funny. Consider sharing any lessons you may have learned. Readers relate to mistakes as well as accomplishments.

Writing

You had a wonderful career and think, "I'll write my memoir. Lots of people in my field will want to read it. And I'll sit back and watch the royalty checks roll in!" Don't undertake this thinking it will fatten your retirement portfolio. Please understand that very few books make money—and even fewer authors do. The typical contract pays a few thousand dollars and no royalties. It costs a publisher a minimum of \$20,000 to publish a book, and in academic publishing a "best seller" is one that's sold a thousand copies. To produce a book, the publisher has to pay someone to review your manuscript, a copyeditor to improve it (every writer needs an editor—no matter how many books they've published), a designer to lay it out, and the printer, as well as the author. Alternatively, you can self-publish through a website and be done. No matter which route you take, please run Spellcheck before sending it to anyone to save yourself embarrassment!

- Self-publishing can be done through any number of websites by uploading a Word or PDF document and clicking the "SEND" button. You have to do all the marketing.
- To publish with an established press, first visit their website and see if they've published other books on the topic. Review their materials for prospective authors to see if you meet their criteria. They receive dozens of manuscripts each year and have limited resources. Please follow their protocols before contacting them.
- Remember: If a publisher accepts your manuscript, there is still a great deal of work to be done. It can take two years or longer from the time it's accepted to when it's published. Expect to revise the manuscript several times. And after publication comes more work; expect to do a lot of your own promotions and marketing work. No one knows the book better than you.

For advice on how to write a memoir, see: <https://self-publishingschool.com/how-to-write-a-memoir/> or any number of other websites.

Memory Book

If you opt to create a scrapbook or memory book, there are several options for cover materials. More important than that material is the quality of the album pages and other materials in direct contact with the photographs and papers. Use materials that will not cause long-term damage.

Oral History

Doing an oral history interview is tricky because it's best to work with someone trained in interview techniques. However, you can do this by having someone else take your expanded résumé and develop questions to ask you. You can agree ahead of time on what topics to you'll discuss. Here are some things to consider:

- Ask yourself: Who's the intended audience? Is this for family only, or will it be donated to an archive along with your papers?
- What's the final product going to be? Just the recording? Or do you want to take the transcript of the interview, clean it up, and publish that? Or use the transcript as the basis for a written memoir?
- Do you want to record using only audio or do you want a video interview?
- What kind of interview will it be? Will it be a career retrospective or a hit the highlights?
- Who will interview you?
- How long will the interview last? A career retrospective could take 8 or more hours.
- After the interview is completed, it should be transcribed. Transcriptions by humans can cost \$20/hr., and it can take 4-5 hours of transcription for every hour of recorded interview). There is free software online, but it can be imperfect and will still require reviewing and editing.
- How will you preserve or store the recording? Where?

For more information on how to prepare for and conduct oral history interviews, see:

http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html