

NOMINATING DIGITAL DOCUMENTS FOR INSCRIPTION:¹ EXPLANATORY NOTE

Compared to analogue documents, digital documents have a very short history and they are still evolving very rapidly. In the context of these Guidelines, this Appendix does not pretend to present a full overview nor to draw conclusions on this development. Its only purpose is to serve as a tool to manage them within the framework of the MoW Registers. They have been formulated in such a way that they can be used by potential nominators.

Criteria for inscription

The principles and criteria for the inscription of digital documents are essentially the same as for physical documents. Both the content and the carrier (including the software) could provide reasons for inscription.

Metadata

A book or any other physical document can be accessed and read without cataloguing details, but digital objects cannot be accessed without metadata. For that reason, metadata are an integral part of digital objects. Bibliographical, technical, administrative and structural metadata, together with representation information, preservation description information and packaging information should always be part of the nominated material.²

Representation

Responsive digital documents have a different look and feel when accessed on different devices. Layout, type fonts and type sizes are adapted, although the textual content of the document itself remains unchanged. If the significance of the digital document mainly relates to its content, the representation may be less important. But if the appearance of the digital document is the main reason for its nomination, differences which are caused by the use of different devices may affect its significance. Any nomination form dealing with digital materials should address this issue, for example by specifying the software environment in which the document was created and was intended to be accessed.

Management plans

The sustainability of digital objects is even more critical than the enduring conservation of physical materials. This relates also to the necessary hardware and software to keep them accessible. Management plans of the holding institutions should always be added as an appendix to nomination forms for digital materials. These management plans should be specific about the preservation of digital

¹ A wider exploration of issues relating to digital documents in the MoW context can be found in the doctoral thesis by Anca Claudia Prodan, *The Digital "Memory of the World": an exploration of documentary practices in the age of digital technology* (2014, Brandenburg University of Technology, Cottbus, Germany)

² A useful description of essential metadata can be found in the *Reference model for an open archival information system (OAIS)*: <https://public.ccsds.org/pubs/650x0m2.pdf>.

documents and cite the institution's digital preservation policy and preservation plan that will ensure their ongoing accessibility.

Monitoring

Monitoring the continuing presence, accessibility and condition is as important for digital objects as for physical documents, if not more so. An advantage of digital materials is the possibility of carrying out the monitoring from anywhere, without physically visiting the holding institution. But because of the dynamic character of many digital materials, monitoring should be done on a more frequent basis, preferably once every year. Monitoring includes checking if all qualities and features that justified inscription on the Register are still available and working.

Storage and access adaptations, developments in hardware and software, emulations and other technical and metadata changes may affect the sustainability of the digital materials both in a positive and a negative way. This should be taken into consideration in the monitoring process. If sustainability of the document is in doubt the inscription may need to be removed from the Register.

Categories of digital materials

For the sake of simplicity and utility digital materials can be divided in three categories:

- I. Digitized materials
- II. Fixed born digital objects
- III. Dynamic born digital objects

Software has been proposed as a fourth category because it complies with the description of documents in the 2015 *Recommendation* (possibly comprising 'signs or codes'). But in the tradition of the Registers, nominated items have always been *documentary manifestations*. Software as such is not a manifestation. The application of innovative or otherwise significant software can be the reason for the nomination and inscription of a digital document (just like the Gutenberg Bible was inscribed, not because of its text, but as the manifestation of a new technique). So for the moment software itself is not eligible to be regarded as a document, but the discussion may be resumed at a later stage.

I. Interpreting the criteria for *digitized objects*

Digitized objects are digitized versions of physical original documents: books, newspapers, archives, maps, pictures, films, sound and video recordings, etc., etc.

Why nominate digitized objects?

By definition digitized objects are not originals, so they are not the most authentic copies/manifestations of the given documents. The nomination form should always explain why the digitized versions are nominated and not the originals. Some reasons could be:

- The inaccessibility, disappearance or destruction, real or potential, of the original documents. The original may still exist but is in such a condition that it is illegible or at risk of disappearance;
- The corpus of digitized copies is a virtual reunification of a former collection that is now scattered over many locations;
- The digitization has added value due to addition of e.g. high quality OCR, full text indexation, contextualization, tags for named entities (persons, places, dates, events), other search facilities etc.;³
- The applied method or technique of digitization is innovative and the nominated objects are manifestations giving proof of this innovation.

What exactly (which version) is being nominated?

Sometimes institutions preserve digitized content in different formats, e.g. scans in TIFF and JPG. Usually, but not necessarily, the format with the highest quality is considered the preservation copy. The nominated version should normally be the preservation copy.

There may also be different levels of all sorts of metadata. The nomination form should also indicate which set of metadata is being nominated.

Authenticity and integrity

Any nomination of (a collection of) digitized objects should answer two questions:

1. Are all original documents authentic and complete and was the original collection complete? (A digital copy of a forgery remains exactly that.)
2. Are all digitized copies 'authentic' (i.e. not retouched or corrupted) and complete? (No images or metadata missing or incomplete.)

II. Interpreting criteria for *fixed born digital objects*

Fixed born digital objects are, for instance: digitally produced E-books, digital born archives, pictures, sound recordings, databases, interactive presentations, e-mails, tweets, etc. Closed and archived

³ In these cases the collection could be fixed and finite but the presentation is probably dynamic. The nomination form should address this issue.

websites are also in this category. Fixed born digital objects have been produced in a digital way, but once they are finite the intention is to keep them unchanged for ever.

Just like physical documents, a born digital document may have been adapted before it got to its final state. But from that moment on it should be fixed to fit in this category.

In principle, (collections of) born digital objects which are fixed and finite are similar to (collections of) physical documents, and the same criteria apply. Special attention should be given to the fixed character. Management plans and other security measures, and monitoring options, should guarantee that the objects, files and metadata have not been and will not be subject to any form of manipulation (photoshopping, deselection or addition of items etc.), neither in the past nor in the future. Preservation should include specification of the technology necessary to access and represent these fixed born digital objects.

III. Interpreting criteria for *dynamic born digital objects*

Some obvious examples: active websites, continuously enhanced digital resources such as educational media, social media.

Websites can be dynamic in several (usually combined) ways, e.g.:

- The website changes regularly due to alterations, additions and deletions executed by the webmaster;
- The website (or webpage) is personalized: it varies and changes based on the characteristics of the user (identity, location, type of membership, given or supposed preferences etc.);
- The website is interactive: it responds to questions or orders from the user.

The dynamic, non-fixed and non-finite character is one of the main characteristics and features of websites and can be a significant value. For that reason the general requirement that items should be fixed and finite must be elaborated by the following additional requirements:

- The nomination form should contain an extensive description of the structure, content, options, facilities, metadata, links and other features of the website at the moment of nominating. It should also contain a description of the history of the website;
- The nomination form should contain a description of the process, criteria and responsibilities regarding the dynamics of the material;
- A fixed copy of the dynamic born digital object as it was on the date of submission of the nomination should be archived, be preserved and be accessible (at least for monitoring purposes);
- The owner or webmaster of the dynamic born digital object should provide an overview of all changes made to the content, metadata, technical formats, features and facilities, preservation measures and other major changes, on a regular basis in connection to the monitoring process. This may require that an updated, fixed copy of the dynamic born digital material as archived on the date of review be supplied in order for the inscription to remain on the Register.