

Archive Preservation Checklist

A practical health check for microfilm and other permanent records

Use this checklist to identify gaps in the condition, documentation, security, accessibility, and continuity planning of your archived collections. A “No” or “Not Sure” answer does not necessarily mean there is a problem. It simply identifies an area worth evaluating.

1. Know What You Have

- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** An up-to-date inventory exists for archived microfilm, microfiche, aperture cards, and other permanent records.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Collections are clearly labeled and can be connected to a department, record series, date range, or retention requirement.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** More than one person understands how the archive is organized and how records are located.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Key information about the collection is documented rather than relying primarily on institutional knowledge.

2. Check Physical Condition

- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Archived media is periodically inspected for signs of deterioration, odor, brittleness, discoloration, warping, mold, or other damage.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Film condition has been evaluated recently enough to provide confidence that deterioration is not going unnoticed.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Damaged or questionable media can be isolated and evaluated before additional handling.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Original containers, reels, jackets, and labels remain in usable condition.

3. Review the Storage Environment

- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Temperature and humidity are reasonably stable and appropriate for long-term records storage.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Archives are protected from water intrusion, excessive heat, direct sunlight, dust, and contaminants.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Records are stored away from known plumbing, roof-leak, flood, or fire-suppression risks where practical.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Storage areas are clean, organized, and accessible without unnecessary handling of neighboring records.

4. Protect Access and Chain of Custody

- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Access to permanent records is limited to authorized personnel.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** There is a defined process for removing, transporting, lending, or returning archived materials.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Sensitive or confidential records receive appropriate physical and procedural safeguards.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** If records leave the facility for scanning or other services, chain-of-custody expectations are documented.

5. Plan for Continuity and Disaster Recovery

- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Archived physical records are included in the organization's continuity or disaster recovery planning.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Staff know who is responsible for assessing and protecting archives following a flood, fire, environmental event, or facility emergency.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Critical or irreplaceable record series have been identified and prioritized.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** The organization has considered whether high-value records should have a digital access or preservation copy.

6. Evaluate Accessibility and Future Use

- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** The organization has functioning equipment and knowledgeable staff needed to retrieve information from legacy media.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Indexing or finding aids are sufficient for staff to locate specific records without excessive manual searching.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** There is a plan for maintaining access as equipment, software, and experienced staff become less available.
- ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Not Sure** Digitization decisions are based on record value, condition, access needs, risk, and business requirements rather than technology alone.

Quick Assessment

Your Results	Suggested Next Step
Mostly Yes	Your archive appears well managed. Continue periodic reviews and document changes in condition, staffing, storage, or access needs.
Several No / Not Sure	Prioritize a basic archive health assessment. Start with inventory, condition, storage environment, and continuity planning.
Many No / Not Sure	Consider a more comprehensive preservation review to identify immediate risks and establish a phased plan for protection, access, and digitization.

Questions to Capture During Your Review

- ☐ Which collections would be hardest or impossible to replace?
- ☐ Who currently knows the most about what is in the archive?
- ☐ Which records are accessed most often?
- ☐ Which collections show signs of deterioration or uncertain storage history?
- ☐ Which records should be prioritized for preservation or digitization?

A preservation plan does not have to begin with a large conversion project. It can begin with understanding what you have, identifying what is most important, and addressing the highest-risk areas first.

Need help evaluating your archive? | Schedule a Free Consultation

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