

# Archiving Your Digital Projects

## Why You Should

1. Think of the most important paper you have ever written. Imagine there is only one copy, and it is printed on paper. Anyone can read it, provided they can get access to it. But the paper copy is vulnerable to fire, water, humidity, tearing... **it's good to have backups.**
2. **Digital objects do not last forever.** File formats change, websites stop being hosted, programming languages stop being supported... even URLs can just change, which leads to dead links and references that go nowhere. Your digital project is vulnerable to technology, marching on.
3. At some point down the road, you may want to change or update your work — new research comes to light, you have access to more resources, etc. With a book or a paper, you can print a new edition. With a digital project, **if you have no archived versions, any changes to the primary project will overwrite your historical copy.**
4. Having your work archived means that it can be accessed in a scholarly context by posterity. If your work falls prey to point number 2 (technology marches on), **your research can still contribute to scholarship** as long as people can find it and understand it.
5. Archiving your work sounds scary, but it doesn't have to be. When you plan out a project, **you can take steps to make preservation easy.** And while there are stronger, more complex options for project archival, there are also simple common-sense steps to extend a project's life. Those steps are best practices for anyone looking to create a digital humanities project.

## Archive vs. Live

1. Because hardware and software both change quickly over time, **a live project may look very different from how it was originally created only a few years after its inception.** While the archived version may look like the original, it also may not — but, it'll be much more consistent over time.
2. Planning your archived project is planning for posterity. **What is the most important aspect of your project?** Digital objects are frequently interactive, and humanities projects can take advantage of that interactivity to display their subject matter in a way that allows for audience participation. But is the interactivity the primary focus of your project, or is it the subject matter? **Which aspects most need to be preserved?**
3. **If you're preserving interactivity, consider your goal.** A live performance, filmed, is not a live performance — it's a filmed record of that performance. A recording of a live website will not allow its audience to interact with the site, but it will show what it was like to interact with that website. But a video game, which is by nature interactive, might need to be emulated instead of recorded. How can you preserve the experience of interactivity, and what might it do to the form or content?
4. **If you're preserving subject matter, consider what needs to be organized and how.** What are the relationships between your data? Perhaps you can turn your written work into a PDF and archive your photos, but not preserve the infrastructure of your site. Consider what parts of your project are absolutely integral to the work, how they connect, and act accordingly.
5. Live projects are a way to take advantage of digital flexibility when displaying one's work. But a backup of one's work may not preserve the exact same experience, and that's okay. **What's important is preserving the effort that went into the project and information that needs to be conveyed to future audiences.**

*Four hundred years after he lived, Shakespeare now needs translations. Your work will too.*