

**The Activists' Guide to Archiving Video**

<https://archiving.witness.org/archive-guide/>

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*The Activists' Guide to Archiving Video* is a free, downloadable guide developed by [WITNESS](#), a nonprofit human rights organization located in New York City. The guide serves the organization's mission to help "activists to archive and preserve their video so that human rights abuses cannot be denied or forgotten over time."<sup>1</sup> The *Guide*, which can be downloaded [here](#), is an easy-to-read document that introduces the basics of video capture, metadata generation, storage, and access to the amateur or professional documentarian. While some seasoned archivists might bristle at the notion of the word "archive" being used as a verb, it is important to remember that the *Guide* is written primarily for an audience with little to no formal training in our profession.

One of the overarching problems that the archives profession faces is the wealth of information being generated in the digital age. I am fond of telling my students that in the twentieth-century it was relatively costly and often difficult to create a moving image recording. This is one of the reasons we have fewer moving images older than a few decades than we do moving images generated in the past twenty years. Technological challenges, economics, and know-how combined to make film and video recordings relatively rare when compared to today. Now many people walk around with audiovisual recording, post-production, and dissemination tools in their pockets. This technological shift means that the firehose of digital content—much of which may find its way into our repositories—is increasing in intensity. This deluge means that it becomes ever more critical that the people who generate the content take steps to make it more easily "archivable" at the time of its creation.

This is where the *Guide* comes in. One of the express goals of this document is to help content creators to produce and package their recordings so that archivists can more readily ingest these materials and make them available in their collections. Another high-level goal of the *Guide* is to give the videographer tools to ensure that his or her recordings of human rights issues and abuses can be used for their evidential value long into the future, regardless of whether a repository takes in these recordings. The *Guide* is very explicit about the need for active management of digital objects. Benign neglect, according to the *Guide*, is not a reasonable strategy for making digital video recordings accessible to future generations. To this end, the *Guide* provides very clear instruction on what kinds of metadata to generate (when,

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<sup>1</sup> "Video Archiving," WITNESS, accessed on April 22, 2017, <https://archiving.witness.org>.

where, what, why, who, and whether the identities of the creators and/or subjects need to be protected). Furthermore, it gives guidance about how to embed metadata in video files at the time of capture as well as workarounds like capturing metadata in camera via signs held up in front of the lens during recording or using electronic text documents as “sidecar” metadata files.

The *Guide* gives very clear information about capturing and/or exporting video at the highest level of quality possible so as to minimize artifacts and errors due to compression. This issue of image and sound integrity and quality is critical to helping ensure the evidentiary utility of the video in the future. Another important part of the *Guide* is its discussion of storage media for capture (like flash memory cards for cameras) and for long-term storage and access (like hard drives). It gives an introduction to digital preservation concepts like the purpose of RAID (Redundant Array of Independent Disks) drives and the need for storing multiple copies of recordings, both raw and edited. I suspect archivists will be pleased to see a section about how to choose an archives and how to understand donor/deposit agreements. The *Guide* also discusses, at a high level, the evidential value of video recordings and what kinds of factors inform that value, including authenticity, file fixity, metadata, and chain of custody.

*The Activists' Guide to Archiving Video* has the potential to be a very powerful tool for both social justice and for the archives profession. It does a good job of conveying concepts critical to audiovisual preservation and access while being an easy-to-read document that could be folded up and put in a camera bag for quick reference. I can also see a place for this document in archives, journalism, and multimedia production pedagogy. WITNESS is to be commended for putting together such a useful tool for human rights activists who want to maximize the longevity and impact of their video recordings.