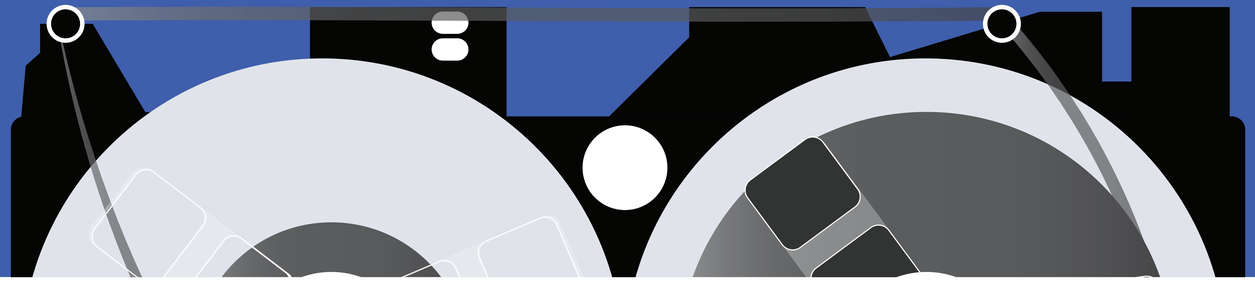
DIY VHS PRESERVATION FOR CIRCULATING COLLECTIONS

--:--

Circulating academic library VHS collections continue to have value for instruction, research, and historical interest. However, library staff underestimate how much of their collections are at risk. Because of the lack of archival staff and resources for digitizing these collections, a substantial amount of irreplaceable content will be unnecessarily lost.

Our work provides a model for libraries with sizable collections of out-of-release VHS recordings to preserve those items under protection of Section 108 of the US Copyright Law at a quality level that is achievable with an ordinary budget, skills, and labor.



1. INVENTORY

Wait... how many tapes?!

NEARLY
50%

of the circulating VHS collection owned by American University is out-of-distribution in any format.

▸▸

What titles are at highest risk of loss from degradation? What titles are of the highest value for user needs?

Triage - Prioritize based on local usage, scarcity of copies in other libraries, streaming-only availability.

2. COPYRIGHT REVIEW

©

Can we really digitize that?
If a video is OK to digitize, log your due diligence and share on **Section108video.com.**

▸▸

Is it:
In distribution?
In a current format?
At a reasonable price?

Verify it with:
Amazon.com
The distributor's website
WorldCat records
Google the title and key personnel

3. DIGITIZATION WORKSTATION

Affordable, not cheap!
Is our setup right for you?

▸▸

Compare cost of your own setup vs. high-volume outsourcing to find your break-even point.

See Ashley Blewer's Minimum Viable Workstation for more recommendations:
bit.ly/mindigit

4. OUTPUT FORMATS

Embrace the lossy!
Is a compressed format okay for preservation?

Cost of storage vs. minimal quality loss for non-unique items.

00:30:00 TAPE

37GB uncompressed vs. 6GB H.264

5. STORAGE AND LONG-TERM PRESERVATION

Oh no oh no!
Where do we put all this?
Run your own Linear Tape-Open drive!

▸▸

LTO cartridges stored off-site in climate-controlled library consortium facility. Duplicates of LTO cartridges stored at second and third off-site locations.

RAID array: on-site for short-term access.

Fixity checks: Checksums run periodically.

Access DVD copies: in circulating library collection.

Original VHS tapes: stored in climate controlled facility after use.

6. STAFFING

You can do it yourself! – This could fit within your existing staff!
No archival training needed.

Depending on size of collection, you may need additional labor to beat the clock.

Start now!

▸▸

VHS obsolescence is coming in 2025-2030. Irreparable hardware and software breakdowns will only increase.

Questions? Please contact:

Chris Lewis
clewis@american.edu

Phil Salvador
philsalv@american.edu

The intention of the project is to provide a tool to speed the research of librarians and archivists who are undertaking VHS digitization projects. By sharing our research logs, we hope to reduce the duplication of efforts.

FIND MORE
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

NEXT STEPS: "A HATHITRUST FOR VIDEO" – FILE-SHARING TO PROTECT COLLECTIONS.

A group effort is needed to spare the historical record that is only available on VHS. Digitize once, share with other owning institutions. We believe this is legally achievable.