

Online Review : "Saving-Over, Over-Saving, and the Future Mess of Writers' Digital Archives"
Amelia Ishmael March 31, 2019

Devin Becker and Collier Nogue's "Saving-Over, Over-Saving, and the Future Mess of Writers' Digital Archives" is a survey report focused on the personal digital archiving practices of emerging writers.¹ The article tries to advise preventive measures that archivists can take in order to ease the anticipation of the oncoming "mess" as writers' digital collections enter special collections and archives departments.

The author identifies that most writers have precarious stewardship over their own digital files, that is sourced in a lack of education in best practices in file organization and archiving. Surprisingly, though many writers involved in this survey admit that their files are a mess, and responded to the survey with details that they have lost significant digital belongings, they are hesitant to seek assistance. Instead writers are resigned that "losses of this kind...are inevitable," and participate in tendencies of what the authors refer to as "benign neglect." But why would writers hesitate to learn how to be better stewards of their careers, especially when so much is at risk? One of the prevalent reasons for writers' disinclination to seek out help include the belief that "it is easier to lose than maintain," authors are anxious that professional file-management practices would compromise their creative practice, and it is not uncommon that writers simply do not value records of their previous works.² Any file-management processes offered would have to take these concerns into account.

Devin Becker and Collier Nogue strongly recommend that archivists approach writers and initiate conversations and sessions with writers (and donors and the general public) about personal digital-archiving practices. They add that "Ultimately, this is more a social than a technological problem, one that must be met with compassion and a thorough understanding

¹ Devin Becker and Collier Nogue, "Saving-Over, Over-Saving, and the Future Mess of Writers' Digital Archives: A Survey Report on the Personal Digital Archiving Practices of Emerging Writers," *The American Archivist* 75 (Fall/Winter 2012): 482–513.

² One respondent described, "[U]ltimately [my] archiving practices are in place (currently) to help foster new work rather than to keep a record of the process of the old work. That is, the process of the old work is only worth keeping (for me) because it might lead to new work at some point, not because it is inherently interesting."

of users' tendencies and desires." After analyzing writers' survey responses, the authors recommend a very basic 5-step process that offers writers' significant digital preservation with the least evasion of writers' working practices. The authors recommend that if the details of this process are circulated broadly writers will be able confidently take the first step in digital stewardship of their personal collections. Though this basic 5-step solution, alone, does not provide much organizational assistance to archivists of the future, it does solve the most threatening issue that archivists face regarding digital archives of the future—if digital files are lost there is no collection.