

# Fact Sheet

## From Paper to Digital: Scanning University Records



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Most university records are now “born digital” and many are never rendered into tangible form. Even records received from external sources are often provided as digital attachments or uploads. Keeping records in digital form saves space and facilitates sharing with those who need access to the records, especially those who are not located within your office. But what about all those old paper records? Is it worth the time and money to convert them to digital format? A scanning project can be time-consuming and costly, so before embarking on a scanning project, consider both the legal and operational implications.

### Legal implications

There may be some records that must remain in paper form for legal reasons such as the need for preserving an original signature. However, in most cases, electronic records are considered equivalent to paper ones for legal purposes, provided certain standards are met. In order for electronic records to be considered admissible as documentary evidence in a court of law they must:

- have been imaged in the normal and ordinary course of business
- have been imaged as part of an established and formalized imaging program with appropriate quality assurance, system audit, and compliance monitoring measures
- have been used and relied upon for normal business purposes

### Operational implications

Scanning paper records should be undertaken with careful planning. Make sure the records are organized and that you have a good indexing system so they can be easily retrieved. Follow the relevant Canadian standards for imaging the records and for retaining them in an electronic recordkeeping system (see below).

#### Excerpt from Ontario's *Evidence Act*, s.34.1:

##### Authentication

(4) The person seeking to introduce an electronic record has the burden of proving its authenticity by evidence capable of supporting a finding that the electronic record is what the person claims it to be.

##### Application of best evidence rule

(5) Subject to subsection (6), where the best evidence rule is applicable in respect of an electronic record, it is satisfied on proof of the integrity of the electronic record.

##### Same

(5.1) The integrity of an electronic record may be proved by evidence of the integrity of the electronic records system by or in which the data was recorded or stored, or by evidence that reliable encryption techniques were used to support the integrity of the electronic record.

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90e23>

In order for records to remain authoritative and useable, they must remain readable and accessible for the entire retention period of the record as determined by the appropriate [records retention schedule](#). This means that imaged records must be migrated through software and hardware changes to prevent obsolescence. Be sure to consider these migration issues at the outset.



### *Consider...*

If the records will reach the end of their retention period and be destroyed in the next few years, it may not be worth the time and expense to scan them. It may be more cost-effective to transfer them to [offsite storage](#).

Remember that once a record has been scanned, you will have two records to manage—the digital image as well as the paper. If both paper and digital copies are to be retained as official records—such as when a unit decides to post a record on a website for public access—then both formats will be governed by the appropriate [records retention schedule](#).

If you are not planning to retain the original paper records, be sure that any legal issues have been addressed (see above).

If the retention schedule calls for transfer to the [University Archives](#), be sure to consult with the Archives before beginning the project to ensure that the digital images can be transferred and permanently preserved. There may be certain situations where regardless of the legal implications, there is a legitimate reason to retain the archival records in paper format.

For records that may not be covered by records retention schedules, it is a good idea to contact the University Archives in advance to ensure that hardcopy records of historical value are not lost before being properly appraised.

### *Canadian standard:*

#### [Electronic Records as Documentary Evidence \(CAN/CGSB- 72.34-2017\)](#)

This standard can be purchased from the Canadian General Standards Board: <http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/ongc-cgsb/index-eng.html>.

For further assistance, consult with the [Records Management and Privacy Office](#) before beginning any scanning project or program.