



Playback Memory Lab  
User Guide and Agreement

# Playback Memory Lab User Guide

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## About Playback Memory Lab

Playback Memory Lab is a free, do-it-yourself space for making high-quality digitized personal archive collections. Using professional-grade equipment, library users can digitize multiple formats, including slides, negatives, photographic prints, documents and VHS tapes.

The Playback Memory Lab at the Sonoma County History & Genealogy Library consists of two digitization stations:

- One station for scanning photographs, slides, and negatives as well as flat documents. The scanner is a large format Epson 12000 with a scanning area of 12" x 17"
- One VHS transfer station for digitizing VHS, S-VHS, and VHS-C tapes

## Playback Memory Lab Contacts

- Visit the website: [sonomalibrary.org/playback](http://sonomalibrary.org/playback)
- Email the Memory Lab team: [playback@sonomalibrary.org](mailto:playback@sonomalibrary.org)
- Make a Memory Lab appointment: [sonoma-library.org/pml](http://sonoma-library.org/pml)

## Partners and Support

Sonoma County Library's Playback Memory Lab is made possible through a grant from the California State Library and was supported in whole or in part by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by State Librarian Greg Lucas. The Friends of the Santa Rosa Libraries also provided funding to support this program.

The Memory Lab Network has been instrumental in helping to build the Memory Lab digitization stations and in the development of training materials. Sections of this handbook were adapted from handbooks written by the Los Angeles Public Library Memory Lab Team, the District of Columbia Public Library, the San Leandro DIY Memory Lab and the Napa County Library Memory Lab.

## About the Program

Sonoma County Library's mission is to bring information, ideas, and people together to build a stronger community. Through the Playback Memory Lab at the History & Genealogy Library, we are providing an empowering space that encourages users to protect, preserve and share their personal, family and community histories. A future phase of the program to expand public access to DIY digitization will be the Playback *Mobile* Lab, a nimble version of the full memory lab that can move from branch to branch or be used in off-site community programs.

The Playback Memory Lab is managed by History & Genealogy Library staff. Librarians Joanna Kolosov, Simone Kremkau, Nikelle Riggs and Megan Jones are program leads.

## General Guidelines

- **Lab Use** – Memory Lab users must sign the Playback Memory Lab User Agreement in order to have access to the lab and make an appointment prior to each use of the equipment.
- **User Liability** – The individual who reserves the Playback Memory Lab will be considered the main user and is financially responsible for any damages or misuse of equipment, even if a group is working on a project together.
- **Library Card**: The main Memory Lab user must have a Sonoma County Library general card account.
- **Age of User** – The main Memory Lab user must be age 18 or older.
- **Length of Lab Visit** – Users may reserve use of the Memory Lab for no more than one appointment weekly. Appointments are 3 hours long.
- **Late Policy** – Reservations will be canceled for users who are more than 10 minutes late and the station will be made available to other users.
- Transfer of **Copyrighted Materials** using the Playback Memory Lab is prohibited. By law, individuals cannot transfer copyrighted material unless: 1) user obtained permission from the copyright holder, or 2) the transfer is for fair use purposes.
- Transfer of **Obscene Materials**, or content that is otherwise inappropriate for the library environment, is prohibited.
- Use of the Playback Memory Lab is subject to the Lab Policies listed here, the Sonoma County Library **Safe Library Use Policy**, the Library Internet Access Policy, as well as any other applicable Library policies and procedures. Failure to abide by all applicable policies and procedures will result in suspension or loss of Memory Lab use privileges.
- **Liability Limitation** – The Playback Memory Lab and the Sonoma County Library are not responsible for any losses, damages, obligations or liabilities directly or indirectly related to the use of its equipment and information resources.
- **Food and Beverages** – Food and drink are NOT allowed in the Playback Memory Lab area. Food and drink can damage our media equipment as well as attract pests that can damage personal materials.
- **Saving Files** – Users are responsible for saving their work on a personal, external memory source. Please bring a USB or external hard drive, or be prepared to access a personal Cloud storage account, in order to save your files. All Playback Memory Lab computers are reset, and all files deleted after each lab user logs off the computer.
- **Storage of Personal Items** – Hard drives or other personal items needed for saving or transferring files cannot be stored at the library. Materials brought to the Playback Memory Lab for scanning must remain with the user at all times.
- **Staff Assistance** – The Playback Memory Lab is a Do-It-Yourself space. Staff will provide basic information about the Lab resources, and users will be able to consult step-by-step guides at each workstation.

# Appointment Guidelines and Procedures

## To use the Playback Memory Lab

To use the Memory Lab, users must

- Make an appointment. Playback appointments can be made at the Sonoma County Library website Events Calendar.
- Agree to sign the User Agreement when you arrive for your first appointment, before accessing the equipment. User Agreements are kept on file for 3 years.
- Provide storage for your digitized memories.

## Before the appointment

Getting items ready for the Memory Lab

- **Locate.** Find everything you want to digitize. This may include photo albums, file folders, carousels of slides, CDs of photographs, and more.
- **Organize.** Sort your material into groups that make sense to you. For example: Years, Holidays, or Stages of Life.
- **Curate.** Remember, making digital copies of your valued items is important, but it is also time-consuming. Do you need all the photos of the beach that you took on vacation? Or are there one or two key photos you want to preserve?
- **Prioritize.** Determine which items are most important to you. These may be things requested by friends or family, or simply the thing you love most.

Check the Condition

- You won't be able to scan documents or photos with mold, mildew or dirt, or transfer broken and damaged VHS tapes (see Inspecting Materials for the Memory Lab below).

Plan Your Time

- Each item scanned can take up to 5 minutes depending on the resolution selected. Plan on needing multiple appointments to complete all of your items.
- For every 1 minute of video, it will take 1.5x to digitize it. Capture happens in real time, and then the file must be encoded, described, and saved to your hard drive to ensure it will last. We recommend digitizing no more than 2 hours of video during one lab session.

Consider File Storage and Organization

- Decide where you will store your digital files. This can be an external hard drive, 8GB (or higher) USB "thumb" drive, or a personal Cloud storage account. For digitizing VHS tapes, you will need at least a 32GB USB drive or a 1TB external hard drive.
- Decide how you will organize your files. Will you place all the images from 1980 into the same folder? All Halloween images together?

Important Facts about Scanning Materials

- **Dots Per Inch (DPI)** - DPI refers to the number of dots per inch used by a printer to print an image or document. DPI also refers to the number of dots (or pixels) per inch the scanner uses to scan the image.

- When scanning, you want to make sure that the DPI you use is high enough to get a great quality image. However, the larger the DPI you use, the larger the file will be and the longer it will take to scan. Instructions provided below include recommended DPI for documents, photos, slides, and negatives.

#### File Formats

- We recommend saving your materials as a TIFF or a JPEG. These are formats that don't require special software to open.
- JPEG: Lossy<sup>1</sup>, smaller file size, generally good enough for personal archiving.
- TIFF: Lossless<sup>2</sup>, larger file size, used by the Library of Congress.

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<sup>1</sup> "...JPEG uses lossy data compression, meaning it reduces the file size of an image by merging similar or 'redundant' pixels, so less information is kept overall. For most people and most use, however, this is not a significant issue" (Sarah Severson, "Chapter One: Archiving Digital Photographs," *Personal Digital Archiving*, ed. Brianna H. Marshall (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2018), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> TIFF is a "lossless image format, and a good choice for people who are looking to preserve the highest possible image quality" (Ibid.)

## Inspecting Materials for the Playback Memory Lab

Materials brought to the Memory Lab should be one of the following formats:

- Photographic prints
- Documents (letters, newspaper clippings, etc.)
- Film [slides, negatives (including glass negatives)]
- VHS tapes

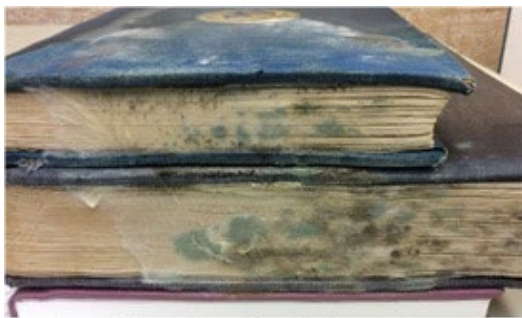
All material brought into the Playback Memory Lab needs to be inspected by staff before it can be placed in any of the equipment. Staff will look for several key issues, and depending on the issue, the material may be ineligible for digitization.

### Photographs and Documents

#### **Mold on photographs and documents**

Mold will likely be the largest issue. Any moldy material is ineligible for digitization in the Memory Lab, as the spores can spread and can transfer mold to other users' material. Mold can form on nearly any porous surface – letters, photographs, books, or posters. Evidence of water damage, however, is not an immediate disqualifier for use in the memory lab.

If past water damage is present, but the material exhibits no other signs of mold or mildew, the material can be digitized in the Lab. If a user has one moldy item, all the items must be carefully inspected for mold as mold can spread.



Active mold growing on books after a water event.



Inactive mold is dry and powdery

<sup>3</sup>

The following are all signs of mold:

- the presence of fuzzy growth, in nearly any hue
- stringy, white filaments stretching across porous surfaces
- strange spots or stains
- evidence of past water damage

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<sup>3</sup> For more on mold, see NEDCC's Preservation Leaflets, Emergency Management, Section 3.8.

Mildew will often accompany mold. The signs of mildew include:

- “Old book smell” – this odor is often caused by mildew, even if the mildew has been removed
- a thin haze, a patch of spots, or a powdery flaking layer, normally white, black, or grey on the surface of the book or paper

Items with these issues are ineligible for the Memory Lab.

### Film - Slides and Negatives

Inspecting film, which includes slides and negatives, follows a sort of hybrid approach from the steps above. The material must be inspected for mold, mildew, and water damage as in photographs, but also checked for vinegar syndrome. Most negatives and film that come to the lab will be acetate film, which will take on a vinegary smell as it breaks down. Once again, as soon as the material is removed from its container, smell it and the container for vinegar. If it is slightly vinegary, the material may be digitized. If it is a potent smell, it may not be used in the Lab.

*Note: You should wear nitrile gloves when inspecting film.*

#### **Nitrate film** (*cannot be digitized at Playback Memory Lab*)

It is rare, but very old negatives can be nitrate. If film smells strongly of mothballs and is from before 1951, it is likely nitrate film. Nitrate film is highly flammable and is a classified hazardous material. Nitrate film should be handled with extreme care and be kept cool and dry.

The Lab cannot be used to digitize nitrate film. Please do not bring nitrate film to your appointment. It can be sent to specialized vendors to be duplicated onto safety film, or to be digitized. Check film edges to see if they say “SAFETY” – if so, the film is not nitrate film, but safety film on an acetate base and should be checked for vinegar syndrome.

### VHS Tapes

Magnetic tape is the tape contained in VHS tapes. This material has its own requirements for inspection. You must inspect the tapes for three things: mold, sticky shed syndrome, and physical damage and deterioration.

#### **Mold on magnetic tapes**

Inspect the box that the tape is housed in for mold and water damage. If you find either of these things, the tape is most likely contaminated and will not be allowed for use in the Memory Lab.

#### **Sticky Shed Syndrome**

When the material is removed from its container, smell it and the container. If you detect a smell that can be described as "waxy," "dirty socks," or "astringent/pungent," the binder of the tape—the stuff holding the magnetic particles together—is most likely breaking down. This process is called hydrolysis, or sticky shed, and any tape with a strong odor like this cannot be digitized in the Memory Lab because the tape will leave magnetic particles as it breaks down, damaging the tape head and the tape. Sticky shed will cause squeaking in the playback.





Mold as white powdery threads on tape



Mold deposits



Sticky shed

1. Inspect the tape on its hub through the video cassette windows. Look for crystalline deposits and mold on the outside edge of the tape (above middle).
2. Open the cassette access door and inspect the tape for white powdery mold (above left), intense creases, tears, or visible sticky shed (above right). Sticky shed can be treated, but the tape needs to be sent to a vendor.
3. Inspect the tape housing for breakage—a broken tape housing means poor handling and also likely means damaged tape, which can damage the VCR. If the housing is damaged, the tape may not be digitized in the Memory Lab.

### **Damaged magnetic tapes**

Any form of damage to the external plastic housing of the tape, or to the magnetic tape itself makes the tape ineligible for digitization in the Memory Lab. Open the tape access door and inspect both the hinges and the tape itself for damage. Broken tape is not allowed in the VCR, and VHS tapes with broken housing are not allowed either.

# PLAYBACK MEMORY LAB USER AGREEMENT



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name), have read the Playback Memory Lab User Guide, and agree to follow all rules, policies, procedures, and restrictions relating to use of it, including, but not limited to, the rules stated herein, the Sonoma County Library Safe Library Use Policy, the Library Internet Use Policy, and all other applicable Library policies and procedures. I understand that these rules, policies, procedures, and restrictions may change at any time without notice and that I will make myself aware of all changes or modifications of said rules, policies, procedures, and restrictions.

I understand and agree that I am financially responsible for any and all damage done to Playback Memory Lab equipment, materials, or facilities resulting in my misuse or failure to follow all rules, policies, procedures, and restrictions relating to use of it. I understand that I am responsible for and agree to pay the repair and replacement costs of the equipment, materials, or facilities resulting from such actions.

I understand that use of the Playback Memory Lab equipment is permissive and at the discretion of the Library. At any time and for any reason, disclosed or non-disclosed, the Library may deny me access to the Playback Memory Lab.

I am aware that use of the Playback Memory Lab is voluntary and may expose me and others to injury, or injury to property. I expressly assume these risks. I agree that by executing this agreement, I shall defend, indemnify, and hold harmless the Sonoma County Library, its officers, officials, employees, and volunteers from and against any and all claims, proceedings, damages, losses, suits including attorney fees and costs, actions, or liabilities for injury or death of any person, or for loss or damage to property, or any other claim in connection with the use of the Playback Memory Lab, including the equipment, tools, and materials therein. On behalf of myself, my personal representatives, heirs, next of kin, successors and assigns, I forever waive, release, and discharge the Sonoma County Library from any and all liability for my death, disability, personal injury, property damage, property theft or claims of any nature which may hereafter accrue to me, and my estate, as a direct or indirect result of my use of the Playback Memory Lab.

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Library Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Check box here if you want to be included in the Memory Lab e-mail list.

**Staff Use Only:**

Staff Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Library Card Record Updated \_\_\_\_\_