

Guideline: Selecting a Scanner or Digital Camera

How do scanners work? Which scanner should I purchase to digitize library collections and archival materials?

Because no single device can accommodate the wide range of physical formats in library, archives, and museum collections; because the expertise of the camera or scanner operator varies considerably; because handling guidelines, image quality requirements, budgets, and timetables are project-specific, **there is no "best" camera or scanner to accommodate the digitization requirements of libraries and archives.**

To determine which types of imaging systems are appropriate to meet your needs, and ultimately which specific components should be purchased and integrated as the imaging workstation(s) for your project or program, consider five factors.

Evaluation Questions

1. What are the dimensions (h x w) and handling requirements for the materials you will digitize?
For three-dimensional objects and “two-dimensional” items such as printed pages or photographs that require face-up imaging, be sure to budget for *all* components of a digital camera system: camera back and software, camera, lens, copystand, and lighting. *Note:* Books are a special case, as they require use of systems with customized or integrated book cradles. (See, Bookscanners page for more information.)
2. Who will operate the scanner or camera? What skills do they have? How important is ease of use?
3. What is the daily (hourly, weekly, etc.) throughput you need to achieve?
Be sure to account for the amount of “down time” you can afford. Can an appropriate service contract be purchased for the system?
4. What are your image quality requirements (stated functionally, objectively, or subjectively)?
5. What is your budget?

Resource List

Agfa Educational Publications. *An Introduction to Digital Scanning*. Antwerp, Belgium: Agfa Prepress Education Resources, 1994.

_____. *A Guide to Digital Photography*. Antwerp, Belgium: Agfa Prepress Education Resources, 1994.

D'Amato, Donald. [*Imaging Systems: The Range of Factors Affecting Image Quality*](#). Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2000.

Gann, Robert G. *Desktop Scanners: Image Quality Evaluation*. London; Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.

Library of Congress. *Manuscript Digitization Demonstration Project: Final Report*. See, section 10, "[Hardware for rapid scanning](#)." Washington, DC: Library of Congress, October 1998.

Williams, Don. [*Selecting a Scanner*](#). Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2000.