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a r c h i v e

What do I use my archive for?

What do I put in my archive?

Where do I start?

What do I want to do with
my archive in the future?

B e t t e r

FOR DESIGNERS AND MAKERS

network archives design and digital culture

Design archives provide insight into the social context of design, the position of designers, the development of their work, and new applications for techniques or materials. In short, archives provide access to the past and contain knowledge for the future – but they have to be preserved and accessible.

There are several organisations in the Netherlands that manage design heritage, and in 2021 they united as the Network for Archives of Design and Digital Culture (NADD). The network shares knowledge around archiving and makes visible existing design archives, with work being done on digital infrastructure to ensure scattered archives are centrally accessible. Through its Seeking Shelter programme, the network also draws attention to managing and preserving at-risk design archives.

NADD consists of more than 45 partners including designers, design experts, professional organisations, educational institutions, and heritage institutions of all sizes that manage archives.

netwerkadd.nl

how to

YOU, THE ARCHIVIST!

To get right to the point: archiving is something you already do. It is collecting and storing information in such a way that it can be used now and later on for various purposes. This guide helps you take the first step in your personal archiving process, determining size, what does and does not belong, and creating quality frameworks.

Sometimes there is already a concrete goal such as saving a project for a future exhibition or sharing the knowledge gained in the working process. Often, you do not know now why you will need your archive later. So where do you start and what do you include?



archive

This guide is meant for you as a designer or maker, so feel free to write in it, work in it and, above all, use it your way. Want to reuse the worksheets again later or prefer to work digitally? You can always download and print them again at:

<https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/pages/how-to-archive-better>

Where do I start?

What do I want to do with my archive in the future?

Better

FOR DESIGNERS AND MAKERS

‘AN ARCHIVE SHOULD BE HONEST AND TRANSPARENT, AND IT SHOULD SHOW CONNECTIONS.’
Borre Akkersdijk
(textile designer)

LIVING ARCHIVES

When we hear the word ‘archive’, we quickly think of something from the past, something already been and now laid to rest. It is not so very strange that archives initially evoke inactivity – after all, they provide us with access to work and working processes we have gone through before. Yet, considered properly, the archive is a living thing that needs to be fed, like a constantly moving organism that needs to be taken care of. Those who do so find that the archive not only helps with looking back, but it also encourages looking forward.

YOU’RE IN CHARGE!

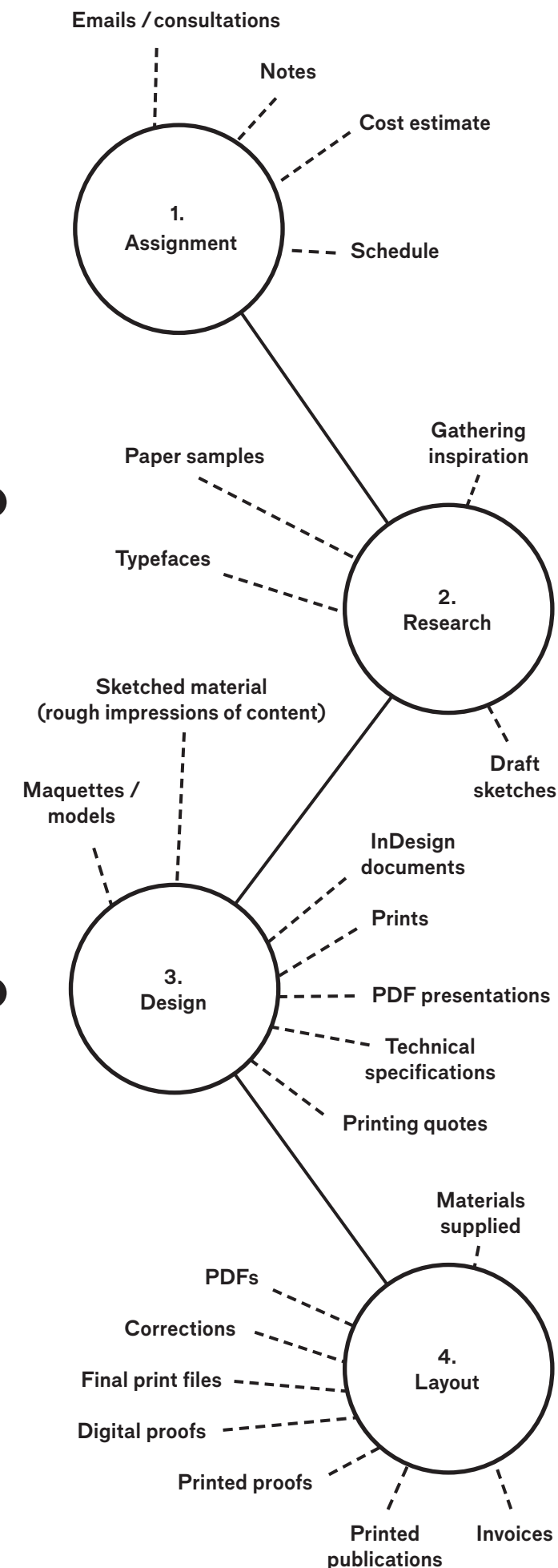
Good news: apart from some legal obligations* as an individual or an organisation, you can largely determine the composition and value of your archive for yourself. But what do you keep? When is something important? As a guideline, keep in mind that the documents you include in your archive should relate to a project or a final draft, and this includes more things than you first think.

MAPPING THE WORK PROCESS

A good archive enables you to reconstruct design processes later on. First, consider which documents are related to each project or final design. What choices were made during the working process? What did the workflow look like? From notes and sketches, mood boards and models to screenshots and samples, everything starts with mapping out the working process. This is how you find out which documents and objects are important to keep. Think physically and digitally – which steps say something essential about the creation of the final design?

* Companies and freelancers must keep records for seven years according to Dutch law, and some records should be kept by a company for 10 years. The tax administration’s website explains what data you need to keep and for how long.

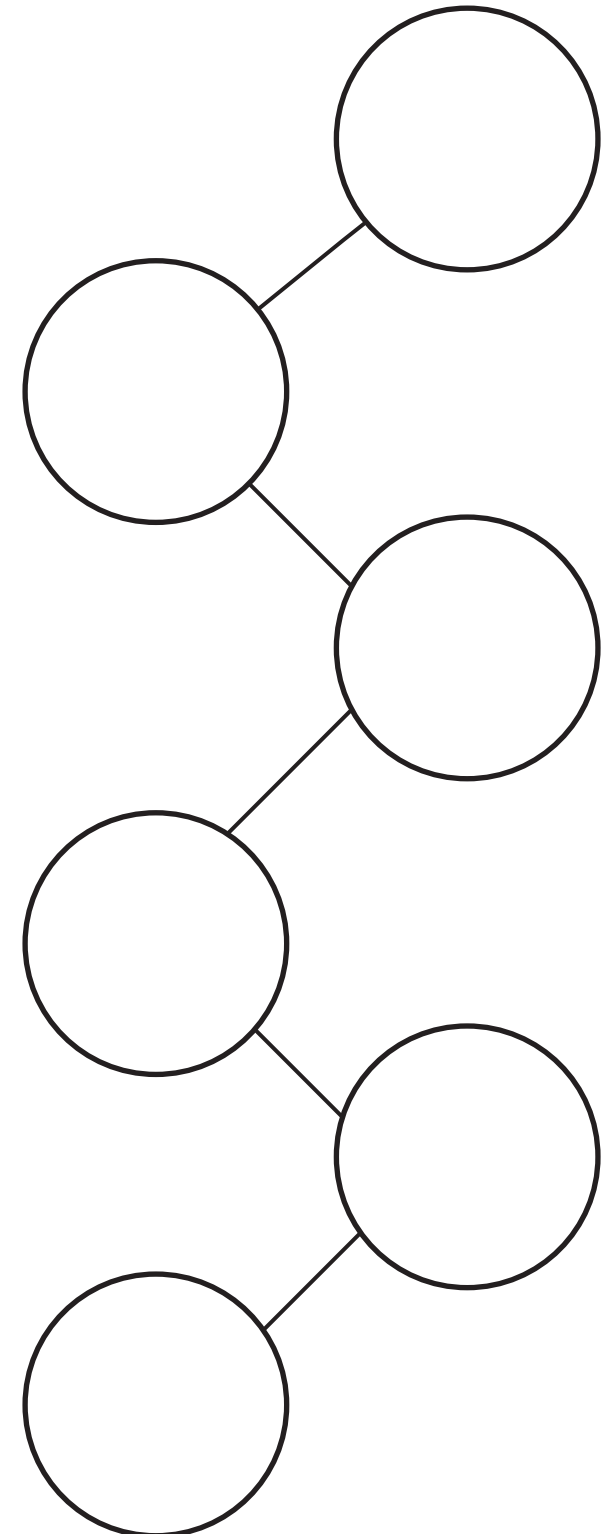
Example working process of a graphic designer



exercise

WHAT DO I KEEP?

What information is relevant enough to your practice to keep? First, describe all the steps in your working process like the example to the left. Next to the circles, write the documents or objects resulting from these stages. What do you notice? Which choices were important? Highlight the elements that definitely belong in your archive.



Exercise

ARCHIVE AMBITIONS

Your archive can have many purposes, from reference work and sources of inspiration to exhibition material. What do you currently use your archive for? Tick and complete this list.

☐

As reference work

☐

As a source of inspiration

☐

For administration

☐

For making new work

☐

To show others

☐

For research

☐

For publication

☐

For education

☐

For making an exhibition

☐

☐

If all went well, the previous exercises helped you get a clear idea of what you use your archive for. Now we challenge you to think freely – what else would you, in an ideal situation, like to use your archive for?

☐

☐

I DON'T NEED AN ARCHIVE

We dare to believe that every maker benefits from a good archive. It provides insights, inspires yourself and others, and helps you to realise your ambitions.

Before getting started with your archive, it can be useful to put your goals, visions and ambitions on paper. What do you want to achieve with your archive? What do you want to use it for? Who are you going to work with on your archive and why? You can use the exercise to the left to get your archive ambitions clear.

Some possible applications:

REFERENCE WORK

Clarity on the design process

You have to deal with other parties at various stages during any design process. Objects, documents or designs that come about during that process but which are not part of the final design are possible candidates for the archive. Even, or perhaps especially, elements that did not make it to the finish line in the project may be of value in the future. Knowledge of design processes can subside over time, but the archive makes it possible to reconstruct. In the unfortunate event of dispute or malpractice, it is important to make a case legally sound: this preparation prevents headaches later.

RESEARCH RESOURCE

Pass on your knowledge to future generations

Archiving is also important for future research into design archives. Is your work relevant for future research? That is probably hard to answer now, but when there is no archive material, we lose a source that tells us about a product and its design process. If you suspect the work has specific relevance for future generations, this is an additional reason to get your archive in order now. All individual design and digital culture archives can add something essential to the history of design in the Netherlands, and when more designers and digital culture-makers start keeping archives, there emerges a stronger image of a distributed network.

INSPIRATION SOURCE

New connections and prompts

You can set up your archive with the aim of it being a source of inspiration for yourself or other makers. An archive can help you discover connections in your methods and designs, or let you learn from previous choices or even missteps.

EXHIBITION MATERIAL

Talking to wider audiences

Archives can provide valuable context to your working practices. Is it important to you that your archive can be seen by a wide audience? Organise your archiving process so that a curator, conservator or researcher can view the archive efficiently. An archive can also be used to contextualise your oeuvre as a maker in a museum setting. It allows the public an insight into the processes and choices you made in the creation of a design, and an archive set up in this way can provide insight into the social or historical context you found yourself in as a maker. Does this fit your archive ambition? There are specific guidelines for organising your archive so that institutions, researchers and curators can get a good picture of your practice.

The quotes in this guide are taken from the Archives at Risk podcast series and the videos of *Archives at Risk: Seeking Shelter*.

Listen to the podcast (mostly in Dutch) at:
<https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/pages/podcast>

Watch the videos at:
<https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/projects/nadd/seeking-shelter>

‘DEBRA SOLOMON’S ARCHIVE IS A REMINDER OF INTERNET CULTURE IN THE LATE NINETIES.’
Haitan Ma (curator)

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h o w t o a r c h i v e B e t t e r

This guide helps you to discover what archiving means and what should be preserved. Why is archiving important? What can you do with limited time or budgets? What can you gain? How will better archiving remain helpful in the future?

How to archive better is a short DIY guide with practical information and simple tips to help designers and makers archive their work. Soon, archiving can become a less difficult task, and even prove to be a habitual and lucrative part of your practice.

**'I KEEP EVERYTHING
I'VE MADE, EVEN IF
I THINK IT'S UGLY.'**
Lies Ros
(graphic designer)

**'THEY'RE A KIND OF
RELIC FOR US;
TIME CAPSULES THAT
WE TREAT WITH A LOT
OF CARE.'**
Roel Wouters,
studio Moniker
(interactive designer)