

First Line of Conservation before Digitisation

For several years until 2014 the strategy for digitising records was to create microfilms. Those films were used as a master from which images were created.

We have since started to digitise the paper records themselves but haven't changed the procedures that come before microfilming or digitisation can start.

We have a set of standards of how a records needs to look:

- it needs to be packed in an acid free folder that fits the record and have an adhesive label with the shelf number and the barcode on it
- there should be no metal objects - like paper clips or staples - left in the record
- it needs to be paginated
- every sheet of paper that is bigger than A3 needs to be taken out and unfolded with a reference to the new shelf number
- if a record is bound by sewing: those bindings need to be opened to be able to see all the information

The one exception to opening all bound records is adhesive binding that was done in the archives. That was a common technique in Germany where the records were cut to the same size and bound so leafs of paper wouldn't be left loose and couldn't tear as easily. To prevent further loss of information bindings like that won't be opened.

The largest part of our digitisation projects is currently done with contractors (we plan to digitise about 20 million pages in the next 4 years - 15 million with a contractor). Since we don't have the personnel to prepare all records to our standards we made to preparations part of the contract. It still is a lot to check the quality of this work and keep in constant contact with the contractor to get good results.

Records that can't be digitised because of extensive damages by the contractor will be separated and restaurated after they are back in the archives and digitised with our own scanner afterwards.

Since most of the records in the German Federal Archives are not older than 140 years the biggest problem is that we find records that are so fragile they have to be stabilised to handle. Unfortunately stabilising with japan paper can create a sort of

cloud of the writings and make it harder to read what is written.

When we scan records with our own staff we have the advantage of being able to work close together with the restoration staff. The scan operators prepare the records and have the advantage of being physically and organisationally close to the restoration lab. They have in general several years of experience in microfilming but if there any questions they can be solved quickly and efficiently.