Photo digitization tip sheet

Suggestions courtesy of David LaFevor, Associate Professor of History, University of Texas, Arlington

Camera

- If you don't have fancy equipment, do the best you can with lighting, setup, and framing to capture good, consistent images.

- Most of the time automatic camera settings will be fine.

- If you have an SLR camera with manual settings, aim for:
  - F8 aperture setting
  - Shutter speed greater than 1/50 second *or* 2x your lens focal length
  - Lowest-possible ISO setting to support these other parameters

Archival and use-copy image files

- Take high-resolution photos with a RAW file format. The highest-resolution "RAW" file setting in your camera may be a proprietary format exclusive to camera manufacturer.

- Convert RAW files to .tiff format for long-term preservation. From .tiff files, create lower-resolution .jpg images for everyday viewing, exhibits, websites, etc.

- Some cameras can capture RAW and .jpg images simultaneously. If your camera has that setting, use it!

Lighting

- Try to find lighting that's consistent and neutral-colored.

- Avoid reflections, glare, or shadows on your image.

- Be aware that natural light may change over the course of a session; if this happens, you may need to re-calibrate camera settings.

Setup

- Keep a good vertical distance (2-3 feet) between camera and document to avoid image distortion.

- Use a plain background, ideally a non-reflective black cloth.

- Place a color checker and/or ruler within the image frame, about an inch away from your document.

- Use a tripod and a remote shutter release if you have them.

Framing

- Orient document and camera the same way (eg landscape or portrait).

- Ensure that the vertical lines of the document appear parallel to each other and to the vertical lines of the image frame.

- Place the color checker and/or ruler at the bottom or side of the document, and keep a regular margin on all sides of the image.

- Color checker and ruler should be cropped out of images used for display; consistent framing helps with this.

Process

- Keep file numbers and file names consistent, and record metadata as you go.

- If you're working with a collection that already has an archival organization or sequence when you encounter it (eg, documents in a folder or pages in a book), <u>photograph the documents in sequence.</u>

- If not, take a few minutes to think through a systematic approach to the documents. Your friendly neighborhood archivists will usually be happy to talk to you about this.