Writing the Docs Honestly

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Opening the Black Box: Transparency and Complexity in Digital Preservation
Digital preservation = so much writing
Docs I write:

- FRED Guide
- born-digital accessioning manual
- web archives collection policy
- web archiving manual
- digital preservation policy
- digital media collection assessment
- digital media imaging log
- Digital Curation Notes
- workstation specs and justification
- annual work plans
- seasonal project lists
- daily timesheet and work diary

I write docs to:

- Remind myself
- Work well with colleagues
- Justify my work
- Futureproof my work
- Maintain membership in a community of practice
Principles

Documentation should be ...
- Precursory: begin documenting before you begin developing
- Participatory: include everyone in the documentation process

Content should be ... ARID, skimmable, exemplary, consistent, current

Sources should be ... nearby, unique

Publications should be ... discoverable, addressable at granular level, cumulative, complete, beautiful

A body of documentation should be comprehensive

Docs I read:

software documentation
hardware manuals
archival description
blog posts
job descriptions
research
meeting minutes
news alerts
social media
email lists
Google Groups
LibGuides

I read docs to:

Identify problems
Look for solutions to specific problems
Maintain membership in a community of practice
Honest description addresses and accounts for the constructedness of archives by considering how archives are shaped by ...

- the process of archiving
- custodians & intermediaries
- archivists

Can we adapt these principles to writing documentation?

Honest documentation spells out the work
Rewriting, unpacking

Old
In general Wayback machine, no specific institution is listed with who archived the site. In Archive-It, the institution is listed.

New
We endeavor to make our web archiving appraisal, acquisition, and maintenance activities visible to users so that the authenticity and provenance of these web archives do not rest solely on institutional reputation or visual branding. Archived web pages display technical metadata related to their capture, which Archive-It generates, hosts, displays, and preserves. We supplement this technical metadata with user documentation and descriptive metadata detailing the processes through which we have appraised, selected, captured, and described URLs. Lastly, we cite the contributions of archivists, website creators, and other partners who participate in aspects of web archiving.
Honest documentation acknowledges the work it does.
Documentation does work

Materializing through reference

- Speaking of conditions conflated with producing them
- Conflating policies or credentials with practices
- Invoking commitment as evidence of reality

Institutionalizing

- Making a practice “background”
- Documentation as an end in itself
- Institutional(ized) rewards for documentation

Honest documentation values labor
Give credit

Centering workers rather than collections

Documentation that celebrates collaboration

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Rubric for honest documentation:

↬ Spell out the work
↬ Acknowledge that docs do work
↬ State your positions
↬ Value labor (yours too)