



EVIDENCE & RESOLUTION

Personal Digital Evidence Preservation Workbook

Preserve accessible personal files and explain their source and handling without altering originals or overstating authenticity.

WHAT THIS WORKBOOK HELPS YOU DO

01

Complete your source and access map

02

Complete your export and copy check

03

Complete your file context card

A U.S. claimant with accident photos, videos, messages, dashcam files, and electronic records scattered across personal devices and accounts.

Use it on screen or on paper. Save a personal copy before entering information. Blank response areas are fillable; printed copies work just as well. Keep completed copies private.

Scope. Educational organization tools, not legal, medical, tax or financial advice. No claim result, coverage decision or payment is promised. Verify policy language, current local rules and all deadlines with the appropriate professional or official source.



START HERE

Start with a clear working file

Work on one claim, account or issue at a time. Keep originals unchanged and label working copies with a short evidence ID. Complete the guidance in order, then use the worksheets to turn questions into an organized next step.

A practical order

- 01 Read the four guidance pages before filling the worksheets. Mark facts you can support and questions that still need an answer.

GUIDANCE / PAGES 03-06

- 02 Use the fictional examples to check your method. Their facts and dollar amounts do not describe your claim or predict an outcome.

EXAMPLES / PAGE 07

- 03 Complete the four working sheets, then use the readiness check and next-step page. Duplicate a worksheet when you need another record.

WORKSHEETS / PAGES 08-11

Protect your information

Store completed copies somewhere private. Use a claim or account suffix when a full identifier is unnecessary. Share only relevant copies through a verified recipient and appropriate channel. A saved PDF can contain personal information even when it is not open on screen.

Before a deadline. Do not wait to finish this workbook when a notice, release, court paper or policy deadline needs attention. Verify the actual requirement and seek qualified help promptly.



GUIDANCE 1

01

Map what exists before moving it

List the places where relevant material may live: the phone that took the pictures, a dashcam card, a cloud photo library, a text thread, email, downloaded insurer documents, and files sent by witnesses. Record who created each item and whether you control the account or device. Distinguish an original capture from a screenshot, edited copy, forwarded message, or download. A file can still be useful when its history is incomplete, but the uncertainty should stay visible. Do not access another person's account or take apart a damaged device to fill a gap.

Protect the originals and avoid cleanup

Do not delete, reset, trade in, reorganize destructively, or run cleanup tools on a device that may contain relevant material. Avoid editing source photos, trimming original video, overwriting filenames unnecessarily, or using image-generation tools to “clarify” what happened. Keep the original material and create separate working copies for notes or permitted redactions. If a dashcam may overwrite footage, consult the manufacturer's official instructions and contact appropriate counsel promptly; do not improvise a procedure that could erase the only copy. An urgent preservation concern is a reason to get qualified help, not to experiment.

RELATED WORKING SHEETS

● Source and access map

● File context card

Sources for this page: [1], [2], [3], [4]. See the linked source guide.



GUIDANCE 2

02

Choose an export that matches the question

A screenshot records what was visible on a screen; it may omit the underlying file, surrounding conversation, attachments, or available metadata. When an official export option is available, record the product, account, date range, settings, and date used. Check the vendor's current instructions. Some photo exports include companion files or multiple parts, such as a still image and a video. Preserve those together. Do not assume that an app's most convenient sharing button preserves everything, and do not promise a forensic-quality export just because an archive downloaded successfully.

Keep context with the item

The usefulness of an image often depends on who took it, where they stood, when it was captured, and whether it shows conditions before or after vehicles moved. Put those observations in a separate note rather than changing the source image. For a message, preserve the conversation context and identifying information available through a lawful export, while restricting unnecessary disclosure. Distinguish your memory from data displayed by the device. A file's download date can differ from the date the picture was taken; record both when available instead of silently treating them as the same event.

RELATED WORKING SHEETS

- Export and copy check
- File context card

Sources for this page: [1], [2], [3], [4]. See the linked source guide.



GUIDANCE 3

03

Check the copy before relying on it

Open representative files and confirm that they are readable, complete, and associated with the expected event. Compare the number and type of files with the source when possible. Check that a long video did not become only a short clip and that a photo export did not omit related parts. Record any discrepancy without deleting the imperfect copy or modifying the original to make the counts agree. A checksum can help compare digital copies, but this workbook does not ask you to perform forensic analysis or treat a matching checksum as proof that an image depicts a true event.

Make backups you can actually retrieve

Keep more than one protected copy in separate locations that you can access safely. A synchronized folder is not automatically an independent backup: a deletion or account problem may affect several devices at once. Record where each preserved copy is held, who can access it, and when you last checked that files open. Use the security features of your chosen service or device, and avoid sharing passwords or unrestricted links. If you are following legal hold instructions, ask counsel before changing storage, deleting duplicates, or ending an account.

Compare the copy with its source and record gaps without changing the originals.



Sources for this page: [1], [2], [3], [4]. See the linked source guide.



GUIDANCE 4

04

Share a working set with a transfer record

When someone needs the files, verify who is asking, what they need, and the approved delivery method. Keep a record of the exact files or archive, date, recipient, and purpose. Do not send the only copy. If privacy requires a redacted or annotated version, preserve an unchanged original and clearly label the new version and what was done to it. Keep the transfer acknowledgment. This record is an organizational aid, not a formal certification of chain of custody. For a court submission or a broad request for device access, obtain advice before deciding what to provide.

Prepare a clear specialist handoff

A damaged device, disappearing messages, disputed authorship, missing metadata, suspected edits, or an insurer request for the whole phone can raise questions a household file system cannot resolve. Assemble a concise handoff: device and account inventory, what happened, what you have already copied, changes you know about, who handled the files, and what is missing. Tell the specialist about unsuccessful attempts as well as successful ones. Do not promise that your preserved folder contains everything. A transparent account of the material and its limitations is more useful than an overstated claim that the evidence is court-proof.

RELATED WORKING SHEETS

- Backup and transfer record
- Source and access map

Sources for this page: [1], [2], [3], [4]. See the linked source guide.



FICTIONAL EXAMPLES

Work through the examples

These invented cases demonstrate the method. They are not case results, estimates of what you will receive or statements of universal rights.

01 The download-date trap

A claimant downloads September accident photographs on October 1. The computer displays October 1 as a file date.

Next step: Preserve the download, record the export method, and distinguish the operating-system date from embedded capture metadata and personal recollection.

Avoid. Changing timestamps to make the file appear older or assuming the displayed download date proves the photo was taken that day.

02 A helpful screenshot with an incomplete record

A screenshot shows one sentence from a longer exchange about where a driver was headed.

Next step: Keep the screenshot as received and preserve the accessible surrounding conversation through a lawful method; label any missing context.

Avoid. Deleting surrounding messages or representing a cropped screenshot as a complete conversation.



WORKSHEET 1

01

Source and access map

Inventory before exporting. Include only devices/accounts you may lawfully access. Do not record passwords or access tokens.

Item/source ID

Device or service

Creator/owner

File type/event

Original or received copy

Date range

Lawful access confirmed

Known edit/export history

Overwrite/loss concern

Help needed

Related guidance: [Map what exists before moving it](#)



WORKSHEET 2

02

Export and copy check

Keep originals. Record settings and verify the copied material opens before relying on it.

Source ID

Export date/time/time zone

Official instructions URL

Export method/settings

Destination

Files/parts expected

Files/parts received

Readable check

Missing/unreadable items

Who performed check

Related guidance: [Choose an export that matches the question](#)



WORKSHEET 3

03

File context card

Separate what the file shows, what you remember, and what the device reports.

Item ID

Original filename

Capture time shown/source

Download time

Location/basis

Creator

What the item directly shows

Known changes before capture

Related files

Uncertainty

Related guidance: [Choose an export that matches the question](#)



WORKSHEET 4

04

Backup and transfer record

Do not share unrestricted account access. Maintain an unchanged copy and identify every derivative version.

Preserved-copy location

Independent backup location

Last retrieval check

Access holder

Shared file/version IDs

Recipient verified

Purpose

Method

Sent date

Receipt

Redactions/annotations on sharing copy

Related guidance: [Share a working set with a transfer record](#)



READINESS REVIEW

Check the file before using it

REVIEW EACH ITEM BEFORE MOVING ON

- ☐ Each working figure or statement is linked to an identifiable document.
- ☐ Missing information is marked as unverified rather than estimated as fact.
- ☐ The exact question and the person or organization able to answer it are identified.
- ☐ The current document version and any conflicting version are preserved.
- ☐ Independent deadlines and the source of each deadline have been checked.
- ☐ The final written response has been compared with the original question.

What still needs attention

Open fact or decision, who can resolve it, and the source needed

Completion standard. The working file is complete when the important facts are supported, the next action is assigned and any unresolved issues remain clearly visible. A completed checklist does not establish coverage, entitlement or legal compliance.



ACTION PLAN

Write down the next step

Choose the smallest useful next step. Make the request specific enough that the recipient can locate the record and explain or address the exact issue. Keep proof of what you sent and what came back.

The exact issue or request

Evidence IDs and document versions that support the request

Verified recipient and channel

Date sent and follow-up date

What response will resolve the issue, and what still needs professional review

Separate decisions. A courtesy follow-up date is not a legal deadline. A document request does not automatically pause another requirement. Do not sign, settle, move property or disclose sensitive records merely because a box on this page is complete.



REFERENCE GUIDE

Sources and scope

The linked official sources support the educational background. The forms and examples are original organization tools. Sources were checked on October 1, 2026; policies, procedures and law may change. Recheck the current source before relying on a rule.

[1] NIST: Digital Evidence Preservation, NISTIR 8387

Professional evidence-preservation guidance emphasizes source documentation, integrity, controlled handling, and more than one copy. Scope: Professional standard background adapted into original consumer organization tips; the workbook does not claim forensic compliance.

<https://www.nist.gov/publications/digital-evidence-preservation-considerations-evidence-handlers>

[2] Apple: Export photos and videos on Mac

Photos offers unmodified-original export and explains multi-part Live Photo output and optional sidecar metadata. Scope: Product interface can change; check current instructions. Vendor example is not a legal sufficiency standard.

<https://support.apple.com/en-in/guide/photos/-pht6e157c5f/mac>

[3] Google Photos: Download your Google data

Download timestamps can differ from embedded photo timestamps, and some additional metadata is exported separately. Scope: Exports depend on the product and settings; no claim that every export contains all possible evidence.

<https://support.google.com/photos/answer/3024190>



REFERENCE GUIDE

More source notes

[4] U.S. Courts: Federal Rules of Evidence

Federal evidence rules include authentication requirements; preservation alone does not establish every admissibility condition. Scope: Federal rules are not a substitute for applicable state rules, court orders, or legal advice.

<https://www.uscourts.gov/forms-rules/current-rules-practice-procedure/federal-rules-evidence>

Keep the scope clear

Do not alter original files.

No third-party account access

No destructive phone/dashcam procedures