

## VHS Digitization Guide

Prepared in collaboration with

**LGBTQ | Digital  
HISTORY | Collaboratory**

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This step-by-step guide will show you how to digitize a VHS tape using the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives Mac-based digitization station. It provides instructions on creating digital versions of tapes, and saving, naming, and managing files. This station was originally set up as part of the *Tape Condition: degraded* exhibition in the archives' gallery space (Summer 2016) and additional equipment and training hours were provided by the LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory in 2016–17.

**Table of Contents:**

1) Equipment list.....	3
2) Equipment setup.....	4
3) Recording metadata.....	6
4) Digitizing a VHS tape.....	7
5) Saving, naming, and managing files.....	9
6) Appendix A: Troubleshooting.....	10

## **1) Equipment list**

- 1) Panasonic PV-9664 VCR (E013)
- 2) Blackmagic Infinity Shuttle
- 3) AVT-8710 Time Base Corrector
- 4) Media Express software
- 5) iMac
- 6) Two RCA cables
- 7) SS to USB cable
- 8) RCA to headphone jack cable
- 9) Headphones
- 10) External hard-drive

## 2) Equipment setup

The basic setup of the VHS digitization station is as follows:

VCR → Time Base Corrector → Infinity Shuttle → iMac and Headphones → External hard-drive

To set up the digitization station, follow these steps carefully:

- 1) Plug the VHS player into the power
- 2) Plug the Time Base Corrector into the power

**Note:** Disconnect the Time Base Corrector from the power when you are finished. It has no off button, so otherwise it will overheat

- 3) Take the yellow, red and white side of the first RCA cable, and plug them into their corresponding VHS output sockets (on the back of the VHS player)
- 4) On the other end of the first RCA cable...
  - a. Plug the yellow end into the yellow input socket of the Time Base Corrector
  - b. Plug the red and white ends into the corresponding red and white “Audio In” sockets of the Blackmagic Infinity Shuttle
- 5) Using the second RCA cable...
  - a. Plug one yellow end into the yellow output socket of the Time Base Corrector
  - b. Plug the other yellow end into the yellow “Video In” sockets of the Blackmagic Infinity Shuttle
- 6) **Press the reset button twice on the Time Base Corrector**
- 7) Using the blue SS to USB cable...
  - a. Plug the SS end into the SS port of the Blackmagic Infinity Shuttle
  - b. Plug the USB end into the USB port on the backside of the Mac
- 8) Using the RCA - headphone jack cable...
  - a. Plug the red and white RCA ends into the corresponding “Video Out” sockets of the Blackmagic Infinity Shuttle
  - b. Plug your headphones in the headphone jack end



Figure 1: *Time Base Corrector*



Figure 2: *SS-USB cable going into Mac*

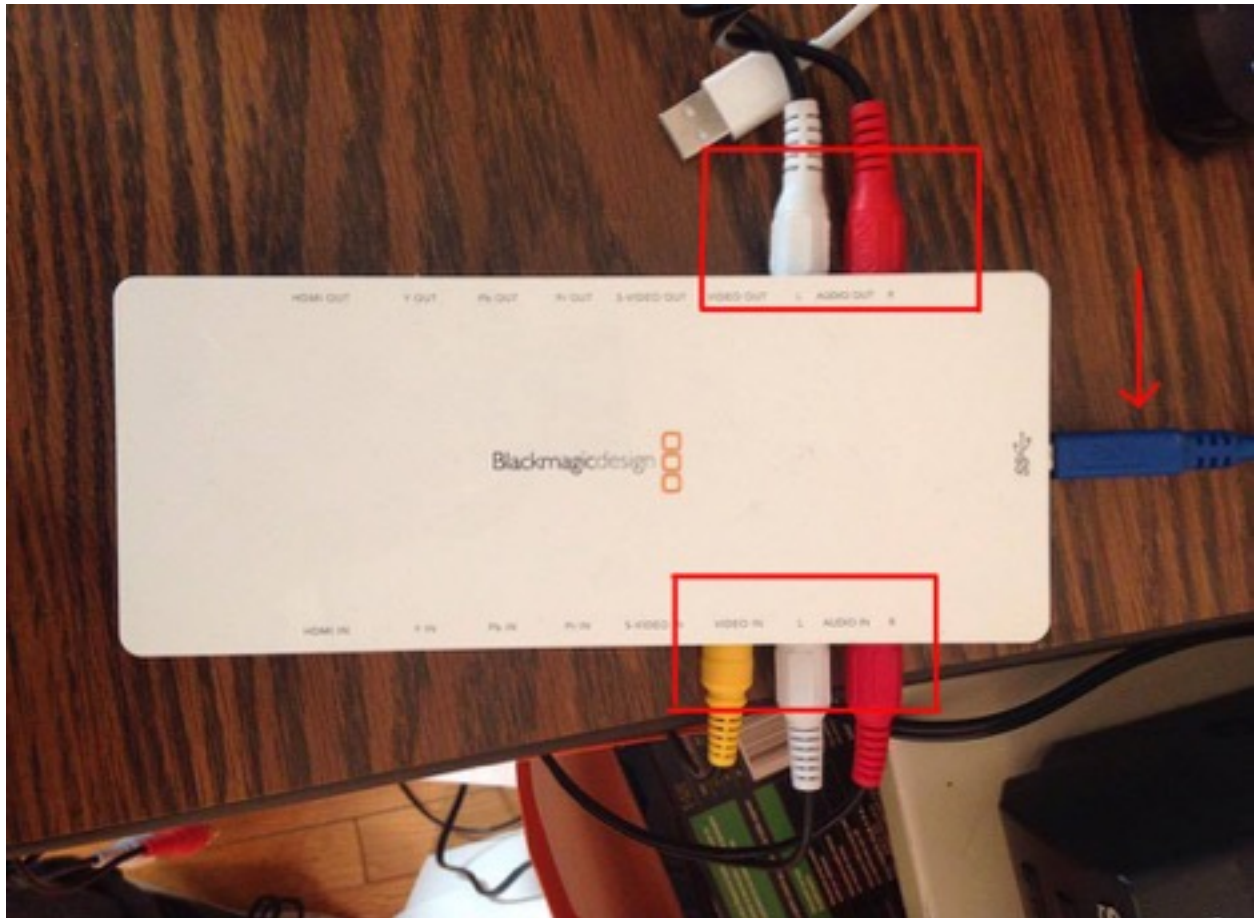


Figure 1: *This is the Blackmagic Infinity Shuttle after being setup. You can see the video and audio in (bottom) and the audio out (top). The SS - USB cable is on the right.*

### 3) Recording metadata

*If your materials are already recorded in InMagic, check out whats already there. When you're done recording the metadata for your tape, update InMagic.*

When digitizing a tape at the CLGA, it is important you record data documenting the files you have created. A spreadsheet is often best for this. The metadata you record should include the following fields:

Title of VHS; Accession #; File Name; Date Recorded; Date Digitized; Digitizer; Creator/Fonds; Original Format; Tape Condition; Tape Cover Description; Length; Classification; Multiple Films on Tape?; Notes; Physical Location.

Record this metadata for each side of the tape.

“Title of VHS” and “Accession #” should be given to you by a CLGA archivist. Note that for VHS tapes, the accession number is always suffixed with a “F”.

“File Name” should be created according to our naming convention, which is “[Accession #][Title of VHS]” Example: 2012-001-02F Mikey’s Film.

“Date Recorded” is the date the content on the tape was recorded.

“Date Digitized” is the date that you are digitizing the tape.

“Digitizer” is your preferred name.

“Creator/Fonds” should be the name and number of the fonds your tape is part of. If your tape is not part of a fonds, just record the name of the creator of this record. The creator is *not always the donor*.

“Original Format” should be “VHS tape”

“Tape Condition” is where you record the physical and audio condition of the tape. Under this field, you should mention if the audio or video is degraded, or the physical VHS tape looks damaged.

“Tape Cover Description” is whatever is written on the tape.

“Length” is the length of the full recording on the tape.

“Classification” can be one of three types: Documentary, Erotica, or Entertainment. Record whichever best describes the content of the tapes.

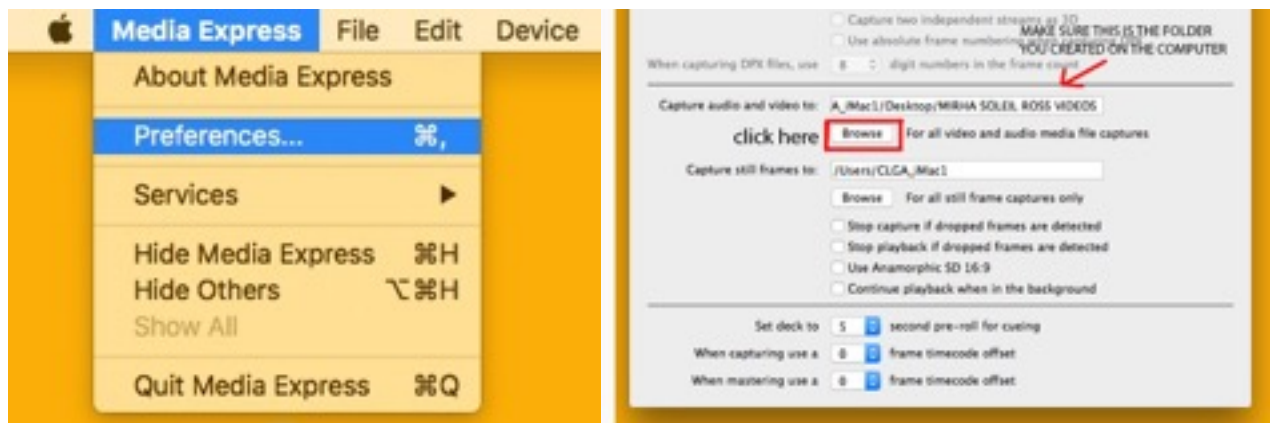
“Multiple Films” is a field to document tapes that have multiple films on them-you should give each recording a description and indicate the time it begins in the file.

“Notes” is the field where you put the descriptive information you have recorded about the content on the tape.

“Physical Location” is where the physical cassette tape can be found at the CLGA.

### 3) Digitizing a VHS tape

- 1) Make sure all equipment is plugged in and properly connected
- 2) Don't forget to press "Reset" twice on the Time Base Corrector
- 3) Create a temporary folder on the iMac, in Documents, where you will store the files created through your project. Plug in one of the external hard drive and create a similar folder on the hard drive.
- 4) Double click the "**DIGITIZE VHS**" icon on the computer desktop. The program "Media Express" will open.
- 5) Click on "**MEDIA EXPRESS**" in the top left hand corner of the screen (the finder bar). Go to **PREFERENCES**.
- 6) Under **CAPTURE AUDIO AND VIDEO TO**, click **BROWSE**. Select folder you created on the computer as the destination folder.



- 7) Return to main screen of "**MEDIA EXPRESS**" and select the "**LOG AND CAPTURE**" tab, at the bottom right corner of the window.



- 8) Make sure your VHS tape is rewind completely. Check the tape for any signs of debris, dirt or damage. If you find any of these signs, do not digitize the tape.
- 9) Insert the tape into the VHS player. It should start playing immediately. Press stop, and rewind the tape.
- 10) On Media Express, you the top right of quarter of the window should look blue. That means it is working.
- 11) Once your VHS is rewind, Press **PLAY** on VCR, and then **immediately** click the **“CAPTURE”** button in Media Express to begin the recording. Check that the sound is coming through the headphones and that the video appears to be running.



Figure 6: *Media Express will display this graphic when it is capturing video to the computer.*

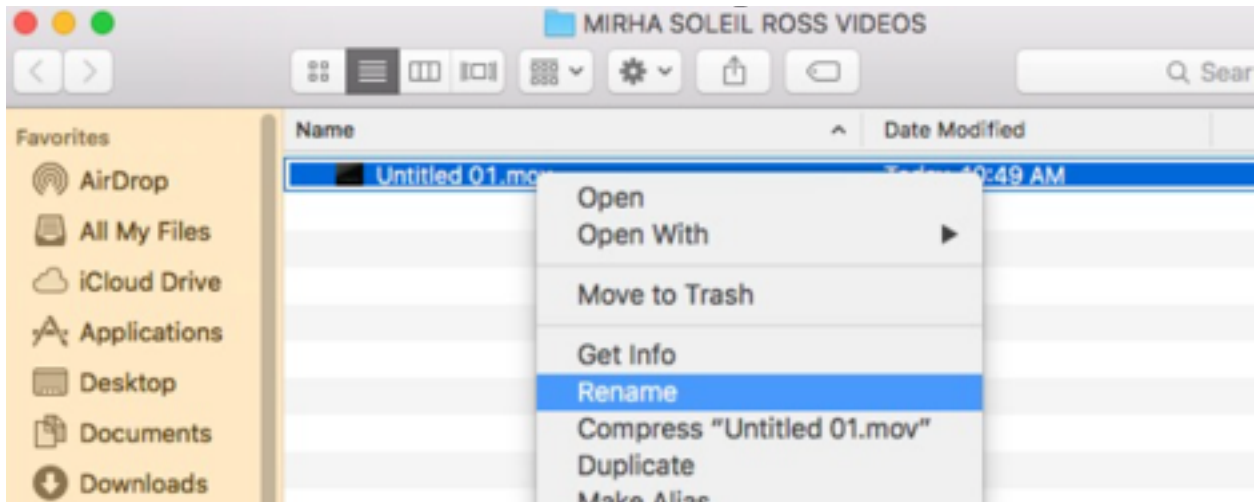
- 7) Once the video has finished running, click the **“CAPTURE”** button once more. This will stop the recording.
- 8) **Unplug the Time Base Corrector.**

**Note:** Editing video files is extremely tedious. Try to click capture as soon as possible after pressing play, and immediately after the VHS is finished.

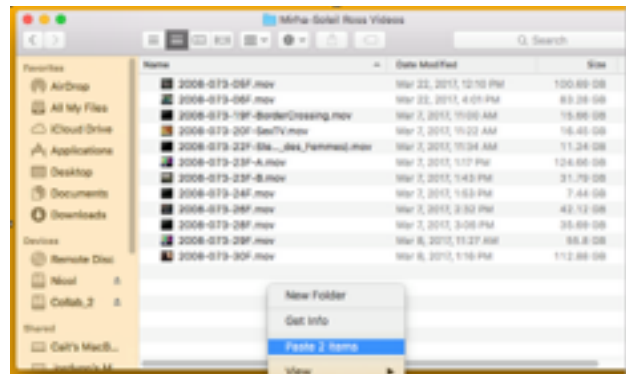
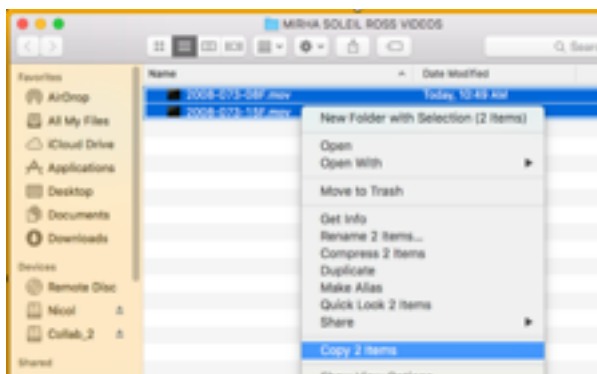
**Note:** Listen and watch the video while it is being digitized. This is a good opportunity to record your metadata for **“Length”**, **“Tape condition”**, and **“Notes”**. Also, that way you can catch if the VHS player begins eating up the tape, and try to prevent any damage to the materials.

#### 4) Saving, naming and managing files

- 1) Go to the folder you had created early on the computer. Your video file should now be there. Right click on the new video file and select “**RENAME**”. Delete the current information and rename the video file with it’s corresponding accession number, followed by the Video Title (i.e. **2008-073-05F Yapping Out Loud**)



- 2) Rewind the video in the VCR than press “**EJECT**” and return the cassette to its original case if applicable.
- 3) Now it is time to copy the files you created over to the external hard drive. Even if you are digitizing many videos, this process should be completed after two files have been created, so that you do not lose work or fill up the iMac’s hard-drive. Copy the files to the matching folder on the external hard drive. Click and drag your mouse to select both files at the same time. Then **RIGHT CLICK > COPY 2 ITEMS**. Open the matching folder on the external hard drive and **RIGHT CLICK > PASTE 2 ITEMS**.



- 4) While in the external hard drive right click on the file and select **OPEN WITH - QUICKTIME**. Make sure the video plays correctly and the audio is not out of sync.
- 5) Once you have confirmed the copied files are functioning correctly return to the folder on the computer with the originally two files. Delete them by right clicking and selecting **MOVE TO TRASH**. Then **RIGHT CLICK** on the trash icon in the bottom dock and select **EMPTY TRASH**.

## Appendix A: Troubleshooting

- If the setup is not working, disassemble everything and set up again. Follow the instructions carefully. Make sure to restart the Time Base Corrector twice.
- **Do not update the Mac. Ignore any prompts to do so.**
- **Do not change any Settings on Inmagic. If you notice some of the settings seem off, contact the Executive Director of the Archives.**
- Sync problems can sometimes be caused by lag from the computer, in which case the files themselves are fine. If you notice a sync problem, try restarting the computer and closing other programs before playing the file.
- Setting up the VHS digitization station is complicated! Don't hesitate in asking for help.