

IU Media Digitization Studios
U-matic videotape preparation and digitization workflow
Date of last revision: 12/7/2017

1 Prepare the tape:

- 1.1. Retrieve tape from the processing room.
- 1.2. Examine the videotape case or sleeve for cracks or evidence of stress that may indicate past damage to the cassette inside. Examine the cassette for problems or physical damage such as breakages, mold, plasticizer residue, cracks, chips, broken flap mechanisms or the sound of loose debris inside the cassette body. If defects are found, assess the damage and determine if a quick repair or cleaning is possible or if additional in-depth processes may be necessary (re-housing, mold remediation, disassembly to correct a problem in the pack, etc.).
- 1.3. Repair any breakages, mangled, torn or stretched tape with a 3/4" splicing block, splicing tape and a razor. Use vertical butted splices with no overlapping videotape at the splice and no splicing tape exceeding over the top or bottom of the tape edge. The splicing tape should never come in contact with the video heads. Be sure that the record inhibit button has been removed to prevent accidental erasures during digitization.
- 1.4. Examine label/bar code placement on the tape. Confirm that labels are not peeling. If they are, remove them and carefully place them inside the cassette case. Remove any labels that may impede mechanical operation or become detached when inserted into a VTR. Look out for any gooey adhesives left over from an old label that may inhibit normal mechanical function in a VTR. Remove with alcohol if necessary.
- 1.5. Review label information that may indicate the video standard of the recording. If there are any references to standards other than NTSC (such as PAL or SECAM), the media should be removed from the immediate workload and alert the processing specialist. Update the POD Recording Standard field accordingly. MDPI is not currently equipped to play or digitize any video standard other than standard definition NTSC.
- 1.6. Clean the tape in Memnon's Indelt cleaning machine:
 - (i) Make sure tape is fully rewound
 - (ii) Insert cassette
 - (iii) Press "Auto" button (machine will clean forwards, reverse, then eject cassette)
- 1.7. Insert the tape into a VTR and play to identify the media

1.8. Many U-matic videotapes are prone to soft binder issues, especially certain brands and formulations like Ampex, Agfa-Gevaert and some Sony types. Remove the lid of the Sony BVU-900 so that you can watch and hear the tape as it threads and plays. Listen for any mechanical sounds such as squealing or chirping that may indicate that soft binder/sticky shed syndrome is present. Watch for stress as the tape moves over the guides and scanner. Sticky shed can also result in video image banding caused by friction that prevents the VTR from tracking the picture properly. Does the tape move normally or struggle in fast forward and rewind mode? Does the deck show signs of tension errors? Do the video heads clog immediately? If sticky shed is present, eject the tape immediately and bake. Do not risk damaging the tape or VTR.

1.9. Baking:

- i) Disassemble cassette and place the spools only in the oven.
- ii) Gradually heat oven from room temperature to 123 degrees F
- iii) Keep oven at a steady 123 degrees F for 48-72 hours
- iv) Power down oven and allow tapes to cool without opening door for 24 hours
- v) Reassemble cassette and clean again in the Indelt machine

1.10. Note the audio configuration. Frequently only a single audio channel was used even though there were two available.

1.11. Make note of the program duration.

(If there is no discernible video or audio on the tape, it may have other problems; such as a very unstable RF signal, it could be blank or a different non-video format or TV standard: PAL or SECAM. If the color doesn't quite lock properly, it could be a Low Band U-matic. MDPI does not currently have a working Low Band playback deck.)

1.12. Note any damage found, repairs, baking, and cleaning in the Physical Object section of the POD with comments as needed.

2 Preparing the VTR for digitization:

2.1. The VTR tape path should be cleaned prior to each tape playback.

2.2. Power down the VTR.

2.3. If accessing the tape path is difficult, unhook all power, audio and video connections from the back of the VTR, taking note of cable labels and connection locations. Remove the VTR from the rack to a location with good lighting and easy, comfortable access, such as a clean counter top.

2.4. Remove the VTR cover.

- 2.5. Clean the scanner drum and heads with a TexWipe dampened with acetone. TexWipes are lint free and are not likely to catch on the edge of the heads like a cotton swab will. The important part of video head cleaning is to not move the heads up and down, but rather hold the TexWipe stationary, then slowly rotate the head drum to clean the head. Clean any additional metal parts that come in contact with the tape with TexWipes dampened with acetone.
- 2.6. Do not use acetone on rubber or plastic parts or audio heads. These surfaces can be cleaned with isopropyl alcohol. Ideally rubber parts like pinch rollers should be cleaned with Head, Red & Roll Cleaner when available. This cleaner will not dry the rubber out as alcohol tends to do over time.

3 VTR Signal routing:

- 3.1. Insert the cassette into the BVU-900 VTR and rewind.
- 3.2. On the BNC video patch panel, patch the Source VTR composite video out into A/D VIDEO IN (this sends the output of the BVU-900 into the AJA HD10AVA converting the signal from analog to digital SDI). The BVU-900 has an internal time base corrector.
- 3.3. Patch the A/D VIDEO OUT 1 into the SDI CAPTURE CARD for capture station 1 (this sends the converted SDI signal into the Blackmagicdesign Decklink Studio 4K capture card).
- 3.4. Patch the CAPTURE SDI OUTPUT into the VTM-203 DIGITAL C INPUT (this sends the output of the capture card into the Videotek VTM-203 Waveform/Vectorscope which feeds the Dell computer display on the console for signal monitoring and setup).
- 3.5. Patch the CAPTURE ANALOG OUTPUT to the TEKTRONIX ANALOG INPUT (this sends the analog output of the capture card to the rack mounted analog Tektronix 1730 Waveform Monitor and Tektronix 1720 Vectorscope).
- 3.6. On the XLR audio patch panel, patch VTR Source channels 1 and 2 into Capture 1 Audio DA IN channels 1 and 2.
- 3.7. Patch Capture 1 Audio DA OUT channels 1 and 2 into TO A/D channels 1 and 2. (This routes the U-Matic audio to the analog to digital convertor and also sends the audio signal to the Mackie audio board to allow monitoring during digitization.)

4 Video TBC and audio setup:

- 4.1. To see the video and audio levels for setup, launch the "Blackmagic Media Express" tool from the start menu of the Capture work station, then press the "Log and Capture" tab. With the source tape in play, you should now see video passing and audio levels visible on the meters.

- 4.2. Optimize tracking and skew adjustment for playback.
- 4.3. Start with the TBC Proc Amp settings adjusted to the preset position for video, set up, chroma and hue settings, utilizing the Sony BVR-55 TBC remote panel.
- 4.4. Play the tape and view the SDI signal through the Videotek VTM-203 Waveform/Vectorscope set to YCbCr/YC (parade display).

(U-matic tapes were used in broadcast and non-broadcast applications, so many will have reference color bars and tone (usually 1K) recorded (but certainly not all).)

- 4.5. If bars and tone are present, set the tone to zero on the VU meters and the TBC proc amp; set-up (black) level to zero, video gain to 100, chroma level and hue set to align to the graticule of the vectorscope, with the red vector being the priority.
- 4.6. Check the program content and be sure there is no clipping of the video signal happening due to high luminance levels. Lower video gain if necessary. Luminance levels may exceed 100% by a few units as long as they are not hard clipped which occurs at or over 110%, and can cause a loss of image detail. Check the tape in several locations and be sure to view an area with higher luminance levels, such as a daytime sky or bright light fixture. Adjust if black levels are crushed and if chroma over-saturation creates excessive video noise.
- 4.7. When there are no reference color bars, maintain the TBC proc amp settings in the preset mode as a starting point. Use the same process as above to best preserve a good range of the luma and chroma signal. Observe playback and adjust to prevent crushed black levels, excessive video gain (hard-clipping) or chroma over-saturation.
- 4.8. Verify that all audio content is visible on the meters of the “Blackmagic Media Express” tool and that it is audible through the first two faders of the Mackie 802 VLZ4 audio board. Check audio locally through the VTR jack with headphones and compare to what is coming through the audio board. With all video and audio levels set, you are ready to digitize.

5 **Digitization:**

- 5.1. Quit the Blackmagic Media Express tool. Quit any other applications that may be using computer resources.
- 5.2. Launch the Recorder tool icon on the capture station desktop.

- 5.3. Scan the bar code of the tape or case with the scanner and verify that the numbers appear in the barcode field. By default the system will place the bar code in the file name field.
- 5.4. On the Audio pulldown menu, select “2 Audio Channels (2 Mono Streams)” for all U-matic tapes.
- 5.5. Press the #2 to prep to record, then the red circle to start the digitization.
- 5.6. Press play on the VTR.
- 5.7. Monitor video and audio and note any anomalies with time codes in the comments field of the Digital Workflow section of the POD.
- 5.8. Fill out and verify all appropriate fields in the POD.
- 5.9. When the program has ended, press “Pause” on the Recorder interface.
- 5.10. Press the #3 “Combine”, then the “Combine Parts” circle.
- 5.11. Rewind the source tape.
- 5.12. Do a spot check QC of the digital file in VLC Player:
 - i) Verify audio sync with picture.
 - ii) Verify time code notes of anomalies found and compare with source if necessary.
 - iii) Isolate audio channels to confirm all are present.
 - iv) Check MediaInfo and verify all 2 streams are present.
- 5.13. Double check that all mandatory POD fields have been completed.
- 5.14. Copy the mkv preservation file to the Transcode/Dropbox for processing.