

Does your data spark joy?

What to keep and what to discard.

You might know [Marie Kondo](#), the organizing guru from Japan. As your house can benefit from obeying her motto 'Does it spark joy?', so can your collection of data files.

Everyone has heaps of digital files. Datasets, to-do lists, papers-I-should-read-but-for-which-I-never-have-time-and-are-now-out-dated, dozens of versions of the same document, an incomplete back-up of an old back-up, etc. Imagine how much digital information there will be if no-one in the world ever throws anything away...

What should I keep?

Consider a single file and answer the following questions:

Does it spark legislation?

You might have drawn up agreements with participants or third parties about data storage. E.g. if you agreed to store certain personal information for only 2 years, discard it after 2 years.

Does it spark transparency?

It should be traceable how the results in your scientific output are constructed. Therefore, you should keep the data and analysis methods that support your scientific publications. In the Netherlands, you should archive this data for at least 10 years.

Archiving data is just one part of transparency. Equally important is to make your data [FAIR](#) (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Re-usable).

Does it spark science?

Some data is unique, and cannot be acquired again. E.g. pictures of archeological excavations, temperature measures in California in March 2016, etc. The more unique the data, the more reason to keep it.

Many data can be re-used by yourself or by other scientists. Naturally, don't throw this data away, but archive it accompanied by a codebook or readme-file to make the data understandable.

Does it spark history?

Is the data of historical or cultural value? Then keep it.

Does it spark my daily work?

Of course, if you regularly use the file, keep it.

What should I discard?

If you answer all questions above with 'no', you can probably throw away the file. Also consider whether the file is **ROT** (**R**edundant, **O**ut-dated and/or **T**rivial). Delete any ROT files.

Why should I do this?

- It brings space and overview on your computer.
- It brings space and overview in your brain.
- You can work more efficiently, since it is clear on which data you should focus your attention.
- You can collaborate more efficiently, since your data file structure is comprehensive for others.
- It saves storage costs.

Done!

Feels good, doesn't it?

This brings you to the important next step where tidying up is all about: take good care of the remaining valuable and useful data!

Make your data [FAIR](#) (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Re-usable) so they keep their value and usefulness. This [guide](#) gives you a good start in making your data FAIR.