Digital Cameras in the Reading Room:
Real advice from an experienced researcher (2006)

The following advice comes from a graduate student who has used his digital camera in several archives. He sets up the tripod and camera on the table so that all he has to do is place the item to be copied under the lens and take a photo. The item is then replaced in the folder.

When using a personal camera to photograph manuscripts, it is very important to be sure that you record which collection the item came out of and where it was within the collection (box and folder title). This can be done in several ways, including:
• photographing a note with that information before you photograph the item
• photographing the folder tab itself with or before the item
• keeping a separate list that notes the image number and the collection, box, and folder in which it was found.

CAMERA

“The general rule is that you want at least 5.0 megapixels - though more is better. The camera I used was a Sony Cybershot DSC-S600. It has a maximum of resolution of 6.0 megapixels and a setting that allows for low light photography as well as settings which improve picture quality depending on the type of ambient light. It was about $200 and worth every penny. I bought mine about 2 years ago and at this time, I think you should be able to get a higher resolution camera for less money.”

Note: You will want to have a camera with a large lens. The bigger the lens, the more pixels to record information and the better the camera does in low light.

Example: Sony Cybershot DSC-H3 8.1 MP Digital camera with 10x Optical Zoom (ca. $300)

TRIPOD

“What you want is a tripod which you can use to point the camera straight downward. The smaller lightweight portable tripods usually don't have this capability, so you'll want to go with a larger model.”
SunPak Tabletop Tripod 17” (ca. $15)

ACCESSORIES

“Another thing which is useful is an AC adapter for the camera. I bought mine online for about $40. It's definitely a wise investment, since batteries get pretty expensive.”

Sony AC-LS5K portable AC adaptor (ca. $30)

MEMORY

“The final thing is storage. This takes a bit more time than I had initially budgeted. You'll want a hard drive devoted exclusively to digital images. I got a 300 GB hard drive for about $170. You'll also want to make a second backup on an immobile medium like a CD-R or a CD-DVD in case the external drive fails mechanically.”

ADDITIONAL ADVICE