
A Preservation Primer

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General:

- If possible, remove staples, paper clips, rubber bands or other unnecessary plastics and metals from the collection.
- All items should be stored in a way that will protect materials from heat, light, humidity, pests and pollution.
- All items should be placed in containers and folders, which mediate deterioration; ideally, these may include acid free paper, folders and boxes, as well as chemically stable plastics.
- Containers should be labeled clearly with information about what is inside.
 - Alternatively, you can create an inventory of the containers, which lists out materials inside each properly labeled box.
- When documents are frequently handled or are too brittle to be handled without support, an archival plastic may be used for storage.
- Charcoal and pastels should not be put in plastic sleeves, as static electricity will smudge the document.
- Unfold or unroll and flatten papers and photographs if this can be done safely without damaging the materials.
- You may use a soft brush to wipe away dirt but again before proceeding, ensure that this process will be of more help, rather than causing undue damage to the material.
- If there is mold present, spread out items in a well ventilated area away from children and others and let the documents dry. When all materials have dried, you can brush away the mold; and you should wear a mask while performing this task.
 - Dealing with mold can pose health risks and dangers. This should only be done if you are completely comfortable with the process and have the proper equipment to protect yourself and the documents.
- When using or viewing materials make sure, the space used for viewing or use is clean and free of liquids and food. Pens or other items that could make permanent marks on materials should not be used.

Paper:

- Paper will deteriorate no matter what, but if you can decrease use, exposure to light, exposure to pollution, liquid and foods, and provide a stable temperature and humidity for the materials you have done the best you can do.
- If the document is fragile or faded you should type out the contents of the document on an acid free sheet of paper.
 - Keep both the original and the typed version, but use the typed version as the use copy unless the original is absolutely needed.
 - Depending on the document you may also be able to digitize the item and create a physical and digital surrogate if it will not cause damage to the material.
- If you need to identify a document or make a note about a document, **DO NOT** write on the document itself.
 - Option: Use an acid free piece of paper and either place it in front, or fold the acid free paper around the documents, and then make note on the new piece of paper.

Photographs:

- All items should be protected from heat, light, humidity, pollution, and pests.
- To provide long-term protection, storage containers, folders and envelopes should be made of materials that are strong, durable and chemically stable.
- Use a No. 1 pencil when writing on the back of a photo and write in the corner of the back of the photograph. If necessary, photocopy the photograph onto acid free paper and using a No. 1 pencil label the copy.
- Keep out of direct sunlight or harsh lighting and display a copy whenever possible.
- When handling a photograph wear gloves or hold at the edges.
- If a photograph is matted, remove the mat unless it threatens to damage the original image.
 - Many mats have a high acidity and will stain a photograph in addition to the damage from the substance used to place the mat.
- If a photograph is mounted, do not attempt to remove the photograph - you may damage the image.
- Color photographs and slides will fade no matter what you do. To slow down this process store color photos together (not in the same folder as black and white photographs) in acid free folders and keep them out of the light. Color photocopies have an even shorter life span but are useful in display purposes.
- Black and white prints, negatives (both nitrate and acetate) should be in buffered folders (8.5 pH).
- If photographs or documents are in frames, it would be best to remove the items from the frames if the process can be done safely without damage to the archival item or to the person removing the item.
 - Be careful of broken glass, rusty nails and staples, and sharp or rusty wire.

Scrapbooks:

- Do not use "magnetic storage albums."
- Use acid free paper.
- Use corners to hold photographs, not glue or tape.
- Identify photographs and items in pencil on the scrapbook page, not on the document or picture.
- Do not laminate anything.

Newsprint:

- Should be photocopied onto acid free paper and the original, if kept, should be stored away from other documents.
- Most newsprint made prior to 1880 is cotton based and should remain in good condition if stored out of the light and in the correct temperature.
- Newsprint after 1880 is generally made out of highly acidic wood pulp that can deteriorate quickly and cause other items to deteriorate. This newsprint should be photocopied onto acid free paper and the original should be disposed of.

Films, Videos, and Cassettes:

- Keep in a cool dry place. All items should be protected from heat, light, humidity and pollution.
- If possible, have a copy of the item made for viewing that will not require the original to be viewed.
 - Ensure it is safe to make the copy, and if possible have it done by someone trained to handle and duplicate film.

- Save the original, when possible, because technology will change and the original film will usually have the best quality. This will serve as your “master” or “archival” version and the copy will be your “use” version.
- Place original film on polypropylene film core in a polypropylene canister; avoid metal cans and reels for long-term storage.
- If the video or audio recording contains an oral history, make a paper based transcript. This transcript will last much longer than the tape or a digital copy.

Born Digital and Digitized Records:

- Hardware used for digital storage should be monitored and reviewed regularly.
- 3 copies (1 use, 1 archival master, 1 offsite backup) should be kept.
- Consider using the 3-2-1 Method (two copies stored locally on different devices and one stored off-site).
- Try to save in a format that will be accessible on most devices without special software or equipment.
- Create simple file names and file structures. Be consistent when naming files. Avoid special characters and long file names.
- Update storage hardware at least every 3-5 years.
- Update out of date file formats as needed.

Other Preservation Resources

American Ancestors by New England Historic Genealogical Society

<https://www.americanancestors.org/education/learning-resources/read/preserve>

The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works

<http://aic.stanford.edu/library/online/brochures/index.html>

Library of Congress

<http://www.loc.gov/preservation/>

National Archives and Records Administration

<http://www.archives.gov/preservation/family-archives/>

Northeast Document Conservation Center

<https://www.nedcc.org/>

Smithsonian Institute Archives

<https://siarchives.si.edu/blog/six-tips-preserving-family-archives>

Selected Archival Supply Vendors:

(Note: Inclusion on this list does NOT constitute a specific endorsement of the vendor by the Western Reserve Historical Society. While the historical society has utilized products from some of these companies over the years, it cannot recommend or warrant the products of any company. When contacting these companies look for their archival supplies)

Conservation Resources International

800-634-6932

www.conservationresources.com

Demco

800-356-1200

<https://www.demco.com/>

Gaylord

800-448-6160

www.gaylord.com

Hollinger

800-634-0491

<https://www.hollingermetaledge.com/>

Light Impressions

1-888-222-2054

www.lightimpressionsdirect.com

University Products

800-628-1912

<https://www.universityproducts.com/archival-storage>