



National Preservation Office

## Photocopying of library and archive materials

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## **Photocopying of library and archive materials**

Photocopying is one of the most popular methods of reproducing books and documents, being quick and relatively inexpensive. The use of copying machines, however, raises serious preservation issues. Used incorrectly, photocopying can cause severe damage to the structure of a book or document, but careful handling can mitigate potential problems.

This leaflet warns of the dangers inherent in photocopying, offers advice on 'best practice', and discusses what design features make a photocopier 'book friendly'.

## **What damage does photocopying cause?**

Inexpert handling and the heat and light generated by machines are the primary causes of damage. Using flat-bed copiers which force the book open to 180° can be particularly damaging.

### **Handling**

Informed and sympathetic handling is essential if book collections are to remain in a useable condition. When using flat bed copiers, gravity causes the leaves of the book to fall forward towards the platen as the book or document is being lowered into position. As a result, leaves can be creased, folded or torn. On such machines, pressure is often placed on the item to obtain a better image, especially when the binding is tight. This puts stress on the structure of the volume, causing the spine to break, emphasising any inherent weakness in its

makeup and risking permanent damage. This damage cannot always be seen until much later.

#### **Ultra violet radiation and light levels**

The amount of UV radiation emitted will vary between machines but according to research undertaken so far it is thought unlikely that the short exposure during the making of a single copy will cause any measurable damage. Concern should be raised, however, when an item is subjected to multiple or frequent copying.

### **Photocopying policy: benchmarks**

It is essential for all libraries and archives to formulate a policy controlling photocopying from its collections as part of its overall preservation policy. The overriding concern of this policy should be the protection of the original item.

The following policy benchmarks for photocopying in libraries and archives have been drawn up by members of the NPO Preservation Administrators Panel.

- Institutions should provide a variety of copying services to the users but only where these do not threaten the preservation of any documents or books. Where feasible copies should be produced from surrogates.
- Archive/library management should promote the use of preservation friendly photocopying machines through their purchasing/leasing policies.
- Routine management of copying services should be closely linked with preservation/conservation departments. All reprographic staff should receive appropriate training in handling materials.
- Preservation staff should develop guidelines on the suitability of material for copying; other staff should be trained to make decisions on the suitability of material for copying based on these guidelines and provide advice on which copying medium is appropriate.
- Any refusals to copy material should be clearly explained: if necessary such decisions must be backed up at senior level.

- Guidelines on appropriateness of material for photocopying should be readily available to users.
- Charges for copying should cover all direct and indirect costs including preservation of original material.
- Charges for all copying should be structured to encourage the users to purchase copies made in a preservation friendly way.
- Opportunities for users to use self-service photocopying should be kept to a minimum. (N.B. This benchmark is more appropriate for libraries. Where such a facility is available in an archive, it will normally only be for use with microforms, and electronic media.)

## **Photocopying services: best practice**

### **Staff awareness and training**

Ideally photocopying should be carried out by the institution's own fully trained staff, with each item being examined for its suitability. The criteria for restricting certain materials must be thoroughly understood by all staff members. Training sessions in good handling practice and good copying practice should be mandatory for all new staff with refresher sessions for existing staff at frequent intervals.

### **Self-service copying**

If it is not possible to allocate staff to carry out copying, the following are some factors which can help to mitigate damage by the public:

- position the machines where they are within clear sight of staff
- clear and concise guidelines on careful handling should be posted prominently by the machines
- criteria for restricted materials should be freely available to users

### **Materials most at risk**

- books which weigh 10lb or more or which are more than 2" thick. These are difficult to handle and strain is put on the binding in trying to obtain a copy
- books which are larger than the photocopier platen

- vellum bindings, which can be brittle and prone to damage under pressure and/or heat
- books with historically important or fine bindings
- books with fold-outs which are larger than their covers are extremely vulnerable to tearing
- books with torn or brittle pages will deteriorate further if subjected to the photocopying process
- parchment
- items with seals attached
- perfect bound books, which are glued rather than sewn, such as many paperbacks, cannot take the strain of being opened to 180° without the risk of breaking
- books stapled or stitched through the sides
- books with broken sewing or loose pages
- books with tight bindings
- books with torn, missing or deteriorating covers
- large sheet maps, plans and charts
- newspapers

Each of these categories should be assessed in relation to the aims of the library or archive and a decision made with regard to photocopying. As a general rule if it is thought that their condition might worsen as a result, then photocopying should be refused. The photocopying policy should be written down and all staff should be aware of it. Copies should be freely available to staff and to the public. Responsibility does not end with the policy, however. It is still vitally important to ensure that any copying done is carried out correctly and sympathetically.

#### **Good photocopying practice**

- do not exert pressure on the spine of a book
- never open a volume more than 180°
- provide adequate support to pages whilst the item is being placed on the platen
- suggest that if more than one copy is required of an item, that subsequent copies are made from the first copy

- limit the number of openings which can be copied per 'healthy' volume, e.g. 25 openings
- fold-outs should not be copied as the risk of damage is extremely high: if it is absolutely essential, it should always be carried out by at least two members of staff with one to support the parts of the item which project beyond the machine
- do not allow books to be left on top of machines as they can be damaged by heat
- photographs should never be left on the platen as heat may cause the surface emulsion to peel and the paper to curl
- consider a recording system to monitor copies from 'popular' items

#### **Copying from surrogates**

If there is material in the collection which is considered to be particularly vulnerable or which is being copied repeatedly, you should think of providing surrogates. Possible surrogates include:

- photocopies of whole or parts of items
- facsimiles
- microfilm
- digital/electronic copies

Use of reproductions will save on the wear and tear to the original. Multiple copies can often be produced inexpensively offering access to more users. The originals, if in real danger, can then be moved to restricted access, thereby protecting them from further damage.

#### **The 'book friendly' photocopier**

A number of specialist copiers have been developed to allow safe copying from bound volumes. While these usually offer distinct advantages over conventional machines, care must still be exercised to avoid damage to the structure of the volume. The main design feature of these machines is the provision of a sloping edge leading away from the edge of the platen area of the glass. This allows maximum presentation of the page area to the platen and avoids stress on the sewing and binding structure. Only one page at a time can be copied.

### **Choosing a copier: machine features**

Identify your specific needs and collect data – general literature, manufacturers' brochures and comparative test evaluations. Bear in mind the following points:

- machines with moving platens should not be used for copying from bound volumes or large documents that protrude beyond the edge of the platen area: there is a serious risk of damage from contact with other parts of the machine when the platen and item are moving
- check for any sharp edges in the machine design which could come in contact with the item
- consider the addition of a foot switch: this modification allows the operator to have both hands free to position and support the originals: this not only speeds up the copying process but more importantly allows greater care to be taken of the original item
- check that your photocopier supplier has experience of providing copiers for use in libraries: many suppliers do not appreciate the substantially differing requirements of a copier located in an office and one located in a library.

### **Copyright**

Photocopying in libraries is covered by copyright legislation. It is a complex subject, the details of which are beyond the scope of this leaflet.

For further information you might consult

Graham P Cornish, **Copyright interpreting the law for libraries, archives and information services**, London: Library Association, 1999.



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