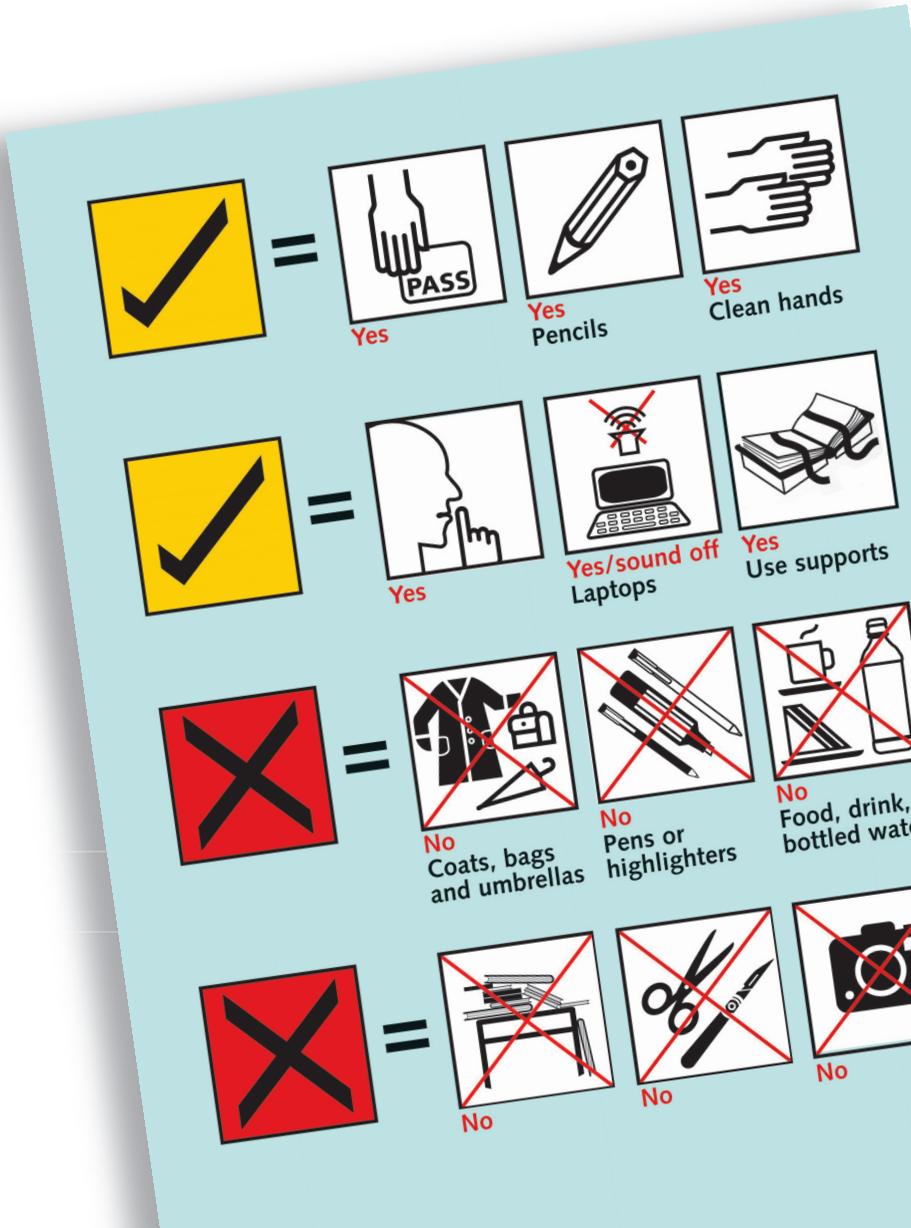


Preservation Advisory Centre

Using collections



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Good handling principles and practice for library archive materials

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Using library and archive collections

Much of the damage that library and archive collections sustain is caused by poor handling. Damage is often cumulative and not immediately apparent. A culture of good handling will significantly reduce the need for costly conservation work and ensure continued access to collections. It is the duty of all concerned to ensure that collections are preserved for future generations of users. This booklet provides guidance on handling books, documents and other library and archive materials. Links to videos and other sources of information are provided throughout the text.

General principles

- All users have responsibility for the care of collections.
- Information and advice on how to handle collections should be available to all users.
- Reading rooms/search rooms should be equipped with appropriate equipment for using materials.
- Hands should be clean and free of creams and lotions. Gloves are not usually required.
- Collection items with surface dirt, dust or mould should not be used in reading rooms/search rooms.
- Fragile original material can be protected by using surrogate copies (photocopies, microfilm or digital media).

Books and bound volumes

- Bound volumes are mechanical structures that are subject to structural stress. 120° is the maximum opening angle for most books. Only a few bindings can be opened to 180° without being damaged. Books with tight bindings should be limited to an opening angle of 90°. Ideally, all books should be supported when open, and for certain categories of material, book supports are essential. These should be made of a non-abrasive, inert material such as inert polyethylene foam. Most traditional library reading stands and lecterns will not support books safely because of the steep angle at which books are held.
- Books with foldouts should be supported on one side only so the foldout opens more easily. Foldouts are weakest along the folds and where joined to the book and can easily tear. Unfold one item at a time and fold back in the correct order.
- Clean smooth weights should be made available to hold open pages.
- Avoid touching text or images and do not attach notes (e.g. post-it-notes). Acid-free slips can be used to follow the text and mark pages.
- Pressure tapes, metal or plastic fasteners such as paper clips and pins should never be used.
- Books should always be removed from a shelf one at a time. Removing books by hooking the top or edges of the spine with fingers will cause damage to spine covering materials and endbands. If there is space above a book it will be possible to reach over the top and push the required book forward by the fore-edge. Alternatively, books on either side may be gently pushed back to free the spine. The book can then be safely removed. Extra care should be taken when retrieving/replacing books fitted with clasps, metal fittings, straps, ties and cover flaps (such books should be housed in protective enclosures). The gap left should be closed by carefully adjusting the books on the shelf or by inserting shelf spacers. Books should not be allowed to lean at an angle or collapse on the shelves.
- Books should stand upright on the shelves, except oversized material (generally over 45cm) and damaged material, which should be stored flat. Books should not protrude over the edge of the shelf and should not be pushed too far back on the shelf. Books should not be stored on their fore-edges, as this will eventually lead to the text block separating from the binding. Items on mobile shelving need extra support in order to minimise the risk of items shifting or falling when shelves are moved.

- Books should fill the shelves, but they should not be so tightly packed that items are damaged when retrieving or replacing them. Bookends should be used to support items if the shelf is not full or if books of disparate height or depth are shelved together. Large books should not be placed next to small ones without a supporting bookend. Bookends should be made of an inert, non-abrasive material and should fully support the books.
- No more than three books or one large volume should be carried at a time. Larger, heavier items should be placed at the bottom of the pile. Large volumes should be carried flat against one's side or chest with both hands positioned under the spine.

Videos: *Using books, Using books in boxes, Using folded items, Using gloves with collection items*

www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/collectioncare/collectioncarevideos/index.html

Article: *Use of white cotton gloves for handling collection items*

www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/collectioncare/introduction/preservation/usingcollections/whitegloves.pdf

Documents and letters

Documents and letters can be stored loose within boxes or enclosures, wrapped in bundles, tied with tags or bound into volumes.

- Do not attempt to flatten documents, especially parchment. Gently restrain items using clean smooth weights.
- Loose items should be kept in order.

Videos: *Using archive material, Using folded items*

www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/collectioncare/collectioncarevideos/index.html

Maps, rolls and charters

- Clean smooth weights should be made available to hold open unfolded sections and restrain unrolled items. Rolls can be read a section at a time, using weights to hold each end in place, rolling up one end as the other is rolled out. Where several sheets are rolled and attached together, roll back top sheets to view the sheet/s below.
- Unfold and fold back sections in the correct order.
- Charters with seals can be supported with flat foam supports.

Videos: *Using rolled items, Using folded items*

www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/collectioncare/collectioncarevideos/index.html

Prints and drawings

- Do not touch the surface of a print or drawing.
- Exposure to light should be minimised.

Video: *Using prints, drawings and photographs*

www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/collectioncare/collectioncarevideos/index.html

Photographs

- Do not touch the image surface.
- Exposure to light should be minimised.

Video: *Using prints, drawings and photographs*

www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/collectioncare/collectioncarevideos/index.html

Booklet: *Preservation of photographic material* www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/photographic.pdf

Papyrus

Papyrus sections are often encased between two sheets of glass. Sometimes they are mounted within paper. Papyrus is brittle and easily damaged.

- Papyrus in glass should be placed on a flat foam support.
- Turn the leaves of papyrus mounted in paper by the supporting paper. Do not touch the papyrus surface. Turn leaves one at a time, taking care not to bend or flex the papyrus.

Video: *Using other formats*

www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/collectioncare/collectioncarevideos/index.html

Globes

Globes come in various sizes, with and without stands. Paper, which can be printed, hand drawn or coloured is adhered to a core made of metal, and usually varnished. They are delicate objects and should be handled with great care.

- Wear clean gloves but touch the surface as little as possible.
- Hold small globes by the pins at the top and bottom. Cork stands can be used to support them.

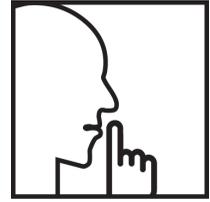
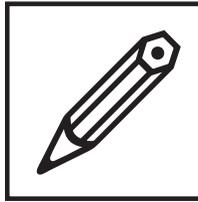
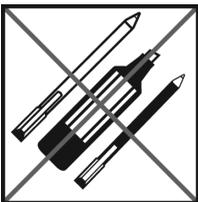
Video: *Using other formats*

www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/collectioncare/collectioncarevideos/index.html

Recommendations for reading/search rooms

These recommendations apply to reading/search rooms, and all areas where collection items are used or stored.

- Coats, bags and umbrellas should not be brought into collection areas.
- Wash your hands and dry thoroughly before going into collection areas.
- Do not drink, eat or smoke in collection areas.
- Keep your workspace tidy.
- Do not place items on the floor.
- Do not lean, rest or write on top of collection items.
- Do not use pens or highlighters in collection areas.
- Use pencils for notetaking or a laptop computer.
- Do not touch the text or image on the page.
- Do not fold over the corners of pages.
- Do not insert bookmarks or attach notes (e.g. post-it notes) to collection items.
- Use acid-free paper slips to mark pages and follow text.



For information about using these icons see www.bl.uk/blpac/icons.html

Preservation guidance booklets

The following booklets can be downloaded free of charge at www.bl.uk/blpac/publicationsleaf.html.

Free printed copies are also available.

Basic preservation for library and archive collections

Building a preservation policy

Cleaning books and documents

Damaged books

Library and archive storage furniture

Making the most of funding opportunities for preservation and conservation projects

Managing pests in paper-based collections

Managing the library and archive environment

Moving library and archive collections

Mould outbreaks in library and archive collections

Preservation of photographic material

Salvaging library and archive collections

Self-service copying of library and archive materials

Understanding and caring for bookbindings

Using library and archive collections

The Preservation Advisory Centre promotes the benefit of good preservation practice and provides support in the form of information services, training and preservation management tools.

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