

Helpful tips for preserving your precious documents & memorabilia

Tips on Protective Enclosures

by Nancy Kraft, for the Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium

Paper items—posters, diaries, railroad time tables, cookbooks, household manuals, letters, and other memorabilia—provide valuable links in our heritage, documenting life in a variety of ways. The life of these items can be extended through appropriate handling and storage.

Tip #1—Provide a clean, cool, dark environment with stable temperature and relative humidity.

Tip #2—Lessen the effects of temperature and humidity fluctuations, keeping items clean, and minimize handling and abrasion by using protective archival enclosures and boxes.

Tip #3—Before storing items, remove extraneous materials, such as paperclips, rubber bands, wrapping material, and old folders. Important memorabilia such as pressed flowers can be set aside for separate enclosure.

Tip #4—Unfold and flatten papers whenever possible. Do NOT force paper flat by pushing with your hand or using weights. Let it relax (absorb the humidity from the air) over several days, slowly unfolding and flattening. Only toward the end of the flattening process should weights be used. The weights should be appropriate to the fragility of the item. If the piece is extremely fragile or, if you are in doubt, consult a conservator.

Tip #5—Gently clean items with a soft brush, testing corner or margin first to make sure it can withstand cleaning. Only brush off what is easily removed. Do not try to remove stains, instead consult a conservator.

Tip #6—Archival protective enclosures come in all sizes and shapes of folders, envelopes, pamphlet binders, and boxes. Single signature pamphlets are easily sewn into pamphlet binders; binders with clear covers are available. Consult an archival supply catalog for appropriate materials. You can obtain a list of archival supply companies from your local library.

Tip #7—Select archival enclosures that provide extra protection while items are stored or moved, as well as allow easy retrieval. Containers should be slightly larger than the items stored to protect the materials edges from damage, yet, snug enough to prevent shifting.

Tip #8—Provide extra protection for fragile items by putting them into archival folders or paper sleeves before storing them in an archival enclosure. The item is retrieved by pulling on the sleeve instead of the item protecting it from abrasion against the enclosure.

Tip #9—Minimize unnecessary handling of item by adequately labeling container. Label folders and envelopes with a no. 2 pencil or by typing. Never use ballpoint or felt-tip pens that might stain or bleed. Label pamphlet containers and boxes with adequate information about their contents by writing directly on the container or box or by using labels.

Tip #10—Create instant identification for pamphlets by adhering a color photocopy of the original cover to the front of the pamphlet enclosure using a thin layer of water-soluble glue stick. (The archival cover protects your item from the glue.)

If you have questions about this tip sheet or other preservation topics, contact:

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