



Guidelines for the Careful Handling of Books

Summary: *Whenever materials of permanent value are handled, they become vulnerable to damage. By raising awareness about the potential harm caused by unsound handling techniques, damage can be minimized. A number of simple guidelines are outlined below.*

Always handle books with clean hands.

- Avoid touching items with dirty, oily, or greasy hands.
- Washing hands frequently will prevent oils and dust from transferring to the volumes.

Support books properly when stored. Books can be stored on their tails, on their spines, or flat. Oversized books should rest flat.

- Avoid storing or packing books on their fore-edges; the weight of the text block will cause the book to pull out of its cover.
- Forcing a book into a space too small or too tight can result in damage when attempting to remove it.
- Allowing books to sag or lean on a shelf can cause permanent warping.

Remove books from the shelf by gently pushing back the books on either side and grasping the desired book from the center of its spine.

- Do not pull books roughly from the shelf.
- Repeatedly retrieving a book by its headcap will cause the spine to tear.
- An alternative method to retrieve a book is to reach behind the desired book and gently push it forward.

Use books horizontally.

- Never force a volume beyond its ability to open or balance it on its tail.

Keep books clean by periodic dusting with a soft brush or cloth.

- Treated cloths can embed undesirable chemicals and waxes into the covering material.
- Rough cloths may be abrasive to the text block or cover.

Use a box or book truck to transport several volumes.

- Try not to carry too many items at one time.

Keep your workspace clear.

- Avoid extraneous materials and clutter in your work area.
- Food and drink in close proximity to books can cause staining and attract insects and pests.



THE GEORGIA ARCHIVES

Use strips of alkaline paper as bookmarks.

- Do not leave extraneous materials in books or turn down corners to mark your place.

When copying or scanning the pages in books, use a device that does not place stress on the binding.

- Overhead photocopier/scanners allow volumes to be copied (or scanned) face-up.
- Photocopiers with a beveled platen allow volumes to be copied face down without damaging the spine.
- If such equipment is unavailable, use special care when placing books face down on traditional copying machines.
- Do not force books open, or allow the photocopier's cover to slam on a book's spine.

Only use pencils when working with rare or valuable books.

- Inks from pens or markers may permanently mar an item.

Use only chemically stable materials (papers/plastics) for repairing or housing items.

- Do not use pressure sensitive (scotch/book-repair) tapes or other materials that contain damaging adhesives (such as Post-it ® type notes) to repair pages or bindings.
- Attempting repairs without sufficient training may result in permanent damage or accelerate deterioration.

Always favor preventive measures.

- Store books in a climate controlled environment (e.g. 60-72°F, 40-55% R.H), away from direct exposure to light.
- Avoid storing books along exterior walls, in attics or basements, where environmental conditions tend to be more severe.

If in the course of your work you are unsure what to do, contact a preservation or conservation professional for assistance.

Resources and Referrals

- American Institute for Art and Historic Artifacts (AIC); 202-452-9545; <http://aic.stanford.edu>
- National Archives, Preservation, <http://www.archives.gov/preservation/>
- SOLINET's Preservation Services, 800-999-8558; <http://www.solinet.net>