



UNIVERSITY SYSTEM  
OF GEORGIA

Georgia Archives

# GEORGIA ARCHIVES

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## Guidelines for the Careful Handling of Books

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**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, dry hands.**

- Avoid touching items with dirty, oily, or greasy hands.
- Washing hands frequently will prevent oils and dust from transferring to the volumes.
- Do not use hand sanitizer or hand lotion.

### **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.
- Use a book cradle for fragile or damaged books to keep the book open at 120°.

### **Keep books clean by periodic dusting with a dry 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.

**Only use pencils when working with rare or valuable books.**

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

**Use strips of alkaline paper as bookmarks.**

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

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

- Do not use any type of pressure sensitive tapes (Scotch™/book-repair) or other materials that contain damaging adhesives (such as Post-It® type notes) to repair pages or bindings or to mark pages.
- Attempting repairs without sufficient training may result in permanent damage or accelerated deterioration.
- Only use polyethylene, polypropylene, and polyester plastics.
- Only use acid-free, alkaline buffered, lignin-free papers and board.

**Always favor preventive measures.**

- Store books in a climate-controlled environment: 60-72°F and 30-50% relative humidity, with little fluctuations, and away from direct exposure to light.

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- Avoid storing books along exterior walls, in attics, or basements, where environmental conditions tend to be more severe and fluctuate often.
- Storing books in boxes and enclosures can minimize environmental fluctuations and exposure to light and pollutants.

**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.
- Cameras, including cellphone cameras, can be used to digitize books supported open at 120°. Soft weights can be used to hold books open to the correct page.

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 Conservation (AIC) – [www.culturalheritage.org](http://www.culturalheritage.org)
- National Archives, Preservation – [www.archives.gov/preservation](http://www.archives.gov/preservation)
- Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) – [www.nedcc.org](http://www.nedcc.org)
- Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) – [www.ccaha.org](http://www.ccaha.org)
- Southeast Regional Conservation Association (SERCA) – [www.sercaconservation.org](http://www.sercaconservation.org)

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