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.
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.
- Photocopikers 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 120º. 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)