



Preservation and Conservation (PAC) Programme Frequently Asked Questions

Choosing appropriate storage material

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Q: Why should I use proper storage materials?

A: Storage methods have a direct effect on the life span of material and the accessibility of information. Poor-quality storage enclosures can accelerate the deterioration of the material they are intended to protect.

Q: Are any commercial products okay to use?

A: Storage materials for general library collections should be lignin-free, sulphur-free, alkaline buffered, and have a high cellulosic content. Enclosures for photographic media are described below. Archival-quality enclosures include boxes, envelopes, and folders. These items are available commercially in a range of shapes and sizes.

Q: What kind of storage are suitable for books?

A: Rare and valuable books can be housed custom-made boxes such as a drop-back or clam shell box. They have the advantage of being able to provide all round support and are more robust than other types of enclosures.

Phase-boxes and corrugated board boxes are cheaper alternatives, They can provide adequate protection, and are much quicker and simpler to construct.

Book-shoes are appropriate for books that require structural support while being displayed on shelves. Many libraries avoid slipcases because they often abrade the surface of the binding and damage the text-block when the book is slid in and out.

Commercially made, archival-quality boxes and four-flap folders come in a wide range of sizes and can be purchased in small and large quantities.

Q: How can I store my photograph collection?

A: Photograph storage materials should meet the specifications provided by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). ISO Standard 18902:2013 and ISO 18916:2007 provide specifications on enclosure formats, papers, plastics, adhesives, and printing inks, and require that storage materials pass the Photographic Activity Test (PAT).

Once photographs have been properly housed in folders, sleeves, or envelopes, they may be stored upright or flat in drop-front boxes of archival quality.

Individual housings can reduce handling in many cases. For example, clear plastic 'L' sleeves (two sheets of polyester placed on top of one another and joined along two adjacent edges), with a piece of board behind the print for added support, have the advantage of allowing researchers to view the image without handling it, thus reducing the possibility of scratching or abrasion

Q: How can I preserve my scrapbooks?

A: Scrapbooks that are of special historic value in their original form should be individually boxed. Unbound ephemera can individually enclose to protect items and is stored in a way that will support them structurally. Be cautious grouping and sorting ephemera by size and type. Storing similar items together is often a good preservation strategy but may disrupt the arrangement and original order of a collection. Be sure to consult with the appropriate curators and subject experts.

Q: Can I use zip-lock bag to store small books?

A: If you can maintain proper environmental levels in your storage, you can use it temporarily. An improper environment can cause moisture to become trapped inside enclosures.

Polyethylene, polypropylene, or polyester (polyethylene terephthalate or PET) plastic zip bags without any additional slip or coating agents are considered stable. Avoid polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and other unknown plastics.

Q: How can I store large maps?

A: Large materials are best stored flat in plan chests or map cases. They can be placed individually in folders cut to fit the size of the drawer. If several items are placed in one folder, interleaving with acid-free tissue paper is desirable.

If they are not brittle or fragile, large maps can be rolled when flat storage is not possible. A tube several inches longer than the item being rolled and at least four inches in diameter (larger diameters are preferable) should be used. If the tube is not made of low-lignin, non-acidic materials, it should be wrapped in neutral or buffered paper or polyester film.

Q: What should I use to store documents?

A: Documents should be stored in archival quality file folders. Ideally, no more than ten to fifteen sheets should be placed in each folder. Folders should be placed in document-storage boxes. Documents and manuscripts can be unfolded for storage if it does not cause damage such as splitting, breaking, and tearing.

Q: Where can I get proper storage materials?

A: There are a wide variety of commercially available enclosures for library materials.

See Conservation Topics : Commercial Services and Suppliers etc. in Conservation on Line
(<http://cool.conservation-us.org/bytopic/suppliers/>)

Reference

Edward P. Adcock, eds. 'IFLA Principle of Library for the Care and Handling of Library Materials'.
International Preservation Issue Number One. Paris: IFLA PAC, Washington DR: CLIR, 1998

Useful resources

"Museum collection storage 2012" in Museum Handbook at NPS(National Park Service)

(<https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/handbook.html>)

"Conservation guide" at State Library Victoria

(slv.vic.gov.au/conservation-guides)

"Storage and Handling" in Preservation Leaflets at North East Document Conservation Center

(<https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/overview>)

Collections Care: Library of Congress

<https://www.loc.gov/preservation/care/>