



# Guidelines for the Careful Handling of Documents

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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 materials with clean hands.**

- Avoid touching materials with dirty, oily, or greasy hands.
- Washing hands frequently when handling records will prevent oils and dust from transferring to the materials.

## **Keep your work space clear.**

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

## **Keep a safe distance (three inches) between the edges of a document and the edge of your work surface.**

- Ensure that the document is entirely supported.
- Be careful to avoid placing elbows on a document or allow an item to hang over the edge of the work surface.

## **Always place items on a solid surface that completely supports them.**

- Avoid handling documents unsupported or in mid air.
- Transport documents in a folder or on a rigid piece of card stock.

## **Use pencils for inventories and for labeling folders.**

- Inks from pens or markers may permanently mar an item.
- Inks will run and bleed if exposed to water.

## **Gently lift items from folders or boxes.**

- Removing items roughly from their folders, boxes, or other original housing can cause tearing or other damage.

## **Carefully unfold items if paper is flexible.**

- Open documents on a tabletop and gently smooth creases flat with clean fingertips.
- Do not fold an item back on itself or attempt to unfold a document that is inflexible or brittle.



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**Replace damaged storage boxes or other containers that do not provide adequate support for records.**

- Folders should fully enclose the entire document.
- Folders should be sized to match the interior dimensions of the box.
- Overstuffing folders or boxes can cause damage to brittle and fragile items.
- Do not attempt to roll or fold records that have previously not been stored in that manner; separate oversized items.

**Replace damaging fasteners with metal (preferably stainless steel) paper clips using alkaline strips of paper as a barrier between the clip and the document.**

- Fasteners that come in direct contact with fragile documents can cause damage.
- Avoid plastic clips, they cause cockling and tearing.

**Dust off records with a soft white brush, if necessary.**

- Avoid wiping documents using cloths or other materials that may be abrasive to the document's surface.

**Separate items in fragile condition. Place these items in their own polyester I-sleeves sealed on 2 adjacent sides or alkaline folders.**

- Do not use any pressure sensitive (Scotch ® -like) tapes or other materials which contain damaging adhesives (such as Post-it ® type notes).
- Do not have documents of permanent value laminated. The plastics accelerate deterioration, and the process is not reversible.

**Always consider the consequences of remedial action.**

- Attempting repairs without sufficient training may result in permanent damage or accelerate deterioration.

**Always favor preventive measures.**

- Store documents in a climate controlled environment (e.g. 60-72°F, 40-55% R.H), away from prolonged exposure to light, and in non-damaging enclosures.
- Display copies instead of originals.

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

**Resources and Referrals**

- Georgia Archives, Preservation Services, 678-364-3761; <http://www.georgiaarchives.org>
- 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>