

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE FOR ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES

Most of the damage to book and document collections is the result of bad handling and storage. This damage usually occurs gradually, over time: by the time the damage is visible, it is usually irreversible.

It is therefore important to promote a culture of best practice in libraries and archives. This approach will increase the longevity of each document and reduce costs associated with conservation. This will also enable continuous access to collections, as it is everyone's duty to ensure their preservation for future generations.

Some general principles

- All users are responsible for taking care of the collections.
- Information and instructions should be made available on how to handle collections.
- Reading areas should be duly equipped and prepared for the use of materials (for example, large and clean tables).
- Before handling books and documents, hands should be washed/disinfected, whether to remove grease and dirt or creams and lotions. Gloves are not necessary if the users' hands have been properly cleaned.
- Works with superficial dirt, dust or fungi (mould) should not be used in reading or consultation rooms.
- Damaged or delicate materials can be protected by being physically or digitally copied.
- Food and drinks should not be allowed in reading and consultation rooms.
- Neither pens nor pencils can be used to make annotations on original documents. Similarly, post-its or any kind of adhesive markers may not be used on these documents.
- Do not use clips and do not fold the corners of a page to mark it (dog-earring).
- Every time a book or document is collected after consultation, the people in charge of the collection should inspect it before storage in order to remove any markers, post-its or other elements placed there by the readers. This simple action will prevent damage that could be later caused by these objects, which is largely irreversible (for example, marks and deformities caused by clips and other items).
- While everyone (archivists, librarians and others) can take care of book and document collections in a way that contributes to extending their life,

when damaged objects require interventive conservation, an expert should be brought in to conserve and repair the material. These treatments should not be carried out by non-specialised technicians, because of the risk of further damage to the objects in question. A common example is the application of tape and glue on documents and books when they have tears: this action is more damaging than beneficial.

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