



Care, Handling, and Storage of Books

PRESERVATION

Proper Care and Handling of Books

Taking care when handling any collection item, especially functional items like books with flexing parts, is one of the more effective, cost-efficient, and easily achieved preservation measures.

Take proper care when handling books by:

- Having clean hands and a clean area to use the book
- Keeping food and drink away
- Removing the book from the shelf by gripping on both sides of the spine at the middle of the book (push in the neighboring book on both sides to get a good grip), instead of tugging at the top of the spine
- Not forcing a book to lie open to 180 degrees; instead, prop up the covers of an opened book to decrease the opening angle
- Not using paper clips, "dog ear" folding, or acidic inserts to bookmark pages
- Not using rubber bands, self-adhesive tape, any kind of "leather dressing," and/or glue on books

Proper Storage of Books

Good storage significantly prolongs the life and usability of books and includes:

- A cool (room temperature or below), relatively dry (about 35% relative humidity), clean, and stable environment (avoid attics, basements, and other locations with high risk of leaks and environmental extremes)
- Minimal exposure to all kinds of light; no exposure to direct or intense light
- Distance from radiators and vents
- Regular dusting and housekeeping
- Shelving books of similar size together, so that the face of the covers are maximally supported by the neighbors on each side
- Keeping upright shelved books straight and not leaning (storing books lying flat is also good)

Dealing with Condition Problems

Beyond the measures outlined above, there are two main options for books with condition problems:

1. Protect the book further with a box or other enclosure*
2. Conservation treatment by a book conservator

*The [Northeast Document Conservation Center](#) has put together very useful technical leaflets on storage enclosures for books and papers as well as a list for *Conservation/Preservation Supplies and Equipment — Archival Supplies*.

The national professional association for conservators, the [American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works \(AIC\)](#), maintains an online directory for finding a conservator by specialty and geographic location and provides information on how to choose a conservator. In addition, AIC also offers guidelines for the care of collections beyond library materials.

Selected Bibliography

The preservation guidelines described here have been used by the Library of Congress in the care of its collections and are considered suitable by the Library as described; however, the Library will not be responsible for damage to your collection should damage result from the use of these procedures.