

HOW TO: 2 Preservation and storage of Records - General

Careful handling is the essential basic strategy for the long-term preservation of paper files:

- Ensure your hands are scrupulously clean and free from food, grease and hand creams.
- Take care when using pens near archival records, because they can leave indelible marks on pages.
- Turn pages carefully, with two hands if necessary, to avoid tearing pages off the file pin.
- Do not use a wet finger to turn pages.
- If you need to bookmark a page in a file use a piece of clean white paper – avoid using 'post-it' notes and remove the 'bookmark' when finished.
- Do not use adhesive tape to repair tears. It will discolour, damage the paper and eventually fall off.
- Polyester, polyethylene or polypropylene plastic sleeves are very useful for placing torn or detached folios back on files and isolating photographs and other materials from adjoining file pages.
- File pins and other metal pins will eventually rust. Use stainless steel pins and clips or plastic clips to fasten files. Placing a piece of archival quality paper between the clip and the document will prevent damage to the paper.

If documents are protruding from files then the papers should be carefully re-aligned. Before placing files in protective packaging it is important to ensure that they are free of dust and unaffected by mould, insects, or active deterioration. Affected items should be isolated and advice on how to deal with them sought through Queensland State Archives Preservation unit or State Library of Queensland.

- Every item, or group of items, should have a file cover or protective material enclosing it.
- Cotton tape can be used to bundle loose papers.
- Do not fold items to fit them into the file cover. Provide a covering that suits the size of the item and place it in a suitably sized box.
- All packaging materials should be made of archival materials. You can slow the deterioration of acidic paper by storing it in alkaline packaging.

The way in which files and general papers are arranged in boxes is very important:

- Files should be stored on their spine with the file pin at the bottom of the box.

- Where a file only consists of individual documents or items and they can be stored flat on the bottom of a box – take care not to stack too many items on top of one another or retrieval may be difficult and damage items at the bottom.
- Thin items stored on their edge must be supported to avoid the paper curling and sagging.
- Cards are usually stored upright in lidded boxes. They should be packed densely – but with enough space to allow a search for individual items. Use cotton tape rather than rubber bands to hold cards together.
- Make sure the box is the correct size for the records to allow for easy retrieval and reduce the likelihood of handling damage.
- It is preferable not to stack boxes. However, if necessary they should be stacked in a staggered formation not more than four high, with the boxes at the bottom filled to avoid collapse.

Storage shelves and cupboards should be designed and set out to minimize damage to any stored items:

- Shelves should be powder-coated metal or wood with an inert coating to prevent the release of harmful organic vapours.
- The lowest shelves should be 15cm off the floor in case of minor flooding.
- Paper records should not be stored on the top of shelving units. Files may be too close to ceiling lights and exposed to dust and in the event of fire, water damage from fire sprinklers.
- Aisles between shelving should allow easy access to, and transport of records.
- Suitably sized tables should be located near storage cabinets, so that staff can safely check the contents and retrieve items from boxes and drawers.

Storage drawers should be clearly labelled with their contents so that items may be retrieved with a minimum of handling.

To prevent damage to the items, ensure that the drawers:

- operate smoothly when opened and closed
- have stops to prevent them being pulled completely out when they are opened
- have a lip at the front to prevent items from falling onto the floor and one at the back to prevent them from falling behind the drawers
- are never overfilled.

Paper documents should be stored in the same environment recommended for paper records and artworks.

Pests such as insects and rodents can be attracted to record storage areas in search of food and shelter. They may take to eating paper-based material such as files.

To reduce the possibility of pest damage:

- Keep the area clean – dust can be a breeding ground for insects and mould.
- Do not eat or drink in storage areas, as food scraps attract pests.

Check storage areas regularly for insect or rodent outbreaks. Baiting or fumigation may be necessary if there is an infestation. See also HOW TO 4: Integrated Pest Management.

Files are usually identified by writing on the file cover. Documents may be folioed in pencil, placed in a labelled box. Clear labelling, will reduce the amount of handling an item receives.

Copying

- Before copying an archival record, it should be disassembled and all metal clips, staples and pins carefully removed. The file should be reassembled in the same order afterwards.
- Documents that are slightly creased and/or folded may be smoothed out by carefully pulling the wrinkles flat – severely creased, folded or torn items should be treated by a conservator before copying.
- Digital scanning should be used where high image quality and multiple digital or hard copies are required.

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