

About Handling Objects



Handling an object is serious business, whether it be a fragile ceramic, a large picture frame, or an old marriage certificate. Each object must be considered unique and irreplaceable.

Do not handle an object unless it is necessary and permission has been given by the owner or responsible staff member. Never eat, smoke, or drink in the vicinity of an object. Serious consequences can be avoided with careful thought and preparation before, during, and after handling an object.

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Before Handling

To protect the object from scratching, marking, or bumping, remove dangling necklaces, sharp rings, protruding belt buckles, pens and pencils from shirt pockets, and tuck neckties into shirts.

Before moving an object, look at it carefully, find its weaknesses, and handle it accordingly. To the extent possible, remove covers and loose parts prior to moving. Secure any other loose parts, such as drawers or cabinet

doors of furniture pieces, and broken components.

When handling objects, choose your gloves carefully. For most objects, clean latex or nitrile gloves work best. In some cases, paper and textile objects may be handled with freshly washed and dried hands. Clean cotton gloves may be used for handling if necessary, although they could catch or snag on rough or fragile objects. If



they must be used, be sure to change them frequently to minimize soil transfer from one object to another. Gloves should not be worn when handling heavy or slippery objects. When handling ethnographic objects or natural history specimens, disposable latex or nitrile gloves should be worn in case they are contaminated with pesticides such as arsenic, DDT, mercuric chloride, or lead. Cotton gloves do not provide adequate protection against these pesticides.

Assure the safety of objects by carefully and thoughtfully packing and/or padding them for transport. Never discard packing materials without searching them for loose or associated materials (flakes, lids, labels, etc.) When using a ladder, always work with a partner. Hand the object down to your partner before descending; do not climb down with the item in your hand.

Plan the movement of objects. Prior to moving an object, prepare a clean, clear space to receive the object that is covered with clean padding as needed. If possible, always work with a partner. While this is obvious for large objects, it is also beneficial when handling small objects. When planning your route, consider drafts, doors, people, uneven floors, etc. Once you decide on your route, inform others of your plans. Planning and communication are essential to minimize the possibility of unnecessary damage.



During Handling

Always use a cart, container, or support board to move objects more than a few steps, especially when going up or down stairs. Move objects onto the cart or container one at a time.

When moving objects, support their weight by placing your hands under them or on the strongest parts of the main body of the object. Use both hands to move objects. Do not lift ob-

jects by parts such as handles, straps, or lids. Do not lift furniture by arms or backs, paintings by top frame rails or hanging hardware, or ceramics by handles. Carry textiles fully supported on both arms, on a rigid support, or rolled on a tube. Do not lift them by the edges.

To lift or move paper documents use both hands. Hold diagonal corners of



If you must transfer an object to another person, place it on a table or cart and allow the other person to lift it from there. Do not transfer the object directly to the other person.

When handling and examining an object, hold it over a table or other surface so that if the object is dropped it will fall a shorter distance. It is often necessary to carry out examinations on padded surfaces to prevent abrasion and provide better support. A padded work surface can be created simply by placing a clean towel on a table and covering it with a clean, white sheet.



the sheet, if stable, or use an acid-free folder or blotter to support the piece during movement. With paper objects, special care must be taken while moving to ensure that loose parts do not blow away. Handle paper objects mounted in mats or other devices by their mounts.

Never touch the surface of an object that is flaking, cracked, or appears damaged in any way. Avoid touching the surface of pastels and crayon enlargements, because the media used is often unfixated and can transfer from the paper to your fingers.



After Handling

If it is necessary to leave an object unattended in a secure area, place a protective cover over it and clearly indicate its presence with a hand-written or printed "OBJECT BELOW" card placed on top of the protective cover. Make sure there is plenty of space left around your object so that its presence is not overlooked.



Consulting a Conservator

If an object is damaged during handling, do not panic. Prior to moving the object or retrieving the associated pieces, take a photograph to document the accident. Retain all pieces, however small, and clearly associate them with the object, placing them in labeled zip top bags or acid-free boxes. Do not attempt to put the pieces back together. This is a job for a conservator. Prepare a written document outlining the accident and place it with the photographs in the object's permanent record file.

If you have any questions about how to best handle your object, please consult a conservator. A conservator will be able to assess issues relating to its care and long-term preservation.



Additional Resources

National Park Service. "Handling, Packing, Shipping." *Museum Handbook*. 2010. <https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/MHI/CHAP6.pdf>

Connecting to Collections. "Object Handling Basics." February, 2013. <http://www.connectingtocollections.org/objecthandlingrecording/>

Conservation Suppliers

Conservation Resources International

5532 Port Royal Road
Springfield, VA 22151
Toll free: (800) 634-6932
www.conservationresources.com
Archival housing/storage supplies, photographic supplies, general

Gaylord Archival

P. O. Box 4901
Syracuse, NY 13221-4901
Toll Free: (800) 448-6160
www.gaylord.com
General conservation supplies, housing supplies

Hollinger Metal Edge, Inc.

6340 Bandini Blvd
Commerce, CA 90040
Toll Free: (800)-862-2228
www.hollingermetaledge.com
Archival housing/storage supplies

Light Impressions

100 Carlson Road
Rochester, NY 14610
Toll Free: (800) 975-6429
www.lightimpressionsdirect.com
Photographic supplies, housing, matting and framing supplies

University Products

517 Main Street
P. O. Box 101
Holyoke, MA 01041
Toll Free: (800) 628-1912
www.universityproducts.com
General conservation supplies, housing and matting supplies

Talas

330 Morgan Ave
Brooklyn, NY 11211
Telephone: (212) 219-0770
www.talasonline.com
Conservation supplies, photographic supplies, general

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