Caring for Archives: Fundamentals for Everyone

Fletcher Durant
University of Florida
Smathers Libraries
Let’s Talk About Paper Clips and Staples

Source: Paper Clips Throughout History, pietistschoolman.com
Mantras for Preservation

Preservation is for access
Collection Care is a process, not an action
Good intentions need good practices
Every institution can improve
There is no one right way
Risk Management

Source: “Balancing Act”, Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History
Ten agents of Deterioration

Physical Forces
Water
Fire
Criminals and Vandals
Contaminants

Pests
Light
Incorrect Temperature
Incorrect Humidity
Dissociation
Know your threats

Earthquake zones
Tornado alley
Flood zones
Hurricanes
Motion picture films
Oral histories
Photo morgues

Source: NASA
Disaster Plans

dPlan: http://www.dplan.org/


C2C Webinars: http://www.connectingtocollections.org/archiveresponseplan/


Mess Kits: http://www.smith.edu/libraries/info/preservation/messkits

Collections Environment

The Ideal:

68 F (50F if high density storage)

35-55% RH

The Sustainable Environment

Avoid large daily swings, accept seasonal shifts (72F in summer, 66 in winter)

Keep RH below 65% to inhibit mold growth and pests and above 30% RH for vulnerable media
Environmental Monitoring

Understand collection risks
Plan for better storage arrangements
Avoid mold growth
Know when something breaks or changes.
Data Loggers

https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/conserveogram/03-03.pdf
Integrated Pest Management

• Preventative long-term, low-toxicity pest control
• Focus on monitoring and proactively making spaces inhospitable
  • Reduce routes of entry
  • Control environment
  • Eliminate water sources
  • Reduce food sources
    • House plants, food waste, etc.
• Routine housekeeping
• Check **ALL** incoming collections
Light is your enemy.
But light is usually not that big a deal in archives.

Light = Energy and energy can damage paper

- Blueprints
- Color photographs
- Plastics
- Colored paper
- Some inks
But light is usually not that big a deal in archives

In archives, light is primarily a threat to exhibits

- Avoid direct exposure of daylight to exhibit cases
- Rotate exhibits regularly
- Use replicas or surrogates where possible

Use curtains on windows
Storage Furniture

Never store collections on the floor.

Powder-coated steel shelves. Avoid wood/fiberboard.

Shelves that fit your repository’s standard box sizes.

Don’t buy library shelving for archival boxes.

Shelves that maximize the useable square footage for storage.

Compact shelving is great.

Floor loads: 150 pounds per sq. ft

300 psf for compact shelving.

Source: Archives of American Art
Housings

Record storage boxes? Manuscript boxes? Letter size or legal size? Paige or Hollinger boxes?

Acid free folders. Acid free boxes.

Every item in a folder. Every folder in a box or drawer.

Items fit the folders. Folders fit the box/drawer.
Sample Selection of Standard Housings

- Record Storage Box
- Document Box
- 16x20x3” flat box
- 20x24x3” flat box
- 32x42x3” flat file cabinet
- 40x60x3” flat file cabinet
Policies

Policies should be put into place to guide and protect staff, collections, patrons, and the institution. They should be written down and available to all staff members. Policies can be bent or broken, but can also serve as justification in difficult decisions.

Security
Loans and Exhibitions
Handling
Event Planning and Space Rentals
Collection Development
Security

Where are collections stored?
Who has access to Collection Storage areas?
When do they have access?
How are collections physically secured?
Is the reading room staffed?
Are researchers allowed to bring bags and coats to their workspaces?
Is there a secure area for researchers to leave their bags and coats?
Is there an internal list of high value items?
   Is it checked regularly against actual holdings?
Loans and Exhibits

Long-term or permanent exhibitions can severely damage collections.

Rotate exhibits or use facsimiles

Suggested exhibition lighting levels are 100 lux or lower. Light sensitive materials (blueprints, color photographs, colored papers, etc.) should be displayed at 50 lux or lower.
Loans and Exhibits

For outgoing loans

- Signed loan agreement with responsible party
- Proof of wall to wall insurance
- AAM Facilities Report
- Photographs of before and after condition
Handling

Wash hands before handling materials

One folder out at a time

No pens in collection areas

Oversize items should never be moved without assistance.

Do not write, lean, or place any object on the surface of any collection materials

No eating, drinking, or smoking near collections

Use gloves only to handle sensitive formats like photographs, films, and negatives
Moving Collections

Always

Be

Carting
Events and Space Rentals

Will collections be out and/or storage areas secure?

How to keep food out of collection areas?

Planning for garbage removal and clean-up immediately following event.

Source: Seattle Municipal Archives
Collection Development Policy

Serves as a guide to preservation priorities.

Don’t spend time/money/effort on materials that are not accessioned
Collection Storage Is Not for Clutter

Collection storage areas are for collections

- Remove clutter and debris
- Discard outdated supplies and materials
- Return or dispose of deaccessioned/never accessioned items
- Move office supplies to other areas

Source: Wikimedia Commons
The Big NO’S

NO Food
NO Hanging Folders
NO Tape
NO Post-It Notes on Items
NO Staples or Paper-Clips (But you don’t have to remove them either)
NO Stacking Boxes More Than 4 High
NO Thinking that the Problem Will Solve Itself
Every item a folder

- Acid-free folder stock
- Letter- or Legal-size to fit box (and to fit items)
- Don’t over fill folders
  - 25-50 leaves per folder
- Keep contents neat to avoid dog-ears and tears
  - Unfold and unroll documents when possible

Source: Archivistaapprenticeship.wordpress.com
Every Folder a Box

- Acid-free box
- Sized to fit folders/items
- Don’t over-fill boxes
- Use “spacers” to prevent slumping

Source: Library of Congress
Every Box on a Shelf

Boxes should have permanent, labeled locations

Do not store on floors

Boxes should fit completely and securely on shelves. No overhang.

Do not stack more than 4 high

Do not stack different sized boxes

Source: Library of Congress
Oversize Flat Items

Map cases with 2” or 3” drawers
Every item/collection in labeled folders
Folders should be either full-drawer or half-drawer size
  Avoid other sizes to prevent lumps and bumps
Leave ½-inch free at top of each drawer
Requires 2+ staff to retrieve items

Source: McMurray Stern
Oversize Rolled Items

- Roll around acid-free core/tube
- Wrap outside of item with paper or polyester
- Tie with cotton tape/ribbon
- Be sure to label it!
- Rolled tubes can be stored upright or flat

Source: STASHC/NYU Libraries
Photographs and Sheet Film

Store paper sleeves or polyester sleeves

Keep cool and dry

Use gloves when handling media

Source: Vancouver Archives
Photographs and Sheet Film

Nitrate sheet film, 1910-1950
https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/MHI/AppendM.pdf

Acetate sheet film, 1925-1970s or 80s
Vinegar Syndrome

Glass plate negatives, 1850-1920s
Fragile, individual four-flap paper wrappers
Store on edge with lots of padding
Slides in polyester sleeve pages or boxes

Source: Vancouver Archives
Film Reels

House in archival plastic cans and on plastic cores.
  Include leader if possible
  Label can and leader

Store flat
Keep cool and dry

Nitrate film reels, 1895-1950
  More than 25lbs is Federally regulated

Acetate film reels, 1922-?
  Microfilm may be acetate until ca. 1990

Source: Wikimedia Commons
A/V Tapes and Magnetic Media

Store fully rewound

Store standing on edge

Source: Wikimedia Commons
Books, Scrapbooks, and Bound Materials

Store books in archival collections spine down

In a folder

Store scrapbooks flat in a box

Source: Nate Stelner, Flickr
Framed Art and Photographs

If possible, hang on wall or remove frame and glazing
If frame has value, store framed item separately
DO NOT STORE GLASS WITH OTHER COLLECTION ITEMS

Source: Wikimedia Commons
Textiles

Store flat in acid-free box

Support and wrap in acid-free tissue

Source: National Postal Museum
Realia, Objects, and 3-D Artifacts

Problematic, individualized solutions

Store separately from paper-based collections

http://stashc.com/

http://www.re-org.info/

Source: STASHC/Bishop Museum
Digital Preservation

“3-2-1 Rule”

- Make 3 copies
- Store on 2 different media types
- Put 1 in a different location

Be consistent and descriptive in naming files and folders

- If associated with archival collection be sure to include accession number

The cloud can be a piece of your preservation plan

- But be aware and wary of its limits
Questions?

Fletcher Durant
Preservation Librarian
University of Florida Smathers Libraries
fdurant@ufl.edu