

# Safe Handling Tips for Pictorial Collections

1998; last rev. July 2004

---

Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540-4730

For additional advice, consult *Care Handling, and Storage of Photographs*, prepared by the Library of Congress Preservation Directorate in 2002. This information leaflet is available online at <http://www.loc.gov/preserv/care/photolea.html>.

## 1. KEEP FOOD & DRINK AWAY FROM COLLECTIONS

- Do not eat or drink while handling original items. Prevent spills and avoid attracting insects.

## 2. USE GLOVES & CLEAN HANDS

- Wear gloves on both hands when directly handling original items, especially photographs. Exceptions include sleeved, mounted, and matted items and some works on paper.
- Wash your hands before working with collections and during long periods of exposure to original items. Avoid transferring dirt and dust from one collection to another.

## 3. PLAN AHEAD

- Prepare enough workspace to accommodate the items you intend to work with.
- Make sure you have the tools you need for the job, e.g., carts, gloves, pencils, etc.
- Before moving any items, check their condition. If you see visible signs of damage, seek advice before proceeding.

## 4. HANDLE OBJECTS WITH CARE

- Do not lean on or set heavy objects on top of original items, even if they are covered.
- Take care not to touch the surfaces of images or drag anything (e.g., jewelry or id badges) across them.
- Keep original items on a flat, well-supported surface. Do not place items on your lap or let them hang off the side of a table.
- Support items carefully when moving them. Consider lifting items with two hands to prevent creasing, bending, tearing, or breaking. Use rigid archival boards to move large items. For large or heavy objects, ask colleagues for help. Also offer help to colleagues.
- Do not stack objects of widely varying sizes or weights. Do not make stacks too high.
- Use pencils when working with or near collections, not pens. Exceptions include pens for marking collection housings
- Never write on a sheet of paper that has collection materials directly below it.
- Cover items not in active use with appropriate paper or plastic sheets to avoid exposure to light, dust, and water. A “CAUTION! Fragile Below” tent-sign helps remind people to be careful.
- Treat the collection housings with care to avoid scratched plastic and misshapen paper.

## 5. OTHER TIPS

- Do not use office supplies on original items. No household tapes, staples, paper clips, rubber bands, Post-its®, regular erasers, etc.
- Consult surrogate images (when available), rather than original items.
- Avoid removing items from their housings unless absolutely necessary.

- Take your time!