



CCAHA specializes in the treatment of art and historic artifacts on paper and provides preservation education, training, and consultation. Established in 1977, CCAHA is the largest nonprofit conservation lab in the country.

Paper Conservation Terminology

Structure and Condition Terms

Parchment: The terms parchment and vellum are often used interchangeably. There are many variations of parchment paper made to imitate parchment, but true parchment is made from animal skin which has been chemically treated to remove the hair, then scraped and dried under tension. Unlike leather, parchment is not tanned. Sheep, calf/cow, and goat skin are typically used.

Vellum: Traditionally, this term referred to parchment made specifically from calfskin. Currently, this term is used in an ambiguous manner, and may even refer to a type of paper. For this reason, we always use the term parchment.

Primary support: The material (paper, paperboard, parchment, etc.) to which design media is directly applied.

Secondary support: The material directly beneath the primary support, such as a mount or backing board.

Media: The material applied on the primary support, such as ink, charcoal, watercolors, graphite, etc.

Friable: Describes media that is powdery or loosely adhered to the support and is easily disturbed.

Foxing: Pale, brown, diffuse spots that appear on paper or other surfaces, either from mold growth or metallic impurities in the paper or a combination of the two.

Tideline: The dark line created by a liquid as it dries, often at the perimeter of a stain. The line itself is discoloration or dirt transported by the liquid that embeds itself deeply in the paper fibers and becomes difficult to remove.

Adhesive: Commonly referred to as glue, this is a general term for any substances capable of bonding materials to each other by chemical or mechanical action.

Pressure sensitive tape: Tape which is sticky at room temperature and may be attached to a surface using slight application of pressure. Examples include scotch tape, masking tape, and duct tape. Always undesirable to attach to a work of art on paper.

Iron gall ink: This was the ink of choice from the middle ages to the twentieth century. Originally dark blue-black in color, it turns to a dark black or brown as it ages. While the ingredients used may vary widely, at the least it must include tannic acid (oak galls or other vegetable matter), iron sulphate, water, and gum. Due to inherent vice it causes physical degradation of the primary support over time.

Treatment Terms

Surface cleaning: To employ various non-aqueous cleaning methods such as the removal of surface dirt by brushing or using appropriate erasers.

Deionized water: Water that has been highly purified, including the removal of harmful metal impurities such as iron.

Calcium-enriched deionized water: Deionized water with calcium carbonate added to benefit paper objects.

Humidification: Controlled introduction of moisture, either directly or indirectly, used to relax a paper object.

Washing: To use water, occasionally in combination with other solvents, enzymes, surfactants, etc., to treat a paper artifact. The purpose of washing is to remove or reduce soluble deterioration products such as acidity or discoloration.

Deacidification: While this term may be common outside of conservation, we do not use this term, because it is imprecise and suggests a type of treatment which we do not conduct or condone. Instead, we will refer to washing and alkalization, or imparting an alkaline reserve.

Stain reduction: Diminishing discoloration in the paper support.

Mending: To locally join splits or tears or otherwise reinforce cracks in a paper support using an adhesive.

Lining: To provide an overall secondary support to a paper object, often mulberry paper with wheat starch paste.

Inpainting: To add media to fills, repairs, and areas of loss in a work of art or artifact. The intent is to suggest the continuity of the image, to create the illusion of wholeness, and/or to minimize the distraction of losses.