

HANDLING ESSENTIALS FOR PAPER-BASED COLLECTIONS

A checklist for preparing to handle paper objects and material.



Handling essentials include the following:

- Handle collections as little as possible.
- Recognize the importance of consultation before handling sacred or culturally significant collection items in order to determine appropriate protocol.
- Prepare yourself by securing or removing jewelry, lanyards, protruding buckles or buttons, and any other potentially sharp or loose adornment on clothing. Consider wearing an apron or lab coat. Remove ear buds.
- Wash hands thoroughly with mild soap and water. Dry hands on a lint-free cloth. Do not use hand sanitizer prior to handling paper.
- Check that work areas and surfaces are clean, clutter-free, and clear of food, drink, and any live plants.
- Always know in advance of transporting paper material where the landing area will be. Plan accordingly to avoid closed doors, narrow hallways, or pathways with potential impediments.
- Handle only one collection item at a time. Use a firm-yet even-grip and beware of pressure from fingertips that can cause indentation
- Never grasp paper at edges, seams or bindings that are fragile, torn, or otherwise vulnerable. Inspect material for any loose or friable media and proceed with caution.
- When in doubt, consult a conservator if you suspect a collection item may have internal or external weaknesses that may not withstand handling.
- Transport each collection item with a stable foundation beneath it, to prevent bending or creasing. A table-cart, piece of mat board larger than the collection item, box or acid-free, rigid board folio are good vehicles to support paper in transport.
- Additional staff may be required to handle oversized or heavy items. Communicate the plan and coordinate movements.
- A book should be grasped by the boards (the shoulders)—never at the end cap—when handled or retrieved from a shelf. A bulky book or fragile bound material may require a book cradle for safety and support during handling,
- When handling photographic materials or paper with powdery or dirty surfaces, wear nitrile gloves.