

Northern Territory Archives Service

Caring for your own archives

Most of us have papers, photographs and keepsakes that document some part of our lives. Caring for these valuable and often irreplaceable records and items is important and there are a few easy and inexpensive actions that you can take.

Papers

Sorting and protecting your records will enable you to find the item you want more quickly and easily, keeping handling of the records to a minimum. Keep your papers as flat as possible and remove metallic fasteners and rubber bands. Do not use sticky tape or post-it notes. In the heat and humidity of the tropics, metal rusts, rubber and sticky tape deteriorates, and these can damage your records. Use pencil to identify your records rather than pen. Any efforts you make to care for your records should be reversible.

Do not laminate originals. Laminating is a permanent action which cannot be reversed. Over time laminate will 'yellow' or 'cloud' and the page within the laminated pocket cannot be rescued. If you have records that you wish to keep for a long time, and you want to protect them when they are handled, make a copy and laminate the copy. Place the original into an acid free folder or sleeve, and store it away safely. Look for pockets and sleeves that are polyester based rather than PVC to hold your original records. Look for the products which are Mylar, polypropylene and polyethylene. Oven bags suit the purpose well!

Photographs

The principles for looking after your photographs are similar to those used for looking after your papers. Ensure that your photographs are stored safely in acid free packaging. Avoid the use of sticky page photo albums or use of any adhesives on your photos. Old fashioned photo corners are a great idea. Remove metal fasteners and sticky attachments from your photos and reduce the handling to a minimum. Avoid touching the surface of your photographs.

Arrange to make duplicate prints of your favourite photographs which can be displayed and handled, and store your originals. If your images are stored digitally – back them up! If they are not already digitised, consider scanning them and keep your back up copy in a separate location to your originals, so that if one is lost the other will be available to replace them.

In a box, in a box

Boxes can provide a good buffer to environmental changes that can affect your records. Placing items in a box, inside a box, can provide good layered protection from light and pests. Choose boxes and packaging that are acid free, where possible. Plastic containers may provide protection against pests but can cause records to sweat in the tropics and may increase the risk of mould developing.

Location, location, location

Consider how your records are stored. A stable storage environment away from changing temperature and humidity is ideal, preferably away from natural light. Store your boxes in a place within your home where they are most secure and away from hazards such as water and chemicals, and free from pests. Keep your boxes off the floor or top of shelving in case of water leaks or flooding. Remember to keep them accessible in case of emergency.

Protect, protect, protect, protect

Do your best when caring for your own archives.

Even if you can't provide the perfect storage environment for your archives, following some basic principles will assist in making sure that your records are available for generations to come:

- Think about the risks inherent in your environment such as the weather and cyclones;
- Think about the risks associated with your building such as leaking pipes and pests;
- Think about the risks associated with your room such as the light, heat and humidity;
- Think about the risks associated with your storage furniture, or lack of; and
- Think about the risks associated with your housing materials such as the type of box you choose.

Further help and advice

Further information can also be located on the NT Archives Service website:

<https://dtsc.nt.gov.au/arts-and-museums/northern-territory-archives-service>

The National Archives of Australia website has format specific preventive conservation advice sheets at <http://www.naa.gov.au/records-management/agency/preserve/physical-preservation/index.aspx>

reCollections: Caring for Collections Across Australia (2005) was written by practicing conservators and is intended to provide a guide for the preventive care of cultural material. Refer to the National Library of Australia's catalogue for details: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/8461695>

Active conservation treatment of cultural material should only be undertaken by a trained conservator.

Contacts

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