

# Preservation Tips from the Texas State Archives

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The preservation of records is serious business for officials, records managers, and others entrusted with conservation. Navigating a wide variety of issues associated with preservation — which are nearly always complicated by the sheer volume of the records — can seem overwhelming. Understanding some basic concepts will make the task easier and help to focus resources.



*Example of properly stored records at the State Library stacks. Photos courtesy of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission*

## **Environment**

Store your paper-based archival materials in a stable, controlled environment between 65 and 72 degrees Fahrenheit and between 45 percent and 55 percent relative humidity. These environmental factors can have an effect on mold growth, insect infestation, warping, paper brittleness, and many

other kinds of physical and chemical decay. Environmental fluctuations can start decay processes that can be difficult to stop, so it is important to regularly monitor your collections to catch problems early. Fluctuations can be caused by seasonal changes, air handling equipment, and building structure.

## Light

Store items away from intense light, such as direct sunlight and harsh fluorescent bulbs. Light exposure causes inks and dyes to fade and paper to become yellow, brittle, and fragile. This type of damage is cumulative and irreversible; no conservation treatment can reverse its effects. To avoid light damage, consider using ultraviolet (UV) filters on existing lighting fixtures. Avoid long-term light exposure and permanent display. A high-quality copy may be a viable display option to help preserve irreplaceable originals. If you have access to monitoring equipment, maintain a light level of five- to seven-foot candles for display, especially for items that are fragile, unique, or may have light-sensitive dyes.

## Storage

Once you have found or created an environmentally controlled space for your materials, you will need to make decisions on the actual storage configurations. The first, and most simple, rule is that materials need to be up and off the floor. Records in contact with the floor, even if temporarily, are susceptible to moisture, flooding, vermin, and contamination. Be sure that the boxes are on pallets at least four inches from the floor surface.

Shelving should be configured to efficiently store the volumes and boxes in your holdings, but also allow for easy access and ventilation. Baked enamel or powder-coated steel shelving is better than wood as steel is more moisture- and fire-resistant, chemically inert, and structurally sturdier.

A wide variety of special archival boxes and folders are commercially available in addition to the standard corrugated record center carton. If using the standard cartons, opt for double-wall construction and acid-free material if possible. Look for products described as "archival" and "acid-free" and verify that these products have a neutral or basic pH specification.

## Security

Basic security procedures will ensure not only that records won't be pilfered, but also that records won't be misfiled, misplaced, altered, or damaged. In addition to maintaining an inventory of all records, any access to the records must be moni-

tored and documented. Only authorized staff members should have access to storage areas and that access may be restricted to duty hours. Maintenance and custodial workers and visitors must always be escorted. A secure research area (separate from storage) should be provided for researchers. A request form that indicates each box or volume delivered to a researcher should be kept as a permanent record. Simple procedures such as having only one box open at a time and only one folder out and open on the research table help ensure accountability and prevent misfiling.



*Harsh lighting can cause paper to become yellow, brittle, and fragile.*

## Keep It Simple

In many cases, major cost outlays are not required to preserve archival materials. Simple, cost-effective measures such as the ones above are extremely effective ways to achieve the most good beneficial storage situation.

## Other Resources

More tips on storage, handling, and disaster recovery are available at <https://www.tsl.state.tx.us/arc/preserve/index.html> and <http://tslacconservation.wordpress.com>.

To pursue more in-depth conservation treatment, the American Institute for Conservation provides a find-a-conservator tool at <http://bit.ly/csPyyF>.

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