



Prioritizing Collections for Housing and Conservation Treatment

Museums, libraries, and historic houses have many collection needs that can be prioritized. This guide outlines two components of collection care, improving storage and conservation treatment, and provides criteria for assigning categories and descriptions. Along with maintaining a stable environment, good quality boxes and enclosures are necessary for preventing preservation problems. By assigning criteria and determining priorities, collections that are at risk of housing-related problems such as poor quality boxes and acidic folders can get the attention they need most urgently. This guide will not only aid in establishing criteria for collections housing and conservation treatment but will also help to keep your list of preservation priorities current.

PRIORITIZING FOR HOUSING

HIGH

The object cannot be accessed in the current housing. The damage and/or loss of information caused by the housing, or lack of housing, will likely get worse without intervention. High priority for housing includes the following:

- Boxes or enclosures that are too small, acidic, and/or not structurally sound
- Sleeves or binders made from PVC (polyvinyl chloride) or another unstable plastics
- Rolled oversized objects that are not rolled around a supportive core
- Books with detached boards, broken spines, and/or loose leaves; books with parchment bindings and/or text blocks that are not in alkaline corrugated storage boxes
- Brittle books
- Materials that should be in cold storage: color photographs/negatives/slides, cellulose nitrate negatives, and cellulose acetate negatives
- Cased photographic objects without cases
- Objects with friable media, such as pastels or charcoal drawings

LOW

The object would benefit from a new housing, but can be accessed by users. This category includes the following:

- Old 'archival' boxes and folders that need to be replaced
- Leather bound books exhibiting red rot
- Books with broken bindings, detached leaves, or missing covers
- Extremely brittle or fragile objects
- Stiff or brittle objects that are badly torn
- Objects with stiff/brittle/acidic backings or secondary supports

NONE

The housing is in good condition, fits well, and is made of appropriate materials.

PRIORITIZING FOR CONSERVATION TREATMENT

URGENT

Immediate intervention is needed to prevent continual damage to the object. The current state of the object may also be a risk to the safety of the users. This includes the following:

- Anything exhibiting active mold growth or a pest infestation
- Materials damaged in a hurricane/fire/flood or other disaster, wet or dry

HIGH

The object cannot be accessed safely without treatment, damage is likely to increase without any intervention. High priority for conservation treatment includes the following:

- Friable and/or flaking media or photographic emulsions
- Books with broken sewing or other loose components
- Iron gall ink with a condition rating of 3 or 4
- Silked and acetate laminated documents
- Objects with unstable adhesives (such as rubber cement) or pressure sensitive tape
- Rolled objects that are stiff, brittle, and/or tightly rolled
- Daguerreotypes with broken or missing cover glasses

The following should be classified as high priority for conservation, but may be classified low priority if housed in a way that can physically support the object:

- Books with broken bindings, detached leaves, or missing covers
- Extremely brittle or fragile objects
- Stiff or brittle objects that are badly torn
- Objects with stiff/brittle/acidic backings or secondary supports
- Objects with broken secondary support
- Objects with structurally compromising losses

LOW

The object would benefit from conservation treatment, but can be safely accessed. The damage will not increase or get worse with time. This includes the following:

- Water soluble adhesive tapes (gummed linen tape) that are not causing discoloration
- Surface dirt
- Minor tears and dog-eared corners
- Books with weak bindings, minor tears, and/or abrasion to the covers
- Moderately acidic, discolored, or stained papers
- Objects with attached mounts, backings, or window mats which are somewhat acidic
- Cased objects with broken hinges

EXHIBITION

The object is currently in stable current condition, but may require aesthetic improvements prior to exhibition. Treatment may include:

- Flattening of creases or reducing planar distortions
- Additional stain removal (such as chemical bleaching of foxing stains)
- Compensating for non-structural losses to the support with toned papers
- Compensating for losses to the design/media through inpainting
- Refurbishing books with worn bindings

NONE

The object is in stable and good condition; or the extreme opposite, the object cannot be helped by treatment. Also, the object may be of high monetary or historic value, and if stable, it may be more prudent to wait on conservation treatment in order to evaluate new technologies.