

HARVARD  
LIBRARY



# Special Collections Reading Room Handling Guidelines

# Arrival

Wash (with soap) and dry hands before handling collection materials.

If used, hand sanitizer must be completely dry before handling collection materials. Lotions and creams can cause stains.

Food and drink are not allowed to prevent staining collection materials or attracting pests.

To optimize your dexterity, gloves are generally not required for paper, leather, or cloth materials.

# Cart



If your materials are served on a wheeled cart, use two hands to move an item between the cart and the table.

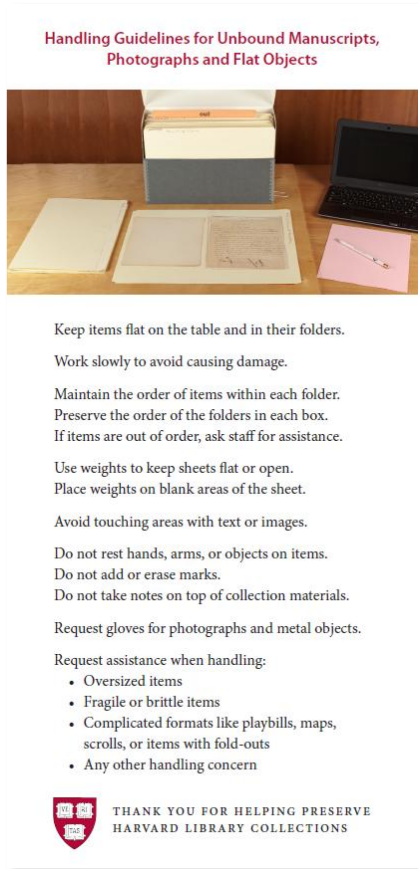
Take one item. Return it to the cart before taking another.

When finished, close books, repack any containers, and return folders to boxes.

Return all items to the cart at the end of your visit; leave supplies on the table.

Ask for help if you are uncertain about how to unpack, handle, support, or rebox any items.

# Supplies



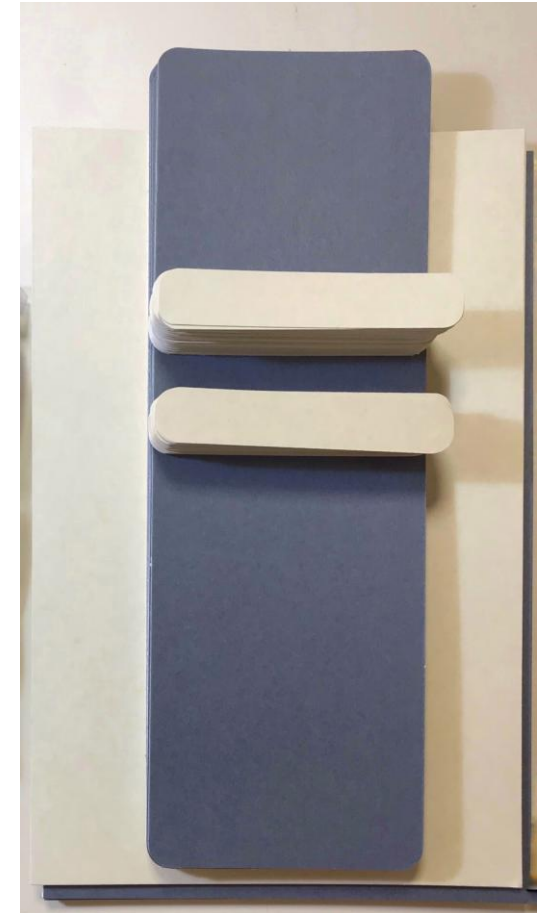
Pencils and colored notepaper

Handling Guidelines card/placeholder

Weights, page lifter, magnifying glass,  
gloves, support board

Manuscripts/Archives: box lid board,  
single wedge

Books: foam or plexi cradle

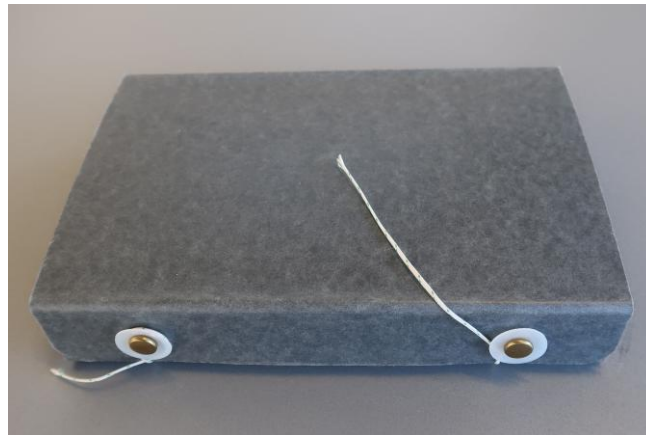


# Containers

Open containers slowly.

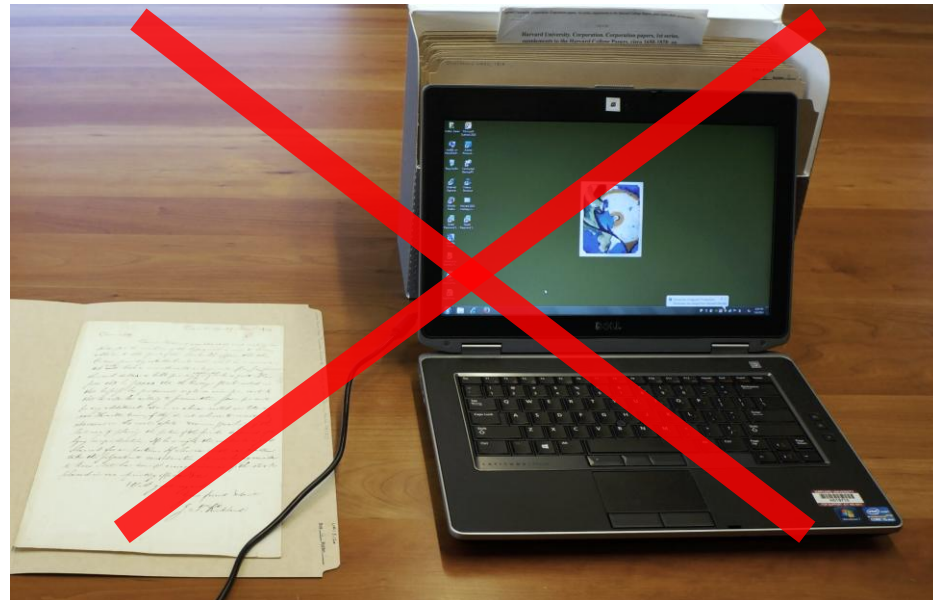
Keep flat on the table while opening.

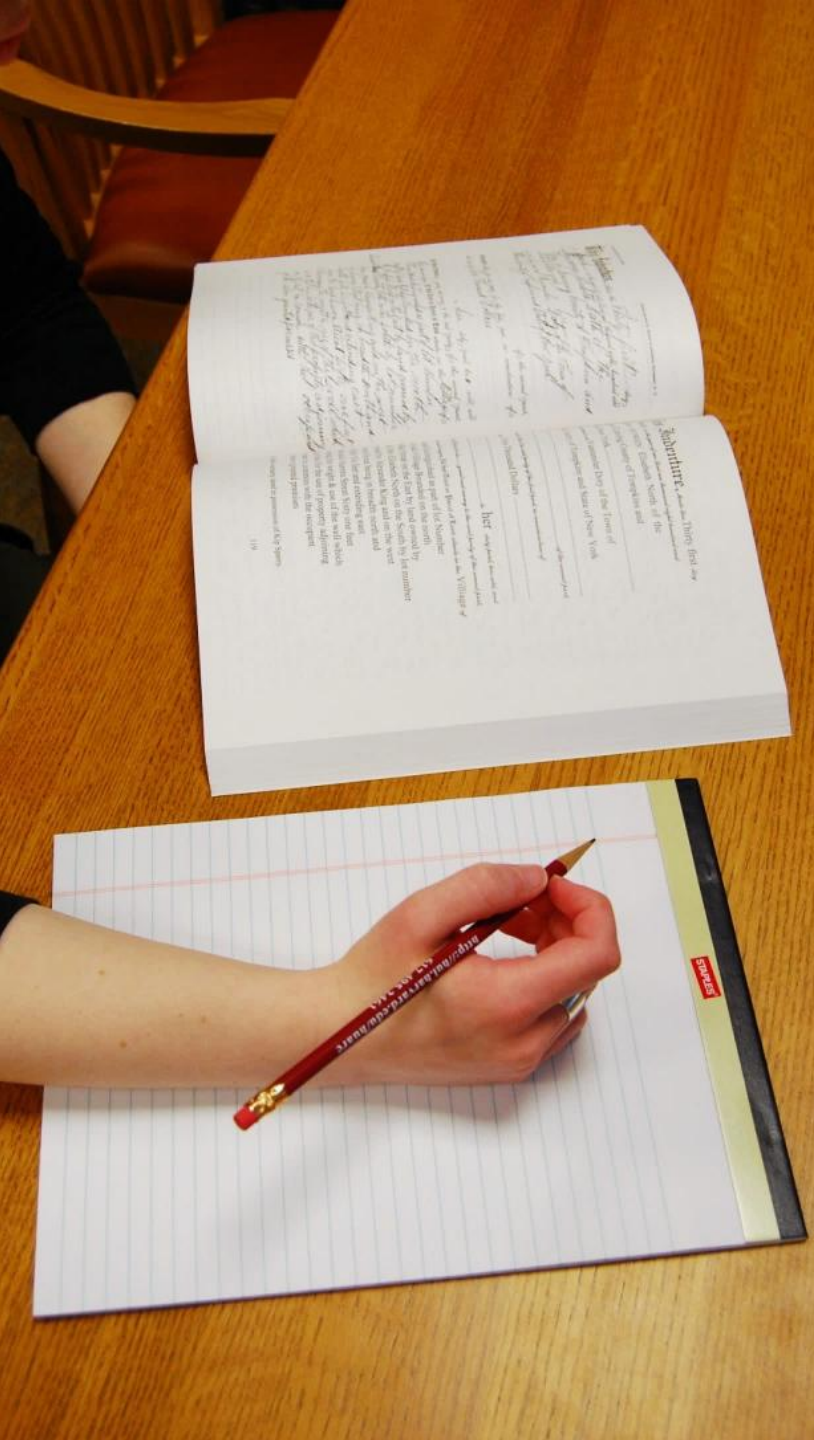
Use weights to hold flaps open.



# Workspace

- Leaning over or resting arms or objects on collection materials causes breaks and scratches.
- Power cords can tear or drag materials off the table inadvertently.





# Reading & Notetaking

Keep the item on table; holding it in your hands risks dropping.

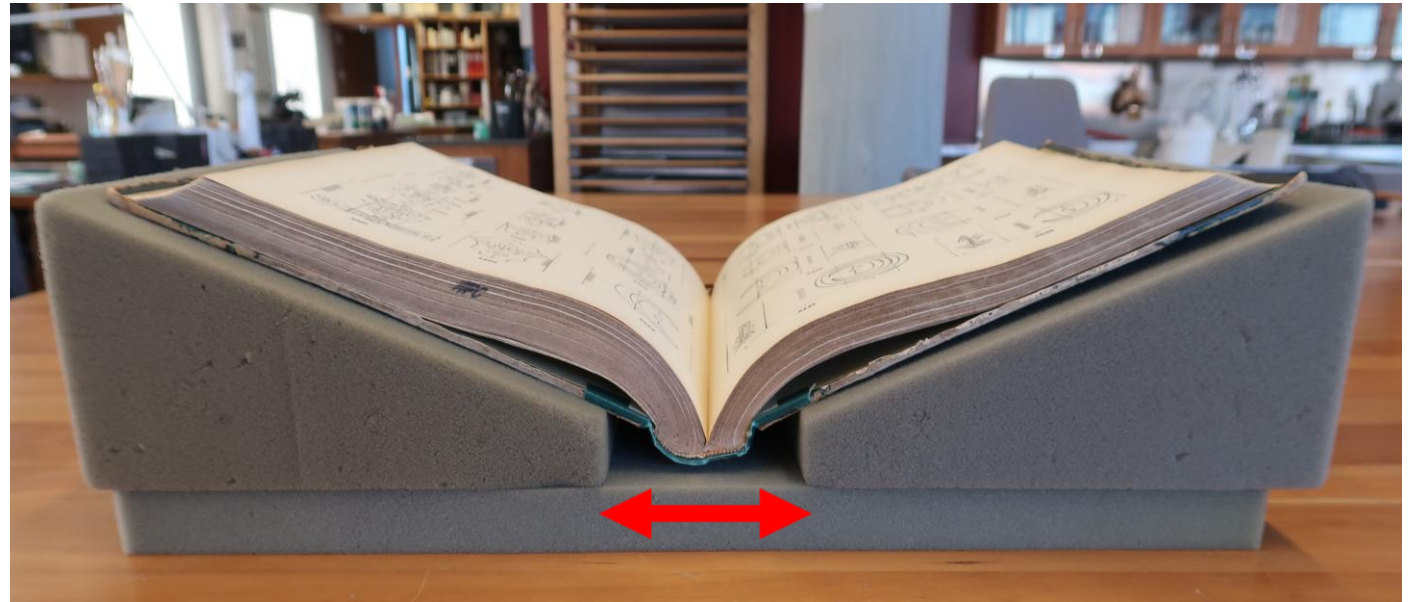
Take notes away from, not on top of materials.

Do not add or erase marks from collection materials.



# Books

Angled cradles should be used for all books.



Books that open easily are set up with a flat, foam sheet and two triangle wedges.

Leave a gap between wedges the thickness of the book spine.

# Stiff Binding

Some books don't open very easily.



# Holding Books Open

Use additional wedges to decrease the opening angle to around 90 degrees.

Adjust wedges from front to back as you turn pages through the book.

Wedges do not need to be set up symmetrically.



# Weights

Drape weights in blank areas, not on top of text or image.

Still won't stay open? Add another weight.



# Plexi Cradles

Good for:

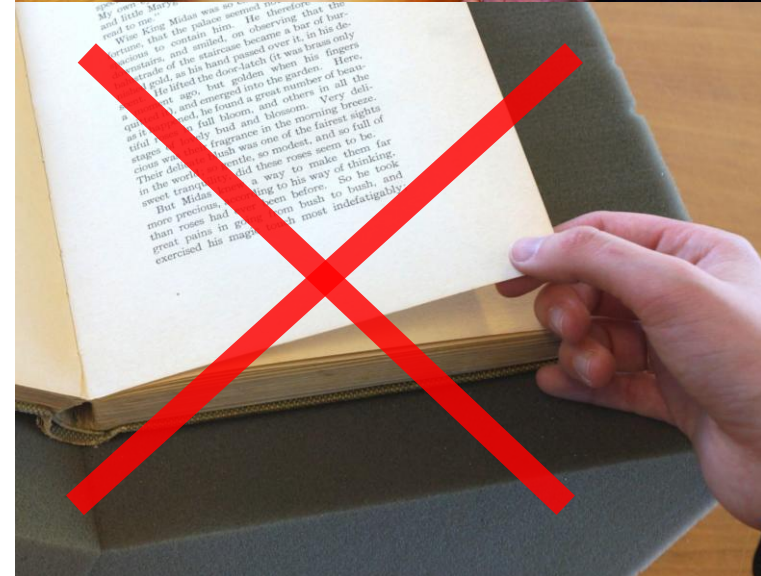
- Powdery leather
- Anything that snags easily



# Turning Pages

Turn pages gently; try using a page lifter if you have trouble separating the pages.

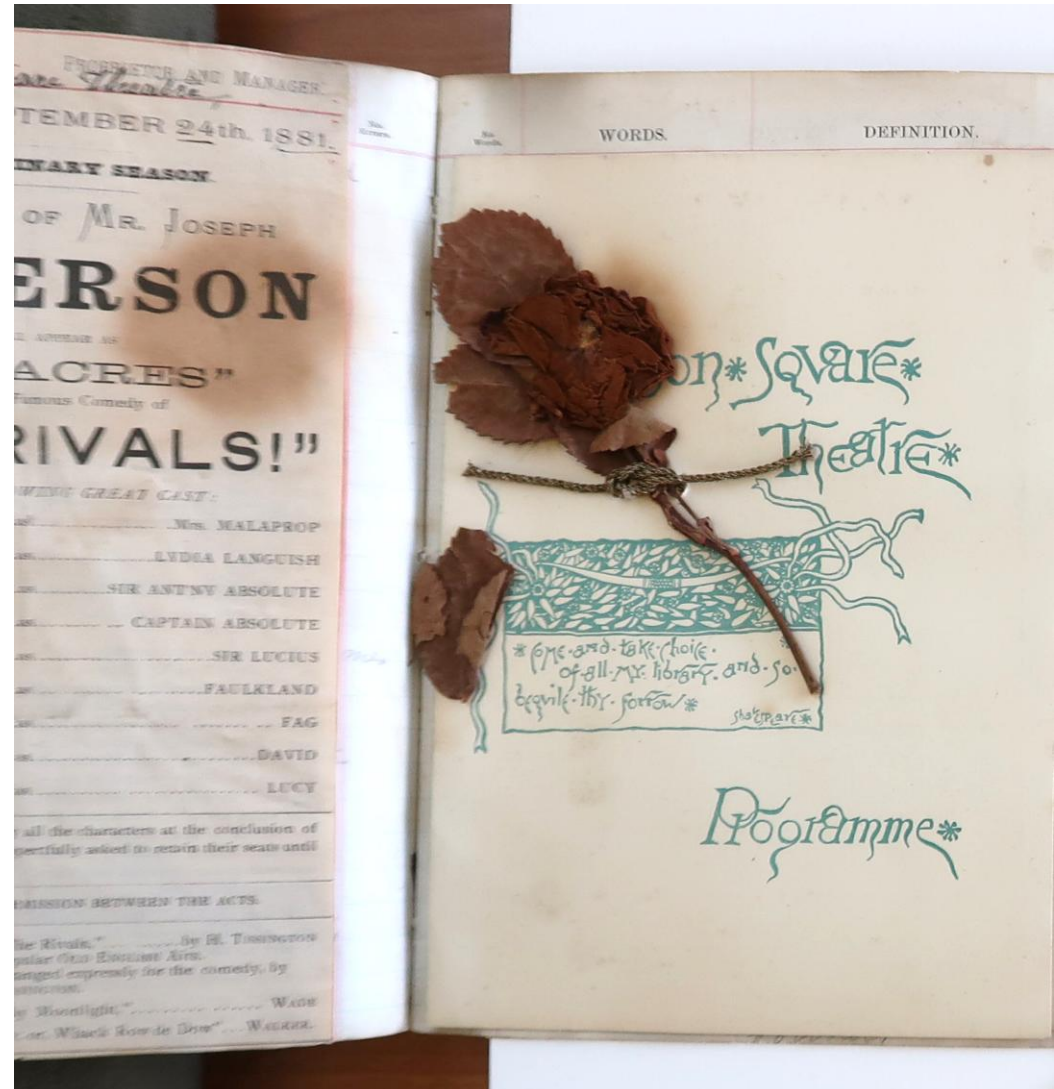
Grabbing by the bottom corner, which tends to get overused, can break or tear it.



# Loose Items

Leave loose items in place.

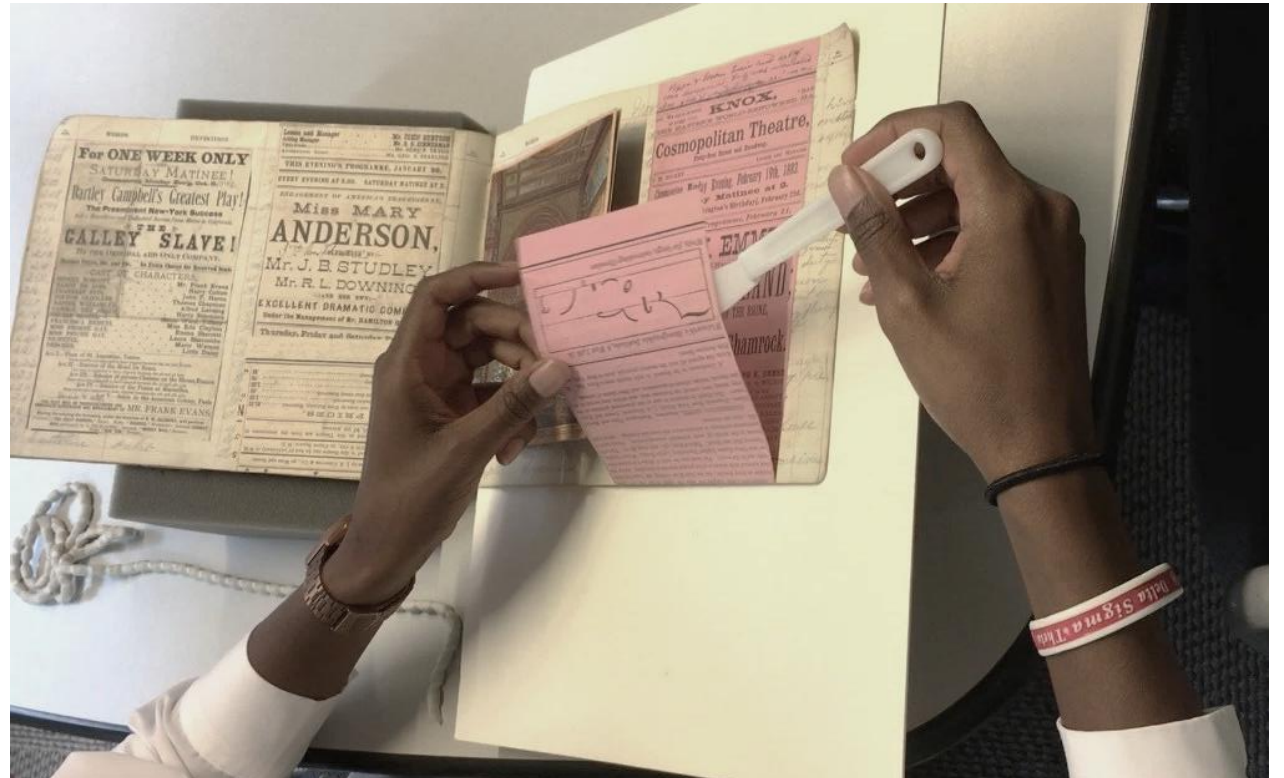
Their location provides context and may inform why they were placed there.



# Fold-outs

Use a support card under the full page, so foldouts do not overextend beyond the edge of the book.

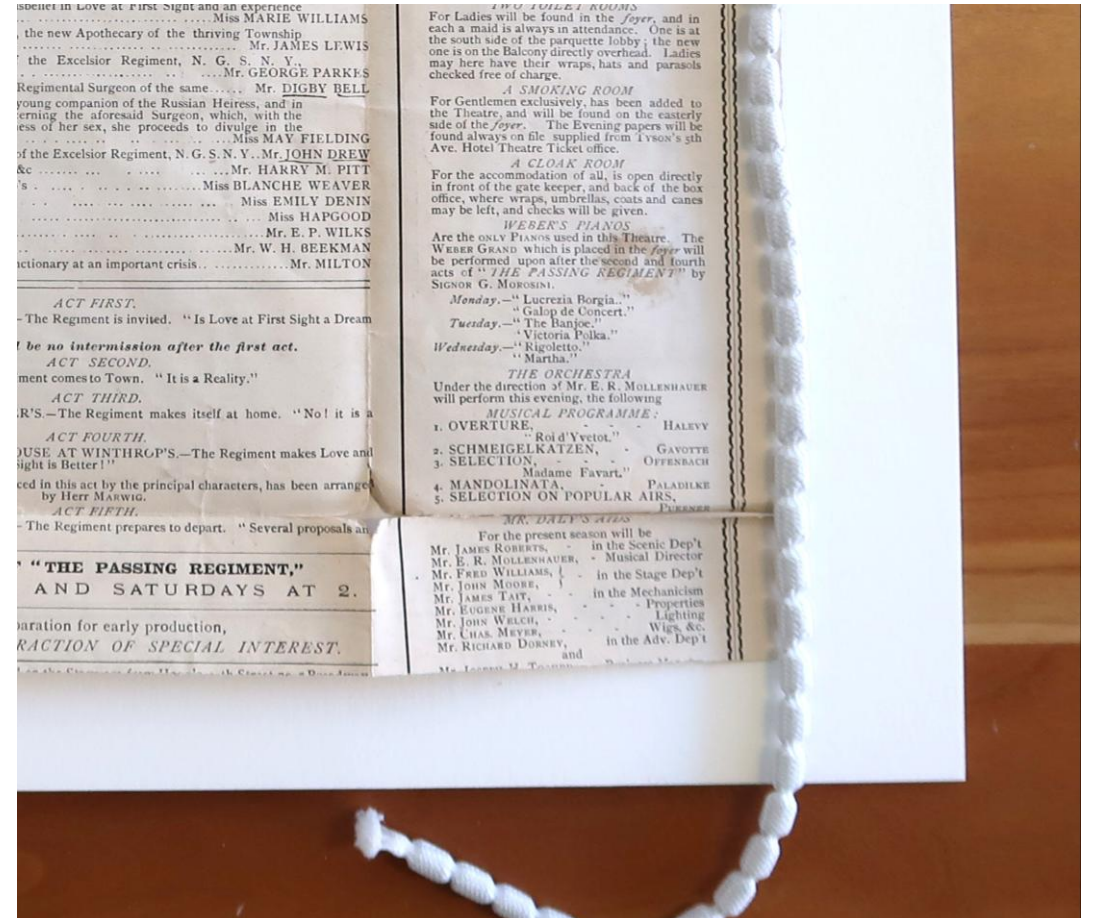
Try using a lifting tool if you have trouble unfolding.



# Fragile Folded Items

Perpendicular folds often develop tears.

Use light weights to hold down blank areas near the tear to prevent it from tearing further.



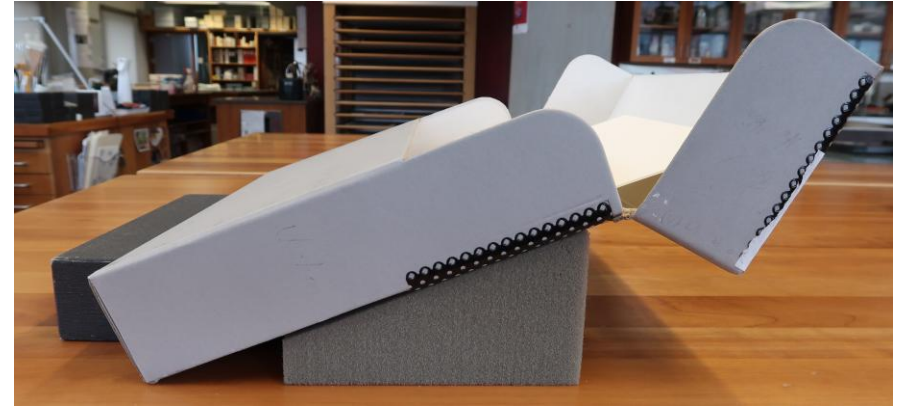
# Hinged Boxes

A skinny box may tip over accidentally.

Place it on an angled wedge to prevent that.

Hold it on the wedge with a weight at the bottom to keep it from sliding.

Use a stiff card to hold the lid open if it wants to close.



# Folders

Use one folder at a time.

Keep items in order within the folder by using a placeholder in the box.

Alert staff if something is out of order.

Please don't reorder it yourself.

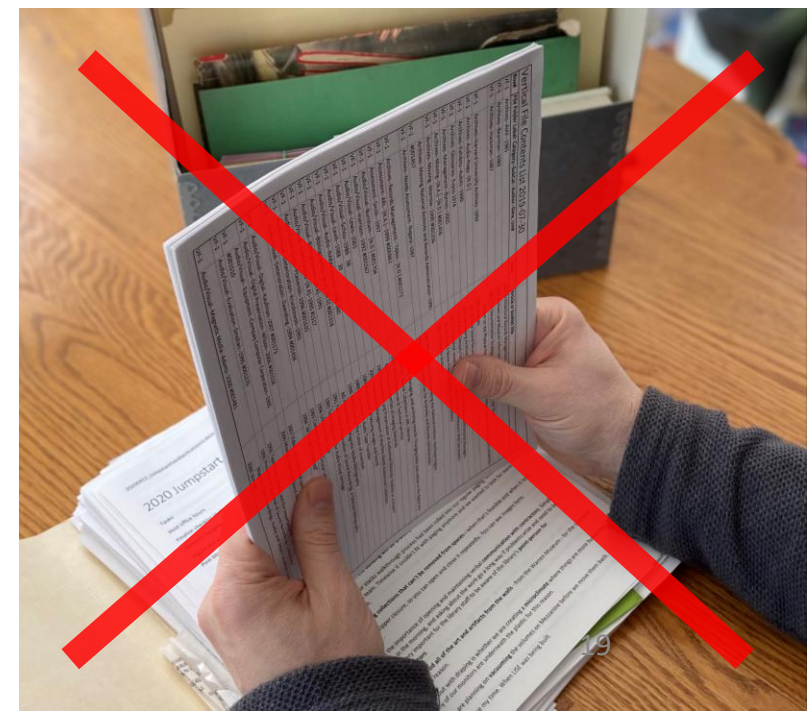


# Manuscripts & Archives

Keep papers on the table, neatly aligned in the folder.

Page through the folder like a book.

Tapping stacks of papers to align them can crush the bottom edge.



# Viewing Fragile Items in Folders

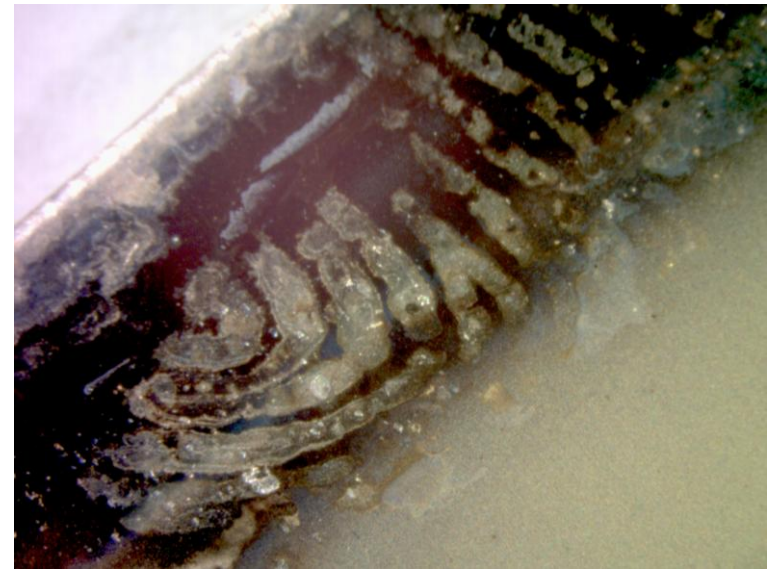
Use a folder to turn over (two hands) a fragile item or bare photograph to view the back side.



# Photographs

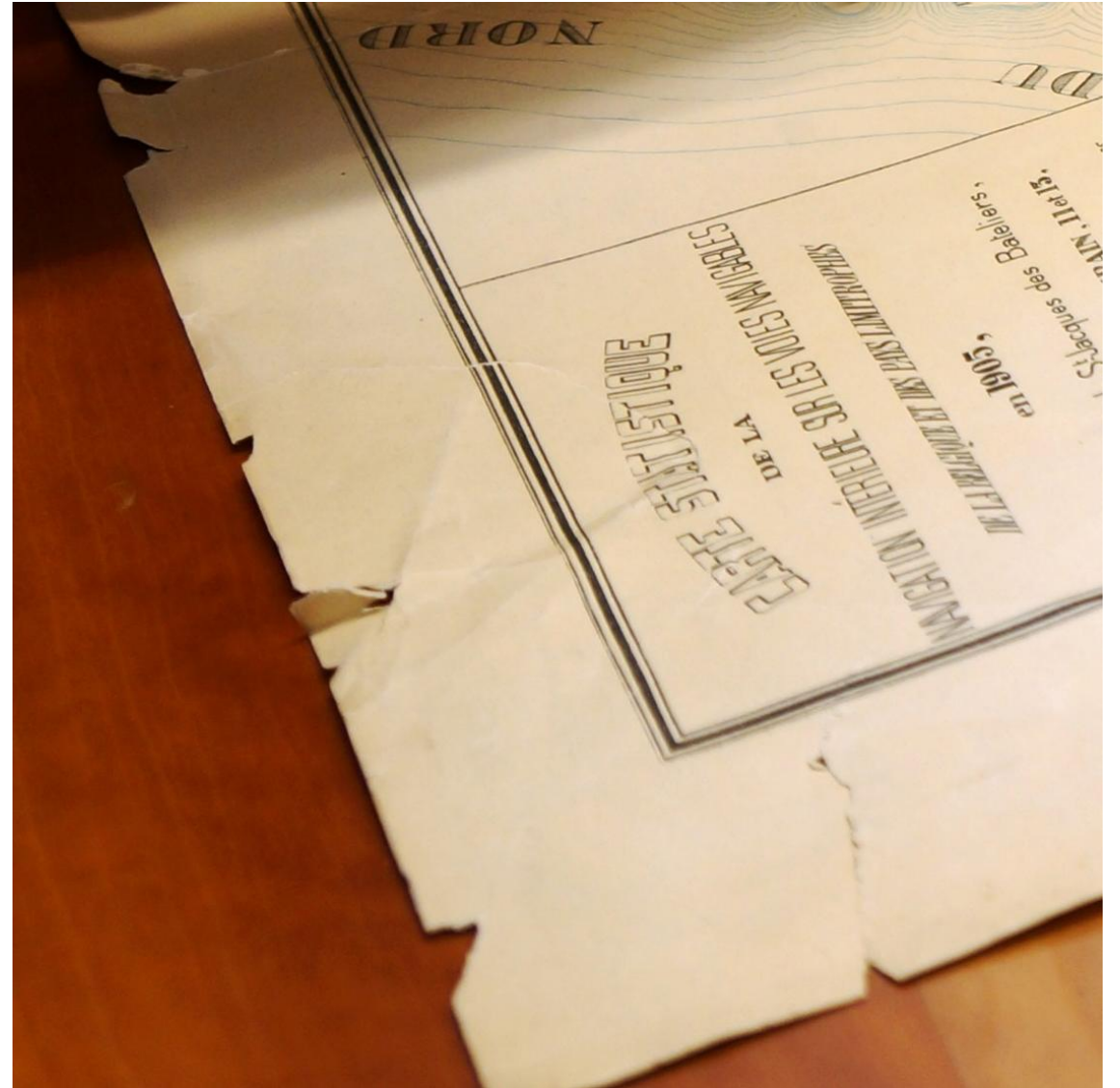
Wear gloves to handle bare photographs.

Gloves protect the photograph from salts and oils in your hands that can cause permanent fingerprints and staining.



# Paper Damage

Handle damaged paper carefully to prevent tears from extending or pieces from breaking off.





# Departure

Return collection materials as you received them, neatly in their containers, and place them with two hands back on the cart.

If the item doesn't fit comfortably in the box, forcing it shut can do more damage. Ask for help.

Leave supplies like cradles and weights on the table.

Ask for help if you feel uncertain.

Your future colleagues thank you  
for handling the collections carefully!



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