Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material

AICCM COLLECTION CARE FIRST AID WORKSHEET

Books, paper and archives

Four Questions to Ask

- What do you see?
- What is the risk?
- What is the safest first step?
- When would you call a conservator?

Safe First Steps

- Move fragile paper on a rigid support; minimise handling.
- Use appropriate housing to protect damaged books / papers and keep fragments associated.
- Document and isolate suspected mould / pest / water issues while seeking advice.

Common Mistakes

- Pressure-sensitive tape repairs or lamination.
- Flattening folds / cockling by force, wet cleaning, stain removal, bleaching or erasing.
- Brushing / vacuuming friable, sooty or mouldy surfaces.

Escalation Triggers

- Active mould or water damage; friable media; severe brittleness; fading.
- Tape / adhesive removal, complex bindings, stains requiring treatment or significant items.
- Large-scale archive incident or any response beyond local drying / handling capacity.

Resources

AICCM Visual Glossary - Pressure-sensitive tape, tidemark, foxing, tear, brittle and mould. Open

Canadian Conservation Institute - basic care for paper documents: Cleaning and repair should generally be left to a conservator; mould requires caution and specialist advice. Open

AICCM Book and Paper Special Interest Group - Network for books, paper-based materials, archives and associated preservation strategies. Open

AICCM Collection Care / reCollections- Australian collection care resource on storage, display, handling and condition reporting. Open

Canadian Conservation Institute - caring for paper objects - Handling, enclosures, light, pests, water and relative humidity guidance. Open

National Archives of Australia: Storing and preserving information. Open

Visible sign / scenario	Ask	Safe first move	Tempting mistake	Escalate when…
Broken binding / loose board	Where is the load when the book is opened or moved?	Close carefully if safe; support in a box / tray; keep components together.	Don't tape the hinge; repeatedly open to inspect.	Text block is loose, sewing is failing or book is significant / heavily used.
Pressure-sensitive tape / adhesive stain	Is the tape still sticky, embrittled or staining?	Leave in place; reduce handling; photograph; seek advice before removal.	Don't peel, heat, solvent-test or add more tape.	Tape is lifting media, staining is progressing or removal is required.
Brittle / acidic paper	Does normal flexing cause cracking or edge loss?	Use a rigid support and enclosure; minimise handling.	Don't flatten or flex to "test" brittleness; laminate.	Paper breaks under normal handling or access needs are high.
Tidemark / water stain	Is this evidence of a past event or current moisture?	Check source and environment; document; support; escalate if damp.	Don't wet clean, bleach, press or dry with heat.	Item is wet, media is bleeding, mould risk is present or many items are affected.
Friable / powdery media	Could touching / brushing remove original material?	Do not touch media; support from below; protect from abrasion.	Don't brush, vacuum, erase or place material directly against a sleeve.	Media is actively shedding or handling / display is required.
Mould suspected	Is growth active, recent or associated with dampness?	Prioritise health; isolate appropriately; avoid disturbance; seek advice.	Don't smell closely, brush, vacuum or spray fungicide.	Visible mould, musty damp conditions, health risk or more than an isolated item.
Poor enclosure / overfilled box	Is storage causing abrasion, distortion or retrieval damage?	Rehouse using appropriate folders / boxes; improve retrieval space.	Don't force more items into box; use acidic card or rubber bands.	Object is unusually large, friable, composite or needs bespoke housing.
Foxing / staining	Is it changing or simply evidence of age / past conditions?	Document; inspect environment and adjacent materials	Don't rrase, bleach or spot-treat.	Staining is associated with moisture, active mould or treatment is desired.
Fading	What is the cause?	Protective enclosure.	Don't ignore.	Object is highly significant.