

How To...Flatten Covers

While it doesn't require a rocket scientist, successfully flattening covers can sometimes be more of a hassle than the novice might suspect. The basic process entails finding a way to press those covers so that they remain flat, rather than tending to return to their 'bent' state.

There are many ways to do this, and collectors have been quite inventive over the years in coming up with various processes to do the same job, but let's cover the basics first. You press covers in groups, not one at a time. The actual number to do at a time depends on which method of applying pressure you use. And, since you're doing this in groups, you should interchange the covers so that every other one is in an upside down position. This will insure equal pressure being applied to the length of the covers, rather than having all your strikers at the same end and thus having the opposite side of the stack of less height. You'll discover that the older covers require more time to be pressed, simply because they're thicker and thus tend to hold onto their creases longer. Also, you should always press covers of the same size; don't mix them up.

OK, well, how do you do the actual pressing? I, myself, have...

- packed them tightly in boxes
- put them under a stack of heavy books
- put them between two small pieces of wood, tightly wrapped with rubber bands
- put them under the legs of heavy furniture, such as the coffee table
- tightly wrapped both ends of the stack with paper bands (not rubber bands)
- put them right into albums and let the natural weight of the other pages (and the album, itself) eventually flatten the covers. This method takes longer than other ways, but they're already in your albums, where they belong, so what do you care?

But, the tried and true method, and the one that I have found to always work the best and the fastest, is to take two short blocks of wood, with a stack of some 50 covers sandwiched in between, and then put the whole thing in a vise, tightened to exert maximum pressure. Three days in there will turn those covers into surf boards! *[party entertainment hint: put a significantly larger stack through the same process, and during the vise-tightening phase the middle of the stack will buckle and those covers will shoot a good 10-15 feet into the air!]*

I have heard of, shall we say, 'more radical' methods—pressing the covers and putting them into the freezer; wetting the covers (with a spritzer, for example) and then pressing them; ironing them, etc. I haven't tried any of these, myself. I'd be too afraid of damaging the covers. Wetting the covers in any way, I would think, would make colors run and the covers stick and fuse to each other...but, the users of such methods say they work.

There are some special circumstances where none of the above methods really work. The example that comes to mind is Click covers. These covers have curved end and act like flexible steel! I've never succeeded in entirely flattening Clicks...which is why I don't collect them!

However you flatten your covers, always just be careful as a general rule. Watch for those especially brittle strikers; don't do any kind of pressing that's going to leave any type of impression into the top and bottom covers; don't use rubber bands directly on the covers as 'tighteners', and so forth.

Happy flattening!