

The Proper Care Of Your Collection

[These guidelines come from the Library of Congress...and they ought to know!]

Take proper care when handling flat works on paper by:

- Having clean hands and a clean work area
- Keeping food and drink away
- Using pencil, not ink, to make any necessary marks or inscriptions; in addition, only make inscriptions when the paper is on a clean, hard surface, to avoid embossing the inscription into the paper, which will be visible from the other side
- Not using paper clips, other fasteners, "dog ear" folding to mark or organize leaves
- Not using rubber bands, self-adhesive tape, and/or glue on paper

Proper Storage of Works on Paper

Good storage significantly prolongs the preservation of paper materials and includes:

- A cool (room temperature or below), relatively dry (about 35% relative humidity), clean, and stable environment (avoid attics, basements, and other locations with high risk of leaks and environmental extremes)
- Minimal exposure to all kinds of light; no exposure to direct or intense light
- Distance from radiators and vents
- Supportive protective enclosures*
- Unfolded and flat or rolled storage for oversized papers *[no creasing, in other words]*
- Individual/isolated storage of acidic papers to prevent acids from migrating into the other works on paper

*Supportive protective enclosures include: acid- and lignin-free folders, mats, and document boxes (all available alkaline buffered or neutral pH); and polyester film sleeves that are stiff enough to adequately support the paper(s) within *[i.e. plastic pages]*. Alkaline buffered storage materials provide a desirable neutralizing effect on acids that are inherent in works on paper, especially as paper ages, but be aware that some media found on paper objects may be sensitive to alkaline pH. Polyester film has the benefit of being clear, but does not contain an alkaline buffer and with little friction readily produces an electrostatic charge that can lift powdery media such as pastel, charcoal, pencil, and flaking paint. [\[http://www.loc.gov/preservation/care/paper.html\]](http://www.loc.gov/preservation/care/paper.html)

Notice the last comment about acids migrating. If you put a cover with a corroded or otherwise deteriorating striker on a slotted page, eventually that deterioration will spread to the part of the page that comes into contact with that striker *and* the similar area on the adjacent page, when the album is closed. If that striker lays against an empty area on the adjacent page, that area will discolor and deteriorate. And, guess what happens to that pristine striker on the adjacent page's matchcover if it's in contact with the bad striker on the opposing page...it eventually deteriorates as well!

If you have covers with deteriorating strikers in your collection, and we *all* do, you need to isolate those covers from everything else. The easiest way to do this is to simply use plastic pages, but most of us also use slotted pages, so, in the latter case, at a minimum, I insert a blank piece of paper between the two album pages, and perhaps even a small pieces of paper just underneath the bad striker so that it doesn't affect the cover in the same slot on the other side of the page. In the ensuing months or years, as you go through your albums, when you notice those 'buffer' papers discoloring, you can simply replace them.

Unfortunately, there's nothing you can do to restore those already deteriorating strikers. Once the process has started, it's irreversible. That's why it's important to keep your covers, whether loose, in boxes, or albums, in a dry place and away from extreme temperatures. I've seen 100 year-old covers that were pristine and 50 year-old covers that were a mess. The difference is how they have been stored.

You *can* put a piece of scotch tape on the back to keep the striker from crumbling, but that's to keep it from getting worse. And, eventually, the tape will become old and fall away. It can always be replaced, however. Just remember that the rule in the hobby is that anything that permanently changes the appearance of the cover is verboten. So, no recoloring the striker, replacing the striker with one from another cover, and so on.

What about preventative measures, other than those discussed on the preceding page? There *are* preservation sprays made by several different manufacturers. They seal the paper and supposedly extend the paper life by 50%. Sealing, I assume, would prevent a healthy striker from corrosion, etc., although I've always been under the impression that the more modern strikers are less prone to deterioration than the older strikers.

I've never used such preservatives, so I can't say that they work. If I did, I'd probably have to observe the covers over a period of decades to see one way or another. Plus, they're not especially cheap...so just how many cans would it take to spray a collection of 50,000, 100,000, or more? Of course, you could always reserve this method for just your older covers.

A more pressing question about such preservative sprays, though, would be, "What does the cover look like after the application has dried?" If it leaves a sheen or gloss, for example, it's changed the appearance of the cover and thus, by hobby standards, would not be a viable option.

