



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Grimwade Centre for
Cultural Materials
Conservation



SAFE HANDLING

GENERAL

Objects are most vulnerable to damage when they are being moved. Understanding the principles of safe handling will reduce the chance of accidents happening.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To safely handle objects, it is important to carefully follow a few basic principles:

1. Assess the item carefully before handling and moving.
2. Prepare yourself and your workspace.
3. Plan both the move and receiving area.
4. Source equipment or people to assist.

ASSESSING THE OBJECT

All objects are different. Before handling, make sure you assess the object for:

- fragility or loose areas
- insecure components (i.e., frame/stand)
- weight
- size

Some objects might require further considerations, such as:

- Cultural sensitivities. Research and consultation will help you understand cultural protocols such as restricted access because material is secret, sacred or sensitive.
- Hazardous materials – mould, heavy metals, pesticides. Research and close inspection will also help you identify if the object contains or has been treated with potentially hazardous materials (i.e. early taxidermy and ethnographic items were commonly treated with pesticide). If you are concerned, seek advice from a conservator before handling, and wear suitable personal protective equipment.



Set up a clean workspace



Wear gloves when handling potentially hazardous material



Support framed works from underneath

RESOURCES



reCollections
Caring for Collections
Across Australia – Handling,
Transportation, Storage and
Display:
go.unimelb.edu.au/36wi



CCI Notes
Care of objects and collections:
go.unimelb.edu.au/z6wi



CCI Notes
Handling heritage objects:
go.unimelb.edu.au/6xwi

PREPARATION

Once you have assessed the object, prepare your workspace and yourself.

Your workspace must be ready before you begin handling or moving objects. Find a clean, clear space to work, large enough to accommodate your object.

Make sure the path between where your object is located, and your workspace, is wide enough to accommodate the movement of the object and is clear of any obstacles.

Consider using a trolley or asking for assistance when moving awkward or large items. Trays, boxes and padded supports can assist for 3D items. Boards can assist for flat paper and textile items. Source these materials in advance.

Once your workspace is ready, prepare yourself. Avoid wearing clothing or accessories which may accidentally damage items - remove watches, bracelets, large rings, long necklaces or lanyards.

Before touching any objects, wash your hands thoroughly. Oils and salts from your hands can be acidic and irreversibly damage vulnerable surfaces.

Gloves can be worn. Tightly fitting powder-free gloves (i.e., nitrile gloves or latex) protect your skin from potentially hazardous materials. These gloves are good for handling items with both smooth or rough surfaces, as they provide good gripping/contact, and provide a barrier between the object and acids from your hands. Cotton gloves can be used, but the fibres can catch on rough surfaces and they can be difficult to get a secure handle on smooth, slippery surfaces. They are more porous than powder-free options.

HANDLING TIPS

Some important tips when handling:

- Do not rush - handle object calmly and with care.
- Carry only one object at a time.
- Talk through the actions with team-mates as you proceed.
- Use both hands – one to support the object from below while steadying the object with the other on one side. This applies to small and large objects.
- Never push or drag an object.
- Select the strongest place to handle. This will usually be at the base - never pick up by handles. Avoid lifting by areas of repair or damage.
- Avoid placing the object in a temporary location, which risks damage to the object.
- Where possible, carry the object in its correct orientation.
- Objects that are damaged might be very fragile in places and will require additional support when handling.
- Carry wrapped objects with extra care because you cannot see what you are touching.

SUMMARY

Preparation is the key to safe object handling and movement. To ensure you don't cause accidental damage, you must remember to:

- Assess object first.
- Plan your movements and workspace.
- Support the size and weight of the object appropriately, with assistance as required.

If transporting your object, protect it from vibration and movement (see PACKING FOR TRANSPORT Fact Sheet).