



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

Grimwade Centre for  
Cultural Materials  
Conservation



# SAFE HANDLING OBJECTS

Objects cover a vast range of items including ceramics, metals, archaeology, natural science and furniture. Practising safe handling is necessary to ensure long-term preservation.

All objects are vulnerable to damage when being handled. Minimising handling and understanding the principles of safe handling will reduce the risk of damage occurring.

## BEFORE HANDLING

- Thoroughly assess the object on all sides.
- Evaluate its weight and size. Objects may be heavier than they appear, and you may require assistance.
- Identify the strongest areas of the object as well as any weak points. Although an object may look robust there may still be fragile or vulnerable areas.
- Assess the condition, damaged objects will require additional support during handling.
- Check if there are any elements in danger of detaching.
- Check for breaks or sharp edges that could snag or cut.
- Identify if the object could contain hazardous materials, such as pesticides, mould or lead paint and wear suitable personal protective equipment.
- Consider the objects origin. Some items can be culturally sensitive. Research and consultation will help you understand appropriate cultural protocols.
- Remove lanyards and jewellery such as rings, necklaces and watches that could accidentally fall or catch on the object.
- Plan your movement (see *SAFE HANDLING – GENERAL* Fact Sheet).

## RESOURCES



reCollections  
Caring for Collections  
Across Australia – Handling,  
Transportation, Storage and  
Display, Heritage Collections  
Council, available online:  
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/36wi>



Handling Heritage Objects,  
Canadian Conservation Institute  
Notes, available online:  
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/6xwi>



Object Handling Guidelines,  
National Museum of Scotland,  
available online:  
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/2fwi>

## DURING HANDLING

- The natural oils and salts in your hands can leave permanent imprints on the surface of some objects, especially metals, so wear clean, tight-fitting, powder-free gloves (i.e., nitrile – see *WHEN TO WEAR GLOVES* Fact Sheet).
- Pick the object up from the base, as this tends to be the sturdiest area.
- Do not hold on to any protruding elements, such as handles, straps or rims, as these are generally weaker than other parts.
- Always use two hands when handling, one to support the object from below while steadying the object with the other. This applies to small and large objects.
- Never drag or pull an object.
- Use multiple people to handle large, weighty or awkward objects.

## HANDLING TIPS

- If an object has more than one part, for example a cup and saucer, only handle one part at time.
- Minimise direct handling by using boxes or trays.
- Where possible, avoid touching painted or gilded surfaces, especially if flaking or powdery.
- If you think an object may be in danger of rolling during handling, use a soft pillow, bean bag or roll of tissue to stabilise it.
- If an object is tall or wobbly, it may be safer to handle it lying down on a padded surface.
- Handle wrapped objects with extra care because you cannot see what you are touching.
- If an object has signs of pest damage or corrosion, handle with extra care as it may be extremely fragile.
- If any elements detach from the object during handling - record where they detached from, keep them with the object and seek the advice of a conservator.

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