



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

Grimwade Centre for  
Cultural Materials  
Conservation



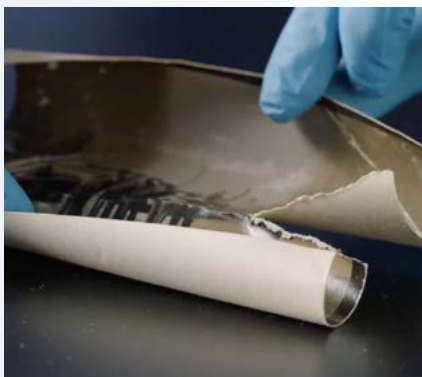
# WHEN TO WEAR GLOVES

Wearing gloves while handling collection material is an important aspect of safe handling practice. Gloves provide a barrier that protects both the object and handler.

## WHY WEAR GLOVES?

There are two main reasons to wear gloves when handling collection material:

- To protect the objects from dirt, oils, acids and salts on your hands that may leave impurities and imprints on the surface.
- To protect yourself from potentially hazardous materials the objects may contain such as:
  - » Mould
  - » Arsenic and other harmful substances that were used as pesticides on Natural Science and Ethnographic collections in the past
  - » Lead, including lead paint
  - » Toxic materials used in historic dyes and pigments
  - » Radioactive materials
  - » Mercury, used in the manufacture of historic hats



Packing a painting with bubble wrap

## WHEN TO WEAR GLOVES?

Wearing gloves is advised when handling most material types including:

- Metals
- Leather
- Ceramics
- Glass
- Plastics
- Wood
- Archaeological material
- Ethnographic material
- Painted surfaces
- Natural Science
- Textiles
- Paintings
- Photographic items

There are some situations where the use of gloves is not necessary as it may reduce tactile sensitivity. This could make it more difficult to do things like leaf through pages, risking damage. This applies when handling:

- Archival material
- Works on paper
- Books

In these cases, it is necessary to handle paper and books with freshly washed and thoroughly dried hands. Wash hands in between handling each object. Hands must be washed with soap and water. Hand sanitiser is not sufficient at removing dirt and oils and may contain impurities such as perfumes.

Always use gloves if there are suspected hazardous materials present.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF GLOVES

- Disposable nitrile gloves:
  - » Preferred gloves for handling art and artefacts.
  - » Smooth, resistant to snagging.
  - » Impermeable, meaning they provide a good protective barrier and are appropriate for all objects.
  - » Available in a wide range of sizes and do not distort, providing a tight fit.
  - » Preferred over latex and vinyl because they do not leave residues, provide a high level of protection and are a low allergy risk.
- Reusable cotton gloves:
  - » Permeable, meaning they do not provide a good protective barrier and are not appropriate for all objects.
  - » Often distort and are generally ill fitting.
  - » Not suitable when handling objects with a smooth surface, such as ceramics or glass, as they do not provide sufficient grip.
  - » Not suitable when handling objects with a rough surface, such as basketry, as they may snag.
  - » Ensure they are washed regularly to avoid cross-contamination.

## CHOOSING THE CORRECT GLOVES

Gloves should be:

- Well-fitting, not too tight or too loose. Have a variety of sizes available for staff and volunteers.
- Powder-free
- Clean
- Intact with no tears or holes
- Smooth with no grips/friction dots

## DISPOSING OF GLOVES

- The most environmentally friendly way to dispose of nitrile gloves is using a specific zero waste plastic recycling program (i.e., TerraCycle).
- If there are no glove recycling programs available in your area, consider sourcing biodegradable nitrile gloves. These can be disposed of with general waste.
- Always dispose of gloves safely after handling potentially hazardous objects. Potentially contaminated gloves should be disposed of in line with your institutions hazardous waste disposal policy.

## RESOURCES



Handling Heritage Objects,  
Canadian Conservation Institute  
Notes, available online:  
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/w4wi>



How to Select Gloves: an Overview  
for Collections Staff,  
National Park Service, Conserve  
O Gram Number 1/12, September  
2010, available online:  
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/c4wi>



Why Should I Wear Gloves?,  
Museum of London, available  
online:  
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/74wi>