



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Grimwade Centre for
Cultural Materials
Conservation



SAFE HANDLING TEXTILES

Textiles appear in collections in a range of forms including clothing, furnishings and artworks. Practising safe handling is necessary to ensure long-term preservation.

Textiles 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 textile on the front and reverse.
- Evaluate its weight and size. Textiles may be heavier than they appear and you may require assistance.
- Identify the strongest areas of the textile as well as any weak points. Although textiles may look robust, there may still be fragile or vulnerable areas. Particular points of weakness to look out for include seams, linings and pest-damaged areas.
- Check if there are any elements in danger of detaching.
- Assess the condition, damaged textiles will require additional support during handling.
- Identify if the textile could contain hazardous materials, such as pesticides or mould and wear suitable personal protective equipment.
- Consider the textiles 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 snag the fabric.
- 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>



Caring for Textiles and Costumes,
Canadian Conservation Institute
Notes, available online:
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/3fwi>



An Illustrated Guide to the Care of
Costume and Textile Collections,
Collections Trust, UK, available
online:
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/a4wi>

DURING HANDLING

- Textiles easily pick up dirt and oils from hands so use so wear clean, tight fitting, powder-free gloves (i.e., nitrile – see *WHEN TO WEAR GLOVES* Fact Sheet).
- Always use two hands when handling a textile.
- Always support textiles fully during handling so their weight is evenly distributed.
- To better support textiles, carry textiles flat, either on a board, in a box or tray. Handle the board or tray rather than the textile itself.
- Avoid picking up flat textiles by their corners.
- Garments should not be picked up by the shoulders. Use a hanger, board, tray or box.
- For garments on hangers, position an arm beneath the heaviest parts to support the weight. If the garment is long or heavy, have one person holding the hanger and another cradling the length.
- Avoid folding textiles where possible.
- If the textile must be folded during handling, gently pad out the folds with sausages made out of tissue or foam pool tubes.
- Large, flat textiles can be rolled onto an archival roll to prevent folding.
- When handling a rolled textile, handle the ends of the roll rather than the textile itself.
- Use two people to handle large or weighty textiles.
- Handle wrapped objects with extra care because you cannot see what you are touching.
- If any elements detach from the textile 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).