Handling Books in General Collections

Library collections are directly affected by the way staff and users handle them. Damage to books is cumulative. Repeated poor handling can quickly transform a new book into a worn one, and a worn book into an unusable book that requires costly repair, rebinding, or replacement. By following the guidelines presented here, the library can make significant strides toward preservation of the collection.

General Handling Guidelines

- Keep hands clean.
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke in proximity to library books.
- Avoid forcing books to lie open further than they easily do.
- Support the covers when the volume is open.
- Do not use paper clips in the text.
- Avoid the use of book drops; instead, return volumes to the circulation desk.

Shelving Books of Ordinary Size

- Use smooth, solid metal shelves without jagged edges or protruding screws. Avoid wooden shelves.
- Ensure that there is air circulation around the volumes. Do not store books against a wall or in an enclosed cabinet.
- Shelve volumes a minimum of four inches off the floor to reduce the risk of damage from flooding or passers-by.
- When possible, use shelving units that have a "canopy" on top, as this will deflect water, dust, and some damaging light.
- Stand all volumes upright, resting on their base (or "tail").
- If a book is slightly too tall for the shelving space, do not shelve it on its fore edge (i.e., in the "spine-up" position). Instead, shelve it with the spine down.
- Do not leave shelves too loosely or too tightly packed. In general, shelves should be about 60% full.
- Support the volumes on each shelf with an appropriate bookend * one that is tall enough to provide good support and that has a wide profile.
- To remove a volume from the shelf, ease back the books on either side of the desired volume. Grasp the volume by the sides with the hand, remove it, and readjust the bookend.
- To replace a volume, loosen the bookend and move the existing volumes to create a space. Reinsert the book in its place, then readjust the bookend so that shelving is snug.

Shelving Oversize Volumes

- Use broad fixed or roller shelves.
- Do not let the volumes protrude into the aisle.
- To remove a volume if the books are stored flat and stacked, transfer the upper volumes to a free shelf or adjacent book truck. Remove the desired volume, using both hands, then replace the upper volumes on the stack.
- To replace a volume if the books are stored flat and stacked, transfer the upper volumes to a free shelf or adjacent book truck. Then put the book back in place using both hands, and transfer the upper volumes back on top of the book.
- Shelve oversized books flat, if possible, with no more than three volumes in each stack.

**Book Trucks**

- Use a book truck that
  - Is easily maneuverable. Those with large wheels are usually more stable and maneuverable.
  - Has wide shelves or protective rails to secure the items in transit
  - Has bumpers on corners to minimize damage from inadvertent bumps

**Processing and Shelf Preparation**

- Upon receipt, open boxes carefully to avoid cutting volumes inside.
- Avoid stuffing bulky card packets or other enclosures between the endpaper and the cover. Instead, place them in the center of the volume.
- Use caution when applying security strips, and do not force them into the spine if there is not enough space to do so safely.
- Use alkaline paper products for pockets, due slips, book plates, and so on.
- Place bookplates and "date due" slips on the flyleaf, so that the weight of the text block will bear the weight when these are stamped or pressed.
- Use high-quality adhesives (such as polyvinyl acetates) to attach bookplates, pockets, and loose art plates.

**Photocopying**

- Support the covers and pages while in the process of photocopying.
- Never force a volume flat on the copy surface.
- Learn to recognize, and do not attempt to copy books whose size or structure prevent them from being copied easily or well.

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