

## Preserving Historic Scrapbooks

**Common risks** include light exposure, extreme or fluctuating temperature and humidity, indoor air pollution (including dust), insects, rodents, mold, handling, and “inherent vice.”

**Handling** is even more of a concern for scrapbooks than it is for other types of book and paper materials. Their complex structures, the variety of their contents, and their attachment methods make scrapbooks increasingly susceptible to damage with repeated handling.

**Inherent Vice** is what truly sets scrapbooks apart in terms of risk. The binding structures are often made from materials prone to deterioration. Ephemera are prone to many different mechanisms of deterioration. Attachment methods often age poorly: adhesives and tape fail or creep; pins and staples corrode.

**There is no silver bullet when preserving scrapbooks, but these solutions can help:**

**Interleaving:** Use an unbuffered paper like Phototex for interleaving photographs. Use a buffered paper such as a lightweight Permalife for interleaving acidic paper.

**Isolation/Encapsulation:** Isolate problematic materials, such as sticky or acidic items. Use buffered paper envelopes or, to maintain visibility without the need to remove the item from its enclosure, use an inert polyester film such as Mylar/Melinex.

**Preservation Surrogate/Digitization:** In some cases, it may be necessary to discard or remove an original piece of ephemera. In this case, a preservation surrogate can stand in for the original (clearly labeled as a surrogate, of course!) Digitization is another option for preserving a record of a scrapbook’s original format or for providing an “access copy” if the original is too fragile to be handled by visitors.

**Stabilization/Conservation Treatment:** A conservator can stabilize detached items, repair binding structures, and perform a full range of conservation treatments on scrapbooks. If professional conservation work is beyond the reach of available funding, then simple rehousing is preferable to amateur repairs, especially if the scrapbook in question has historic value.

**Rehousing:** Scrapbooks will benefit from supportive, acid-free enclosures. Not only does an enclosure afford physical protection from light and particulates, it also creates a microclimate in which the scrapbook is somewhat buffered from humidity fluctuations.

**Disbinding\*:** If the original binding structure has no historical significance, and is causing damage to the scrapbook contents during handling, then one option is to disbind and then rehouse the pages of the scrapbook in a portfolio, folders, and/or an archival document box.

**Disassembly\*:** Because disassembly (removing the ephemera from a scrapbook) destroys the artifact value of the scrapbook, full disassembly is not recommended except in limited, extreme cases. One exception is “magnetic” photo albums, from which ephemera should be removed and rehoused.

**\*Whether disbinding or disassembling, it’s a good idea to take photos of the scrapbook first, so there is a record of its original format.**

### Making New Scrapbooks That Last

Modern scrapbooks should be stored with all the same precautions as historic scrapbooks regarding light, temperature, humidity, and so on. Choose materials for scrapbooks wisely, and you will prolong their longevity by decreasing their "inherent vice."

More Stable Choices	Materials To Avoid
Acid-Free* Archival* Lignin-Free* Cotton rag papers PVA (polyvinyl acetate) UHU Stic glue stick Wheat Starch Paste** Water-moistenable gummed linen tape Polyethylene plastic Polypropylene plastic Mylar/Melinex film Printed digital copies of photographs Paper or Mylar "photo corners" Binding structures with spacers or stubs	Solvent-based adhesives (such as rubber cement) Pressure-sensitive tape (such as scotch tape, masking tape, duck tape, etc.) Adhesive "dots" Metal clips and pins PVC (polyvinyl chloride) plastic Kraft, "construction," and other acidic papers Original photographs Self-adhesive ("magnetic") albums

**Abbey pH Pen:** If you are unsure whether decorative papers or storage boxes are acidic, test them using an Abbey pH pen. Draw a small dot or line in an unobtrusive place. Purple indicates a neutral or alkaline pH. Yellow indicates an acidic pH.

**\*Terminology:** The term "Archival" is not regulated, so it has no real meaning on consumer products. "Acid-free" paper means *only* that the product was not acidic at the time it left the manufacturer. However, some so-called "acid-free" papers can become acidic over time due to their lignin content. Look for "lignin-free" paper instead.

**\*\*Wheat Starch Paste** comes in two main varieties: pre-cooked and uncooked. Pre-cooked wheat starch paste is a powder that can be mixed with water for instant use. Uncooked wheat starch paste (sometimes called "precipitated" wheat starch paste) must be cooked before it can be used.