

William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections: Handling Special Collections Materials

General Considerations:

- Unless otherwise directed by staff, materials should be handled with **clean, bare hands**. This is safe for most materials. If in doubt, ask.
- Gloves should **not** be worn except when handling photographic materials, vellum, or other highly sensitive media. In such cases, disposable nitrile gloves are available at the service desk.
- Writing on, annotating, or otherwise marking collection materials is prohibited.
- In the event an item is inadvertently damaged while you are using it, **notify staff immediately**.

Archival Materials:

- **Handle archival materials with care**, bearing in mind that archives may contain multiple media.
- **Be mindful of the media you are working with.** Paper from different time periods varies widely in acidity, fragility, and brittleness; similar considerations pertain to other media. It is better to be too careful than not careful enough.
- **Turn pages with both hands** to ensure adequate support and a sure hold.
- **The order of archival holdings must not be altered.** The existing order of folders in a box, pages or items within a folder — even if these are not numbered — must be maintained. Leave materials exactly as you found them.

Rare (pre-1815) Books:

- **Use of a book support is required** for all rare books. For smaller items, this might be a book pillow; for larger items, a book sofa is required. Staff will provide these at the service desk and can instruct you in their use as needed.
- **Open books only as wide as you need to** in order to read them. Do not flatten books, or otherwise exert undue pressure on their spines and hinges.
- **Snakes or other book weights must be used if you need to hold a book open** at a certain page. Staff will provide these at the service desk and can instruct you in their use as required. Do not hold books open with your hands or other objects.
- **Exercise great care when turning pages;** it is easy to tear or abrade paper without meaning to.
- **Books should be closed and laid flat when not in use.**