

Photoconservation Tips – “Don’ts”

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I. Storage

Don't store nitrate or acetate negatives in plastic sleeves because they trap gases give off as by-products of decomposition.

Don't use vinyl (PVC), glassine, manila envelopes or other non-archival enclosures. Enclosures should have passed the Photographic Activity Test (P.A.T.).

Don't use plywood shelving, old shoe boxes, and the like to store photos.

Don't store photos in rooms painted with oil-based paint for at least a month after painting.

Don't store photos in rooms with copying machines, which give off ozone, a catalyst for chemical reactions that degrade photos.

Don't store photos in a damp basement, attic, on or near the floor, under water pipes, or near windows where exposed to light.

II. During Use and Exhibits

Don't project color slides longer than necessary; light damage is cumulative.

Do not leave slide trays on hot projector after turning off machine.

Do not leave photos on top of light boxes or exposed to fluorescent room light when not in use.

Don't handle photos with ungloved fingers or wash your hands frequently to remove finger oils.

Don't exhibit original photos when a copy would suffice.

Don't use glue, adhesive tape, or dry mount tissue to mount photos to mat board. Mounting methods should be easily reversible.

Don't frame photos directly against glass; use a window mat.

When exhibiting originals, do not exceed 5 foot candles of illumination for light sensitive photos such as albumen prints and cyanotypes and not more than 10 foot candles for stable photos such as modern silver gelatin black-and-white prints.

III. During Collection Management

Don't trim mounts off photos if mounts were part of original presentation, to retain photographer and studio information.

Don't try to restore a daguerreotype; consult a conservator for treatment.

Don't write on backs of photos with ball point or water soluble felt tip pens; use pencil if possible or permanent black marking pen for photos on plastic supports.

Don't put adhesive labels or use rubber stamps on fiber-based photographic prints. The labels will probably fall off leaving adhesive stains and ink from the rubber stamp will bleed through to the front if the print gets wet.

Don't use paper clips or rubber bands on or next to photos.

Don't leave newspaper clippings and other acidic papers in the same file with photos. Replace with copies on permanent archival paper such as Permalife.

Don't destroy negatives or prints after digitizing. If unstable, store originals in cold storage.

Don't eat or drink near photos to avoid damage from spills and to prevent crumbs that will attract insects.

Don't use specialized software to index photos if data can't be exported to another program.

Don't overstuff folders with photos of different sizes. Sleeve individually if feasible.

Don't store prints vertically if they sag and curl in the box. Store vertical boxes horizontally during storage.

IV. Digital Photos

Don't have all your eggs in one basket. Back up all files regularly and store at least one in an off-site location. Cloud storage is an attractive off-site option.

When scanning for long term preservation, do not save the archival master as a compressed file such as JPG. Save them as uncompressed TIFFs and make JPGs to make smaller files when needed.

Don't save digital files with just numbers for file names. Give them names that you will recognize and organize them into folders.

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