



Caring For Damaged Books

To make sound decisions about book repair, conservators prefer to see the book in question and to have specific information about its condition and value. But, in the absence of specifics, these general guidelines are helpful.

When evaluating the condition of a book to determine what repairs are appropriate, conservators are guided by several factors:

- Structure of the binding (whether the book is sewn through the folds, oversewn or adhesive-bound)
- Type of paper used in the text (coated or uncoated)
- Condition of the paper (strong or brittle)
- Intrinsic value of the book
- Potential use

To Repair or Replace

Before undertaking a book repair project, ask yourself about the book's value. Does it have value as an artifact, or is it valuable only for the information it contains?

If the book has no value as an historic artifact, you can consider preserving the contents by means other than repair. You might transfer the information to microfilm, produce a facsimile by photocopying, or simply replace the volume with another copy in better condition.

Assessing the Damage

Damage to books can range from relatively minor (a few loose pages) to extensive (broken bindings). Repairs are most successful when performed by those experienced in book binding and equipped with the necessary tools and materials to make the repairs in the least disruptive manner.

Following are a few of the problems most commonly encountered. At the end of this section are phone numbers and an address to request a list of book conservation service providers who can give you expert help to tackle those problems.

Detached Pages

If a few pages are detached from an otherwise structurally sound book, you can perform a procedure called tipping in - reattaching a single sheet by applying a thin line of adhesive. Instructions for this procedure can be found in the *Library Materials Preservation Manual* by Hedi Kyle (New York: Nicholas T. Smith, 1983).

A few words of caution: This procedure should not be attempted when the paper is brittle. In addition, the adhesive must be stable and non-damaging (for example, starch paste) so that the procedure could be reversed without damaging the book.

Loose Covers

Sometimes the binding of a book may be intact but the whole text block (body of the book) is loose or detached from the cover. If the cover is merely loose, repair involves tightening the hinge with adhesive where the text joins the cover.

When the cover is detached, the book must be recased. If the old cover can no longer provide adequate protection, a new cover is necessary. In circumstances where you need to retain the original cover, you may store the book and its cover in a box (more on that later).

Broken Bindings

Most bindings are either sewn or adhesive-bound. If the pages of a book are loose due to weak or broken sewing, the book needs to be re sewn. This involves removing the text block from the covers, removing the spine lining, if any, and replacing the original thread. Resewing is usually not recommended when the paper is brittle. Adhesive-bound books are particularly susceptible to broken bindings. To repair these, a small portion of the spine is milled off before the pages are reattached with a specially formulated adhesive. Note: This method is not appropriate for brittle or coated paper and should be used only when there is enough margin to avoid obscuring the text with the new binding. Because the text blocks of books rebound by this method become smaller, a new cover is usually required.

Boxes Offer Protection

In certain circumstances, you may opt not to repair a book but to store it in a specially made box. This may be the best solution when the book has value as an artifact, and repair would alter the value inherent in the original. Boxes are also the answer when the condition of the paper is too fragile to permit repair, or when the cost of repair would be prohibitive.

These boxes keep damaged books together while protecting them from dust and light. They offer the greatest protection when custom-made to fit the book. Such boxes should be made only from stable materials that will not contribute to the deterioration of the book over time.

Where to Go for Help

Keep in mind that, while some problems require the expertise of a conservator, other problems may be met by a bindery. Whatever the nature of your needs, always ask for a written proposal of the work to be done, a cost estimate for the repairs, and a timetable for completing the work.

Book and Paper Conservation Service Providers

For a list of firms and individuals who can provide book binding and repair, box making and other conservation services, please contact the Society's Conservation Outreach Program at 651/297-1867 or 1-800-657-3773, FAX at 651/296-9961 or by e-mail at conservationhelp@mnhs.org. The mailing address is: Conservation Outreach Program, Minnesota Historical Society, 345 W. Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906.

To help you select conservation services, online suggestions are provided in a leaflet "*Choosing and Working with a Conservator*" published by the Northeast Document Conservation Center. Another valuable source is the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works. (The NEDCC has a comprehensive selection of leaflets on preservation in *Preservation of Library and Archival Materials: A Manual*.)

"*Choosing and Working with a Conservator*" reviews the nature of book conservation, summarizes the qualifications of a conservator and outlines what you should expect as a consumer of conservation services. Remember, in order to determine the appropriate treatment for a damaged book, the conservator must be able to examine it. The conservator should then provide you with treatment options, cost estimates and a timetable for repairs.

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