

### *Using Keepsake Albums*

- Place documents in polyester sleeves that are slightly bigger than the actual document so that they are easy to slip in or out.
- Store the pages in an album with a slipcase that will protect it from light and dust.



### *Framing for Display*

- Choose mat board that is acid-free and/or archival to prevent deterioration of the document.
- Use corner mounts to attach the document to the mat board. Do not use tape, which leaves residue and can rip the document.
- Select UV filtered acrylic or glass to reduce light exposure and fading.
- Do not let the document touch the glass.
- Hang the frame away from direct sunlight.

## *Preservation Resources*

[Postalmuseum.si.edu/preservation](http://Postalmuseum.si.edu/preservation)

The National Postal Museum's website has information for all audiences and teaches simple preservation techniques that anyone can use at home. You can learn about choosing safe plastics for storing collections; flattening folded or rolled documents; removing staples and paperclips; locating suppliers for museum-quality storage options; and much more to help with your own collections.

The videos and articles also highlight many of the fascinating projects undertaken by the museum's preservation department.



### *Digitizing Your Collections*

[Digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving](http://Digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving)

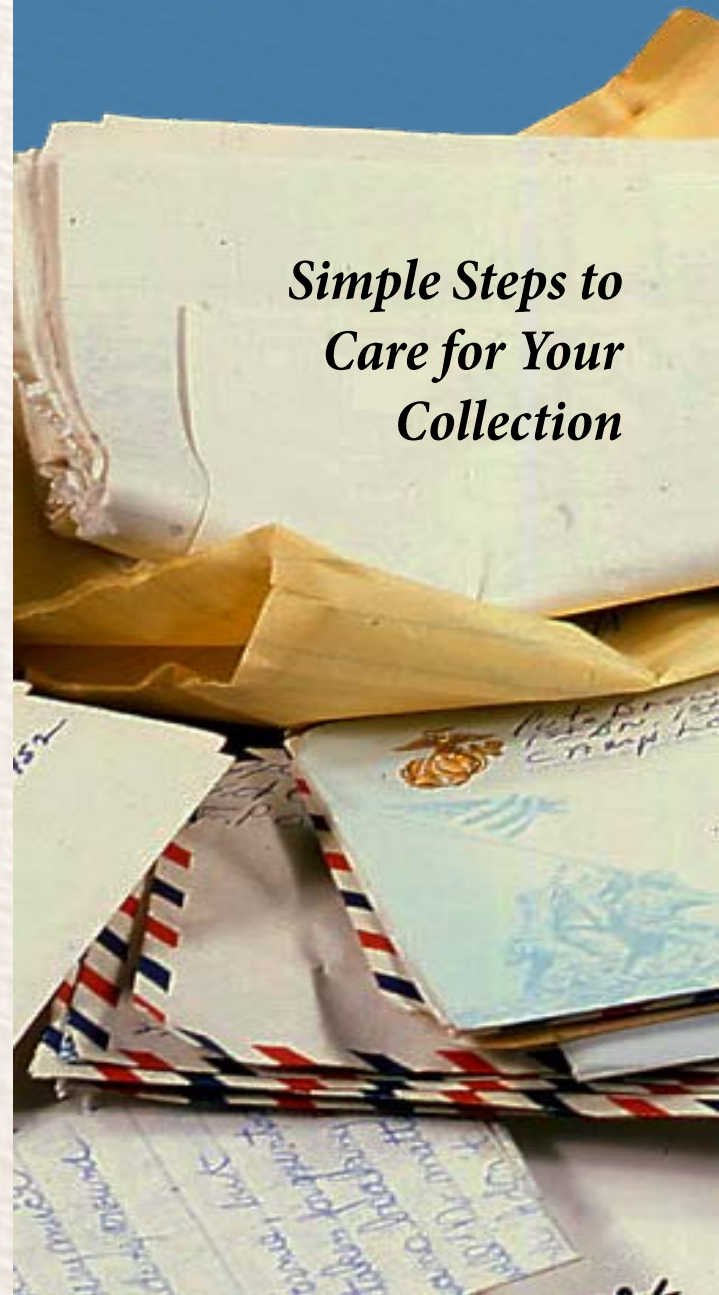
This website by the Library of Congress has recommendations on how to scan your collections, such as letters and photographs, and how to archive your digital files.



Smithsonian  
National Postal Museum

# *Keep & Preserve Your History*

## *Simple Steps to Care for Your Collection*







# Caring for Your Collection

Letters and documents give us windows into our past. They carry both the individual stories of our families and the broader historical narrative of local, national and global communities. Preserving this history can be easy and economical. The simple techniques in this guide will help prolong the life of your family's papers and treasures for generations.

## Getting Started

- Use clean hands. Avoid lotion and hand sanitizer since they contain chemicals that can harm the documents and letters.
- Keep food and drinks away from your collection.
- Work on a clean, flat surface.
- Use only pencil if marking the documents. Making permanent marks alters the history.
- Do not use paperclips, staples, rubber bands or sticky notes, they stain and tear paper. If they are present already, remove carefully.
- Remove letters from envelopes to prevent excessive wear, but store them together because the envelopes may contain important information not found in the letters.
- Take care when flattening folded or rolled documents. Frequent folding and unfolding weakens the paper's fibers and leads to tears.



## Organizing Documents

- Arrange papers in an order that will make sense, such as by date or person.
- Place each document in its own acid-free and/or archival folder or separate by interleaving buffered-bond paper to prevent further deterioration.
- Put photographs in folders or sleeves labeled "PASSED PAT," which indicates the material passed the Photographic Activity Test and will not harm photographs.



## Storing Collections

- Use acid-free and/or archival boxes for long term storage.
- Fill the boxes so items do not shift, but do not overstuff since too much pressure on paper fibers can cause them to break.
- Label the outside of the box.
- Write an inventory recording the contents of each box to help you locate items in the future.
- Store the organized boxes off the floor to prevent water damage. Keep them in an environment with stable temperature and humidity levels by avoiding attics, basements, garages, exterior walls and windows.



**Prevent Deterioration:** An artifact's composition, environment and use, all contribute to the rate and method of deterioration. Understanding these factors will help you plan for the long-term preservation of your collection. The ten most common agents of deterioration are: neglect, light, pests, theft and vandalism, physical force, fire, water, incorrect temperature, incorrect humidity, and chemical deterioration.

**Choose Acid-free:** Boxes, folders and other supplies that are labeled "acid-free" have been manufactured to eliminate active acid from the paper pulp. Manufacturers often refer to these products as "archival." Acid-free products are either pH neutral or buffered to create a pH level of 7 to 11 making it safe for long-term storage.