
Librarians and archivists must make the critical determination of which materials will be important in the future. Difficult decisions must be made to ensure that deteriorated library and archival materials receive the most appropriate preservation options based on the intellectual content, physical aspects, and condition of each item within the context of the mission and policies of the holding institution.

Reduction of chemical and physical deterioration, as discussed elsewhere in this book, is a crucial preservation activity because it affects all materials in the collection under the care of the library or archives. However, each item in the library or archives continues to deteriorate at an individual rate based on its physical and chemical qualities and on its use. Physical deterioration is breakdown of the structure of the item so it no longer functions adequately. For a bound volume, this includes problems relating to paper, leaf attachment, and binding primarily caused by the use of the item. Chemical deterioration is most often seen as embrittlement of paper because of hydrolysis and oxidation-chemical processes affected by the materials used in the original manufacture and by the environment in which the paper has been housed. Procedures must be implemented to identify the materials that are deteriorated either physically or chemically, and to make a selection decision to preserve each item.

Decisions to add materials to library and archival collections are made daily. These decisions relate to current user needs. In academic libraries, this may be for instruction or research; in a public library, to respond to the community’s information needs. The decision may also relate to developing a collection to support the study of a specific subject area. Although simple mending or even library rebinding of deteriorated volumes may appropriately be undertaken without significant review, for seriously deteriorated items a second or reselection decision must be made. Does this item or collection still make the contribution to scholarship assumed when it was purchased or accepted into the collection?

It is very difficult to determine what materials will be needed in the future. Scholarship responds to intellectual discourse and disciplinary trends over time. Materials little used today may be used in innovative ways by future scholars. For example, a scientific monograph of today becomes the fodder of the historian of science tomorrow; vanity press items, bad poetry, romance novels, and popular magazines become documentation for social history; textbooks document educational practice. However, decisions have to be made. No one institution will have the funds to preserve everything in its collections; some materials will be of little importance or will be preserved elsewhere; other materials will no longer meet the mission of the institution.

Three assumptions are made in selecting what to preserve:
• No one institution can afford to preserve everything in its collection. Cooperative agreements will ensure that more items are preserved, but the resources do not exist to preserve everything.
• To accomplish the preservation of those materials that should be preserved, priorities must be set among collections, priorities that must be based on the quality of the collections and the vulnerability of materials to loss. Local institutions must define their strengths and concentrate their preservation resources on those strengths. Nationally, and increasingly internationally, priorities must be set among the collections of a subject area so resources are spent as efficiently as possible.
• Not every item needs to be preserved. Perhaps a representative sample of a class of materials will be enough to serve the needs of scholars in the future. Perhaps some materials will never be called for. Librarians and archivists, with the assistance of scholars when appropriate, are called on to make decisions as to what should be preserved.

Ultimately, the decision to preserve library materials must be made on an item-by-item basis. Each item deteriorates at an individual rate depending on its physical composition and its use. However, the large scale of the preservation problem usually requires that priorities for preservation action be based on considering entire collections. But collections as a whole are made up of individual items. Policies and procedures for treating the individual items that make up these collections will be based on physical condition of the item rather than on quality of the work. Priorities among these collections must be set on a local and a national, or increasingly an international, level.

This chapter is concerned with selection on a general level: how decisions are made as to which items and collections should be preserved, according to what criteria, and what the preservation options are. Physical treatment, reformatting, and other preservation options require a more complex set of selection decisions. Those are dealt with in other chapters.

Identification

Identification is the process of observing that an item is deteriorated and forwarding that item for routine treatment or bibliographic review. Identification is most often a by-product of other library processes. This approach often identifies as many deteriorated materials as the preservation program can manage. It also results in the identification of materials currently used that, because of this use, have a priority for preservation treatment. Special projects will identify materials through separate independent processes.

Deterioration of bindings is usually obvious, although problems with paper strength and leaf attachment may require a more careful review of the item. When a deteriorated volume of a multivolume or serial work is identified, the entire set should be reviewed and decisions made in relation to the condition and relevance of the complete title.

Identification is done through at least one of the following seven ways:

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Condition and Use Identification of deteriorated materials is most often made when materials are used. As volumes are returned at the circulation desk, staff members review them and forward deteriorated materials for a selection decision. Volumes with damaged bindings, detached pages, or flaking embrittled paper are easily identified. Users of the library-faculty, scholars, students-will often notice deteriorated volumes and bring them to the attention of library staff. As these users become more aware of preservation concerns, they are more likely to do so. The circulation staff must be aware of the procedures for handling deteriorated volumes and show appropriate concern when problems are brought to their attention.

Stack maintenance personnel, especially those responsible for shelving and order of the materials, should also be on the lookout for deteriorated materials that may be used internally but not necessarily checked out. Part of the orientation and training of these staff members should be the understanding of the process of deterioration and the identification of preservation problems.

Condition and Library Processing Staff members in other areas of the library or archives also may encounter deteriorated materials. The acquisitions and gifts and exchange staffs will see materials as they come into the collection; cataloging staff may see materials that have come for first time cataloging or for recataloging. The volumes they have identified should also be set aside for a selection decision. In archives, much preservation work is done during the appraisal and processing activities, including the identification of specific items that need additional treatment. One of the responsibilities of curatorial staff and library selectors is to manage the existing collection. As they review the collections, they will identify materials that need preservation attention.

Condition at Shelf Many special projects require a review of the materials at the shelf. Items may be identified for preservation during shelf reading, bar coding, or security taping projects. A project for conversion of cataloging records into machine-readable form (recon project) may also be an appropriate time to review materials at the shelf. Preservation projects may be implemented to identify deteriorated materials in specific portions of the collections. Special collections materials often require review by the curator and a conservator to identify special problems.

Collection and Condition Often collections as a whole are identified for preservation attention, as is discussed later in this chapter. In this case, the library staff members review each item within that collection to identify deteriorated materials.

Scholarly Review Faculty, researchers, or scholars individually, as a group, or through a project administered through a professional organization may identify deteriorated individual titles of permanent research value that should be preserved.
**Vulnerability to Loss or Deterioration** Some materials may be identified for preservation because they are more likely to deteriorate. Examples of this are newspapers or foreign publications printed on ephemeral paper, or materials that are to go on exhibition.

**Value or Uniqueness** Some materials identified for preservation attention because of their importance will be given high priority for preservation. This includes materials of high monetary value or ones that are unique and therefore vulnerable to loss.

**Identification Work Flow**

Responsibility for identification of deteriorated items should be assigned to all library staff who come into contact with its collections. "When an item is identified, a circulation record should be made to facilitate finding the item if a user should request it. A form may be designed to travel with the book indicating who identified it, which collection it came from, and what treatment might be desired. The form can also be used later to designate the selection decision, the searching process, and cataloging information.

Materials identified as deteriorated may be placed on a special shelf or book truck in the circulation unit or other section where they are found. Those that can be repaired in-house or commercially rebound may be sent directly for treatment without review by subject specialists. "When the untreatable materials reach a critical mass, the selectors are asked to review them for withdrawal, storage, or preservation reselection decisions. An alternative work flow is to send these materials as they are found to a unit of the preservation department, which will make the initial triage decisions and do the preservation searching. Then the materials are forwarded to the selector for a decision.

**Decision Making**

After deteriorated materials have been identified, decisions must be made about whether they will be retained and treated. The decisions should be made by the selector, bibliographer, subject specialist, or curator responsible for the development and maintenance of the collection. In some cases an overarching collection development policy will eliminate the need for individual item decisions, but those policies should be made by the collection development staff with the advice and assistance of preservation staff. With clearly articulated policies, support staff will be able to make most of the decisions. Only those requiring reselection decisions or that are not obvious need be referred to the bibliographer.

A library’s preservation policy should derive from its collection development policy. For example, materials in an undergraduate collection may be treated to remain on the shelf as long as possible, and withdrawn or replaced when they become untreatable. Libraries may preserve materials in some subject areas but not in others. Materials in special collections may be retained in original format whatever the cost. A public library may preserve local history materials, but not older business materials or fiction. The

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policies should be made in the context of the mission of the institution. Many libraries will not preserve such materials as offprints, textbooks, or later editions, reprints, or collected works that include no significant new material.

Many preservation programs have a policy that any materials that can be treated through an in-house repair facility or a library binder are immediately forwarded to those units. These materials will usually be relatively new and the paper still flexible. Because these materials have problems indicating they have been used and because the treatment is relatively inexpensive, a policy may be made that they are to be treated without the relatively costly decision-making process.

However, for materials in which the paper has become embrittled and those materials with artifactual value, a reselection decision must be made. The bibliographer, selector, or curator is responsible for determining which materials are still relevant to the collection or to future scholars and should be treated. These options, retaining and preserving in original format or reformatting, involve expensive processes. Therefore it is important to make informed decisions.

Other library options, including deaccessioning (or weeding), transfer to off-site storage areas, and transfer from general collections to special collections, require analogous decision making. This is recognized in recent literature in the field that discusses these processes in combination. The Collection Management and Development Section of the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services has published a Guide to Review of Library Collections: Preservation, Storage, and Withdrawal, and the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries of the American Library Association has published guidelines for transfers from general to special collections. Weeding in general collections, deaccessioning in special collections, appraisal of collections for addition to an archive, and preservation decisions also require decisions review by those knowledgeable about the collection and its use.

The role of the faculty in academic libraries must be considered. Most faculty members do not have the time or interest to be involved in individual item-level preservation decisions. The selector will have to determine when it is appropriate to ask for advice. Formulation of policy statements should include faculty involvement and understanding of the consequences of the policies. The selector and the preservation staff may take the opportunity of such policy formulation to discuss with faculty the need for preservation and the available options.

As part of the review process for preservation, the selector or bibliographer must have information about the item in order to make an informed decision. This involves bibliographic searching of local bibliographic files and regional or national bibliographic utilities to determine

- the relation of the item to the collection. Are there other copies, other editions, other materials by the same author? Based on policy decisions, materials that one would not necessarily expect to find in that library or that are not integral to the collection may not be preserved.

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• whether other accessible copies exist through cooperative arrangements, in the geographic area, or through interlibrary loan. If copies are readily available and it is reasonable to expect they will remain available, the library may decide to rely on other institutions for access.

• whether the item has been preserved elsewhere. If another library has preserved the item and provides access to it, the institution may not want to duplicate effort and costs. A decision must be made for the local institution to replace its copy or to depend on the other institution for access.

• whether replacements are available commercially. If another copy, reprint, facsimile, or microform is available, the library will not want to duplicate effort, but may want to acquire the replacement for local users.

This information will help the selector in deciding which materials do not need to be preserved in the local collection because they exist in other institutions or have already been preserved. The selector needs only to decide whether the item should be replaced locally or put back on the shelf and allowed to die a peaceful death. However, if this search does not eliminate the item from consideration, the selector must make a decision.

Criteria for Decision Making at the Item Level

Criteria for item-level decisions are best expressed as a series of questions to be asked about the material:

**Does the Item Have Artifactual Value?** Library and archival materials have two aspects: visual content and physical content; each item has a text or illustrations that exist on a substrate. The text or other visual content is usually of prime importance for preservation. It is considered by many scholars, librarians, and archivists to be the content of the item. However, scholars who study printing, publishing, papermaking, and binding history consider those aspects of any item of primary importance—constituting in effect their text. The look and feel of the carrier of the text is also of importance to social historians; it adds to the understanding of the use of the text.

Artifactual, intrinsic, or iconic value is defined as having an attribute that makes the item important for its physical characteristics. Attributes that indicate that the physical item should be preserved may be age or date of printing; important or unusual bindings, paper, or printing; or illustrations. The exhibition value, provenance or association, or aesthetic qualities of the item should also be considered. Any item that may need to be authenticated in the future must be retained in original format for further study.

The issue of artifactual value has been debated fiercely. Some scholars, such as G. Thomas Tanselle, feel that every item has value as an artifact. Archivists and librarians realize that there will never be resources to preserve every physical entity. Brittle materials cannot be rejuvenated and thus it may be imperative that the text be preserved before the physical object is completely lost. In some fields and in some libraries, preserving every item may be an appropriate policy. For example, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research

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Center at the University of Texas has collected every copy of the first printing of *Ulysses* that could be found in order to study the process of publishing James Joyce’s work.

The National Archives and Records Administration, the Library of Congress, and other libraries and archives have written policies on the retention of materials in original format. A collection development policy should include this information for every appropriate subject.

Preservation is concerned with both the permanence of the information and of the medium that carries and conveys that information. If an item is determined to have sufficient artifactual value, the original item should be preserved. This may require conservation treatment to stabilize the item and restore it to a useful state, or a protective enclosure to reduce further deterioration.

**Is the Item Important to the Study of Its Field?** Does it contain primary work, or important secondary work? Is it indexed or abstracted, or listed in important bibliographies of the field? Is it important to the publishing record of its field, for example, a first edition? This is a very subjective area of the decision, based on the selector's knowledge of the field and its history.

It can be argued that each subject area relates differently to its literature and that preservation decisions must take into account these differing approaches. Scientists use the literature of science differently than classicists or historians use their primary and secondary sources. Social scientists may only be interested in original data. However, predicting use based on the researchers in one subject does not take into account the interdisciplinary nature of archival and library materials; a different discipline or one we cannot now imagine may have use for these materials even after their primary function is obsolete.

**Is the Item Bibliographically Complete?** The most complete copy should be preserved; one missing pages, issues, or volumes should be left to others to preserve unless it is the most complete copy available. If feasible, a copy should be made complete before preservation by borrowing the missing parts through interlibrary loan. This is especially important for multivolume and serial titles. Other libraries may make decisions based on the fact that one institution has preserved a copy; if that one copy is incomplete, users will not be assured of access to the whole.

**Will Its Preservation in Microformat Save Considerable Space without Limiting Access Unduly?** Back volumes of scientific journals may be put on microfilm because they are consulted rarely and take up much space. Although this pertains primarily to the decision to microform an item, it can be an important criterion for the decision.

**Has This Item Been Heavily Used?** Or will it be used in the future? This is a difficult criterion because there is little indication that current or past use indicates future use. Current use, however, may be the best indication of future use. If the item has been used
frequently, especially recently, it should be preserved. If no one has used it in its time in the collection, it may not be as important.

**Are There Any Constraints Caused by Copyright Laws?** Although collections are empowered to replace deteriorated materials for the collection, copyright must be considered for those materials not in the public domain when photocopy or microfilm reformatting is done.

**Is This Item in Danger of Being Lost?** Some materials that are used heavily or are in a very fragile format may be given preservation treatment before they deteriorate further in order to prevent future loss.

**Does This Item Have Permanent Research Value?** This concept is very difficult to define and is quite subjective. It can be seen as a combination of all the other criteria. If the preceding criteria indicate that the item should be preserved, then that item has permanent research value.

Once the decision has been made to preserve an item, it is important that the best option be chosen. Figure 1 lists many of these options along with criteria for each option. The decision not to preserve may lead to withdrawing the item or replacing it on the shelf until it is too deteriorated to use. This is called planned deterioration or benign neglect. Planned deterioration, however, should be the result of conscious decision, not simple oversight. For example, newspapers or other materials available elsewhere on microfilm may be kept so that the user has access to them as long as they are usable.
Figure 1
Options for Treatment of Individual Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planned Deterioration</th>
<th>Repair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will survive use</td>
<td>Only minor damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important enough to treat</td>
<td>Facilities available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserved elsewhere</td>
<td>Would not withstand machine binding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retain original binding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rebind Commercially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Major damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heavy use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not artifactual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Withdraw, Deaccession</th>
<th>Reformat/Preservation Microfilm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Out of scope for collection</td>
<td>Brittle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other copies, editions in collection</td>
<td>No artifactual value, if original will be damaged by filming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available elsewhere, not necessarily locally</td>
<td>Use copy to protect vulnerable original</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Replace</th>
<th>Reformat/Digital Copy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can't be repaired</td>
<td>Access primary goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local copy necessary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reformat/Preservation Photocopy</th>
<th>Transfer to Limited Access/Storage Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can't be repaired</td>
<td>Vulnerable to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy use (reserve, reference)</td>
<td>Valuable or rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper copy necessary</td>
<td>Limited use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conservation Treatment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warrants cost of conservation treatment</td>
<td>Artifactual value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rare or valuable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Selection and Decision Making at the Collection level

Many libraries may decide that only materials that are circulated are to be preserved. However, it is important to future scholarship that significant collections of materials relating to specific subject areas remain accessible regardless of current use patterns. Library staff identifies important or "great" collections for preservation attention. Identifying collections as a priority for preservation attention may result in better storage conditions or controlled access in addition to treatment or reformatting. The collection development and management staff working with the preservation staff should identify these collections based on criteria that indicate their quality in relation to other collections in the subject area.

The Yale University Library has completed a study to determine its most important collections. A committee identified 140 coherent subject groupings and special named collections in a priority order for preservation attention. Their approach was to keep the integrity of the broader intellectual value of whole subject areas regardless of use patterns and "to identify groups of materials that should be preserved and within those groups items that need preservation." The criteria used were size, strength, makeup, academic priorities, value to scholarship, and preservation needs.

A few coordinated attempts have been made at defining the great collections on a national level, such as the Research Libraries Group (RLG) Great Collections Microfilming Project. But in each case, it has been the work of the local institution to determine which of its collections are important to the scholarship of the specific subject and therefore are a national priority. Scholarly groups have worked through the Commission on Preservation and Access (now part of the Council on Library and Information Resources) to assist in defining the great collections in their subject fields.

Collections already in a library’s special collections department may be relatively easy to identify as important and thus worthy of consideration for preservation priority. However, many institutions have large subject collections built over time, in some cases many such collections, which represent subject strengths. These collections should be identified for establishing their preservation priority. Such collections may be significant because they meet local academic or community research priorities or because they meet national needs. They may have met current needs at some point, but those needs may have changed. The quality of these collections may be determined through the use of several decision criteria.

Size of Collection Quantity does not always indicate quality, but collection size gives some indication of strength. The National Shelflist Count, published in 1986 by the Resources and Technical Services Division of the American Library Association, compares the size of collections based on subject. A collection that ranks high in numbers of items in relation to other collections in that subject should be considered for preservation attention.

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**Strength Indicated by Conspectus Level** The Association of Research Libraries North American Collections Inventory Project, based on the development of the Research Libraries Group Conspectus (now the responsibility of Washington Library Network, which has merged with the Online Computer Library Center, OCLC), is an online inventory of research library collections. The conspectus indicates levels of collecting by subject. The local institution indicates whether it has collected retrospectively or collects currently to what level within subject areas defined by the Library of Congress classification. Although the conspectus is admittedly a subjective document and is not yet complete, and not every library has participated in developing their conspectus values, it can be useful for determining collection strengths in relation to other collections within the same subject areas. The levels are from 0 (out of scope) to 3 (instructional), 4 (research level), and 5 (comprehensive). The conspectus indicates both absolute levels in relation to the universe of publications in the subject area and a comparison with other collections in that subject. A collection that ranks at least at 4, or research level, should be examined for treatment given its research value and priority as a subject area collection. Level 5 (comprehensive) indicates the presence of special materials, and as such, suggests a priority for preservation activities.

Many libraries will contain one or two level 4 or above collections. Major research libraries, however, may contain a hundred or more level 4 collections, making the conspectus values less useful for determining preservation priorities.

**Past, Current, or Projected Future Use of Collection** High current use indicates local interest and priority. Use through interlibrary loan or visiting scholars indicates national priority. The strongest collections should logically receive heavy use from either local or national constituencies. Although difficult to project, discernable trends in scholarship may indicate future use. Collections with use from local or national constituencies should be given priority for preservation.

**History or Provenance of Collection** Collections may have strength because they were built under special circumstances. A significant gift or endowment in one area, or strong faculty, alumni, curator, or donor interest, may have resulted in strong collections. In some cases a deed of gift may entail a legal obligation to retain and preserve a collection.

**Publications or Bibliographies Based on the Collection** Are there well-known bibliographies or publications that are based on the collection, or has information about the collection been published? This suggests that the collection may be important in the future because of enhanced access.

**Quality and Extent of Bibliographic Control** Is the collection under bibliographic control, completely cataloged in a national database? Increased access makes this collection more important for future scholars. If the collection does not have adequate bibliographic
control, the cost of preservation activities may be considerably higher if they entail more extensive conversion of records or original cataloging.

**Available Funding** Preservation of entire collections is an expensive proposition. It is prudent to give priority to collections that have a priority for internal funding or will attract outside government or private funding. Although this is political in nature, it is a pragmatic consideration in setting priorities among collections.

**Media of the Materials in the Collection** Are the majority of the items in a collection of an ephemeral medium that dictates that they need to be preserved sooner than other collections? For example, newspaper or pamphlet collections, gazettes, and telephone books may be more at risk than less fragile collections. Color, cellulose nitrate and cellulose acetate-based photographic media and glass plate negatives are at risk and should be considered a priority, as should all magnetic media.

**The Cooperative Responsibilities of the Institution** Has the institution made any commitments to the preservation of materials in a specific collection through local, state, regional, or national cooperative programs? Past commitments may indicate strong collections.

**Faculty Review of Collections** Are faculty, scholarly professional organizations, or other groups of scholars interested in preserving this collection? Has this collection been identified as possessing certain or specific strengths that other collections in the subject area do not have? The Modern Language Association, the American Philological Association, the Renaissance Society, medievalists, and art historians have become involved in determining what should be preserved in their fields.

**Condition and Vulnerability of the Materials in the Collection** Does the collection have a considerable number of materials that have deteriorated? The collections with the most preservation problems but each item may still be subject to faculty review for importance to scholarship. A faculty committee may develop a list of the most important tides in the field or review materials as they are identified. An example is the American Philological Association project to microfiche the important literature in classics printed between 1850 and 1918.

**Costs**

Although ideally the cost of treatment should not dictate the treatment, practically it must be an important consideration. The treatment should not cost more than the item is worth. An item may be put into a protective enclosure to slow deterioration even though the appropriate option would be full conservation treatment, which would be more costly than the item merits. Reformatting is more costly than minor or routine physical treatment.

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Another consideration must be the cost of making individual item decisions. These decisions can take considerable time. Policy decisions that obviate the need for individual decisions help to keep costs to a minimum.

Conclusion

The decision to preserve materials on a collection or individual level is a difficult, time-consuming, and expensive endeavor. A process must be developed to identify materials that are deteriorated. Each institution must determine policies to guide the decision-making process, so that decisions can be made as rationally and routinely as possible. Policies must relate to the mission of the institution. The strengths of the collections and the most important materials in the individual collections must be identified as well as the materials most vulnerable to loss. Political considerations, such as costs, funding, and local interest in the collections, must be taken into account. The most appropriate and cost-effective preservation option must be chosen for each item. The other chapters in this book discuss in detail the process of deciding which preservation option is most appropriate for which type of materials and the policies and procedures relating to each option.

Note


Suggested Readings


Brown, Charlotte, and Janet Gertz. "Selection for Preservation: Applications for College


Harvard University Library. Preserving Harvard’s Retrospective Collections.


O'Toole, James. On the Preservation of Books and Documents in Original Form.


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