



Rare Books Handling Techniques

Gloves or no gloves?

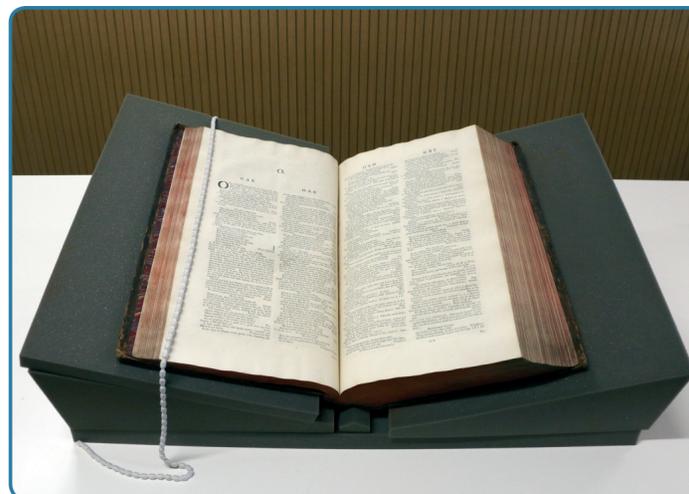
Wash your hands before going into the Reading Room to prevent grease and dirt transferring to collection items.

Gloves are only worn if the leather bindings are disintegrating creating an orangey powder called 'red rot' or if the user is wearing nail varnish.



Using foam-wedge book supports

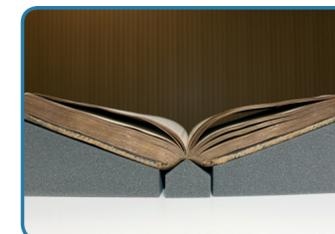
Most books are not designed to open flat and forcing them will cause damage to the binding and spine. Certain styles of binding need support in different places, as shown.



Hollow back binding



Rigid tight-back binding



Flexible tight-back binding, with additional spine



Flexible tight-back binding, with extra wedge

Using cushions

Cushions provide all-round, gentle support and can be used for smaller books, fragile books that need to be handled with more delicacy or books with tight bindings that do not open easily.



Using snake weights

Avoid touching the pages by using the snake weights to hold open the book at the desired page. Remove completely before turning the page. Be careful not to lay the snake weight on top of illustrations or annotations in the margins.

Touch items as little as possible to prevent making marks.

Follow text with acid-free slips of paper rather than fingers.

Handle all items with care and turn pages carefully. Avoid leaning on books or archives as this may damage the binding structure or tear the paper.



Large format items

These items can be unwieldy and difficult to handle due to their size. Make use of the oversize book supports and ensure you have enough space to work. Do not place anything on top of them.



Items with foldouts

Foldouts in books are vulnerable to damage because they are difficult to unfold and refold. The folds and the point at which they are attached to the book will be the weakest parts. Older material can be especially vulnerable. Do not place weights on the folds. Unfold and refold items in the same pattern and with care.



Loose leaf items in archives

Handle papers carefully, keep them tidy and do not change the page order. Do not place anything on top of papers and do not lean on them when making notes. Never lift papers by the corner alone or pull sheets out from the pile. Keep items with their assigned folder or wallet. Do not square up papers by knocking them together on the desk top as this causes damage.



Unusual formats

Scrolls, charters and seal can vary in structure and size. Use weights to hold the item and take care unfolding and refolding or when moving items. Consult with the librarian on best handling practice.

