



## Are gloves necessary for handling archives?

This sheet will explain:

- when to use gloves;
- what gloves to use;
- how to reduce handling.



Our hands are sources of acidity, moisture, dirt and oils. All these can have a short and long term, detrimental effect on sensitive materials such as archives. Gloves however, hamper dexterity which can increase risk of physical damage. They also can be uncomfortable to wear for long periods of time.

Recommendations and advice may vary depending upon what is being handled and in what context, but generally – **clean and dry hands are best**. Materials such as metals, textiles and photographs however are best handled using gloves.

## Health and safety

Nitrile or vinyl gloves will prevent the user having direct contact with dirt and mould for example which may irritate the skin. Care must be taken to use a new pair each time and avoid transferring anything from dirty gloves. If not using gloves, wash and dry hands before and after eating.

## Types of gloves

Cotton gloves, if clean and not fluffy can be used. They can be more comfortable to wear, however dirt tends to cling to fibres which can also catch on the edges of items. Latex gloves can cause allergic reactions to some, so perhaps should be avoided.

Ill-fitting gloves can potentially cause more damage than they prevent.

## Clean hands

Clean dry hands are suitable for most archival items except photographic or mouldy material.

## Minimising handling and contact

Think in advance about what you are handling, where you are using it and for how long, then set up accordingly.

Tools can also aid handling and minimise contact, as well as reduce the cumulative damaging effects of handling. Use paper markers rather than fingers to follow text. A spatula can support a page when turning it as well as careful use of weights and rests. Cover parts of an item you do not need to see with paper to protect it; and a transparent cover or sleeve is an excellent way of viewing without contact.

A support such as a piece of card or paper, or a box for an object can be used to move an item from one place to another. Turning an item over can be done without touching if it is within a paper folder for example.