

HOW TO CARE FOR NEW AND OLD BOOKS

by Stephanie Bond

Does your heart break at the sight of a deteriorated book? (Especially if it's your own inventory?) Unfortunately, the very act of being displayed is the most damaging environment for a book—fire, water, light, and other natural elements are the greatest enemies. The following **DOs** and **DON'Ts**, however, will ensure that your precious investment is preserved as long as possible.

- Older books might actually be more durable than newer books because of the quality of materials used. Still, **DO** monitor your inventory, especially the more fragile and valuable books at least once a month to help catch any environmental damage while you can still save the volume.
- **DO** condition leather-bound books regularly to keep the covers from cracking or drying out.
- **DO** use flame-retardant curtains and carpeting/rugs in your store to reduce the threat/damage of fire.
- To reduce the chance of water damage, **DON'T** position shelving directly below water pipes and sprinkler heads.
- Excessive humidity will cause the pages of your books to stick together. **DO** use a dehumidifier to reduce moisture in the air. Fifty percent humidity, give or take a few points, is considered best for book storage.
- Conversely, excessive heat and dryness will make book pages brittle. If necessary, **DO** add moisture to your display area with a humidifier to achieve fifty percent.
- **DON'T** forget about the stockroom, which is often exposed to more extreme swings in temperature. If books aren't on display, they should be stored in a cardboard box in a cool, dry place.
- If you display books in your windows, **DO** install an ultraviolet blocking tint on the windows and/or change out the books every day.
- **DO** handle every book carefully. **DON'T** open a book wide enough to break the spine, and **DON'T** turn down the corner of a page to mark a reading place.

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- **DON'T** pack books too closely on the shelves—they might stick together, and your customers could damage them trying to wedge them back onto the shelf. Likewise **DON'T** shelve books so loosely that they flop around on the shelf. Use booksends to support volumes in shelves that are less than full.
- Some bookshelves are more decorative than practical, so **DO** inspect your shelves for damaging surfaces, such as rough wood or curlicue corners that can snag book jackets, etc.
- **DO** use glass-enclosed shelves to protect more valuable books from fire, water, and rough handling.
- If a book has a cut-out cover, **DO** shelve it face-out to reduce the chance of tearing the susceptible cover.
- **DON'T** display a book on its side unless it is an oversize book and even then, don't stack other books on top of it unless you change them out often.
- Fluorescent light yellows books, so **DO** use incandescent lighting to extend the life of paperbacks.
- **DO** occasionally rearrange books so that, for instance, the same titles aren't always on the top shelf.
- **DO** dust your books regularly and install a good filter in your heating/AC system.
- Some insects flock to the feast of bindings, pulp, and paste used in books. If you have a pervasive problem, especially when preserving old books and collections, **DO** contact a professional who will guarantee that no pesticides will come into contact with your inventory.
- Some bookstores feature popular mascots, especially cats. But climbing animals can damage books, so **DO** keep the litter box away from your most valuable volumes! ~**SBond**

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