



Museum Textile Services

Clothing and Textile Storage Guidelines

Museum Textile Services helps museums large and small assess and upgrade their historic clothing and textile storage areas. These guidelines are equally helpful for individuals concerned with the best way to protect their collections within the home. Regardless of budget or size, all storage areas must be clean, cool, dry, dark, and as free as possible from drastic changes in temperature and humidity, thus ruling out the basement or attic.

Textiles

Textiles should be stored as clean as possible because dust particles can cut fibers through friction and abrasion. Many textiles can be vacuumed with a low-suction hand vacuum providing a few basic precautions are first taken (see our **Vacuuming Textiles** handout for instructions.) Not all textiles are stable enough for vacuuming, though.

Textiles should have no direct contact with materials such as wood, regular tissue, or other wrapping paper. Most paper tends to be acidic; acid is especially damaging to textiles. Instead, textiles can be wrapped in acid-free tissue or in clean, white cotton cloth, such as an old sheet or pillowcase, or in muslin. Because textile fibers need to be in an environment where there is some air movement, fabrics should not be sealed in air-tight plastic bags or containers to prevent damage from moisture condensation. Also, because some plastics off-gas as they deteriorate with age, they should not come in direct contact with textiles.

The best place to store antique fabrics is in an archival storage box. If necessary, a lined drawer can be converted to a suitable storage environment (see our **Template for an Archival Drawer Liner** handout for instructions.) Avoid storing delicate textiles at the bottom of a drawer under heavier items; always order textiles from heaviest on the bottom to lightest or most fragile on top. Do not over pack drawers or boxes.

It is preferable to store textiles flat, subject to minimum abrasion, folding, and pressure. If folding is necessary, avoid sharp folds by padding at the points of folds with tissue sausages. A piece of tissue between each textile can facilitate handling and protect against abrasion and tears.

Larger textiles can also be safely stored rolled on tubes. Acid-free tubes are best, however a regular cardboard tube can be covered with a barrier such as Marvelseal or polyethylene. The greatest care must be taken to avoid creasing the fabric in the process of rolling it. Proper tension can be maintained if rolling is done on a table or other flat surface that is at least as wide as the cloth and that has been cleared for this purpose (see our **Rolling Textiles** handout for instructions.)

Pile carpets should be rolled with the pile down and facing away from the tube as you roll. Tapestries should be rolled with the tube parallel to the weft. Remember to leave enough extra tube on the ends to facilitate handling and cradling. Some things that should not be rolled include painted textiles and textiles with surface decorations. Unless absolutely necessary for space reasons, multi-layered textiles, such as quilts, should not be rolled.

Historic Clothing

We recommended that all clothing and their accessories be stored flat. If folding is necessary, garments should be folded following natural body lines or seam-lines, such as waistline, armholes, etc. Sleeves should be folded carefully across the bodice front or back. Sleeves, shoulders, and other parts may need to be lightly padded with tissue. A piece of tissue between each textile can facilitate handling and protect against abrasion and tears.

Hanging storage is an option only for clothing that is in good condition and strong enough at the shoulders and where the skirt meets the bodice. Weak items should only be stored in a box. All hangers should be well-padded with archival materials and the garments should be loosely packed within the closet to encourage air flow.