



Museum Textile Services

Displaying Textiles

The following guidelines are designed to help you choose the best locations and methods for displaying your textiles. These recommendations are meant only for textiles in stable condition with proper mounting, framing, or support. Continuing to display a textile under poor display conditions will accelerate deterioration and shorten the textile's useful and/or decorative lifespan. By the time you see visible changes, such as color fading, yellowing, tears, or insect activity, your textile has already been irreversibly damaged. Conservation will stabilize the textile and allow it to be displayed again, but only if sensible precautions are taken.

Framed Textiles

- Displaying a textile in a frame with no glazing, or with non-filtering glazing, is harmful to the textile. Anything framed prior to the 1980s will have plain glass or acrylic with no ultraviolet-filtering capacities. Displaying a framed textile in an area of low or indirect light will not protect it from light damage. All framed textiles should be retrofitted with UV-filtering glazing or stored safely.
- The best place in your home for a framed textile is an interior wall that receives little or no light on a regular basis. Excellent areas include rooms with drawn blinds and hallways. Even with UV-filtered glazing, a framed textile can be harmed by light, particularly sunlight, which heats up the fibers causing harmful expansion and contraction. Textiles warmed by the sun are also favorite destinations for insects such as carpet beetles.

Free-hanging textiles

- Textiles have been used throughout history to cover walls and windows. To protect curtains from light damage, make sure they are lined and well supported. Check periodically for water damage after storms. The best way to protect window treatments, especially sheer curtains, from light damage is to place an ultraviolet filter on the window itself. A commercial firm will help you install UV-filtering film on your windows when you are ready to make the investment.
- Tapestries, quilts, and other large, flat textiles, can be safely displayed on a wall without a display case if the conditions in the room are suitable. Light, temperature and relative humidity, traffic, pets, and insects, such as webbing clothes moths, can all cause damage to free-hanging textiles. Once a safe location has been determined to hang your flat textile, a conservator can provide a Velcro hanging system. Ideally, two textiles, such as two similarly-sized quilts, will be rotated to allow each one six months on display followed by six months in an archival storage box kept in a safe location. Upgrading to a display case can allow for longer-term display.

Carpets, pillows etc.

- When a carpet is walked on regularly, it becomes soiled and damaged. To protect an important carpet, place it in an area of little traffic and away from pets. Eventually you may decide instead to display the carpet on a wall.
- Pillows, shawls, blankets, and other decorative household textiles are an important part of making us feel at home. When using an older or historically important textile in a decorative way, make sure it is not being accidentally harmed. Give pets their own bedding and keep your feet off if you want to protect your investment. Relegating your favorite items to a guest bedroom or office may extend its lifespan.
- Historic quilts and coverlets will not survive daily use on the bed. An heirloom textile that has survived generations can be quickly destroyed when put back into regular use. Make a distinction between your everyday textiles, those seen or used on special occasions, and the irreplaceable items of your family's history.