

Layered Preservation

Layering is a concept used all around us. When it's cold out, we dress in layers to help keep heat near our bodies. Your computer may be behind a router with a hardware firewall, and have anti-virus, anti-spam and firewall software, Your car has anti-lock brakes, airbags and seatbelts... all layers of protection for the occupants. Use this same layering concept to protect and preserve your treasured scrapbook albums, photos, documents and memorabilia.

In deciding how to layer, you need to consider what you're protecting against. Typically, the factors to be concerned with include:

- Heat: The higher the temperature your items experience, the faster they will deteriorate.
- Humidity: Damp environments promote mold growth.
- Sunlight: Prolonged exposure to UV rays from sunlight can fade inks and dyes in photos, papers or textiles.
- Airborne: Your home has dust particles, along with particles from cleaning sprays, cooking, air fresheners, and the like.
- People: Handling can cause physical damage as well as the transfer of dirt, oils and acids found on hands.
- Pest: Insects and mice can destroy whatever they get into!

The items that can be used to layer and protect your treasures can include:

- Archival boxes
- Archival file folders
- Polyester envelopes
- Polyethylene bags
- Page protectors
- Scrapbook Albums
- Deacidification spray
- Acid free envelopes
- Your house

To illustrate the layering concept, let's assume you have an old photograph of your grandmother when she was a child. Before you can layer, you need to decide how you will use this photograph. Do you want to look at it occasionally or do you just want to store it? Do you want to display it? Will it be with other photos or is it singular? Considering these, here are some options:

1. To look at it occasionally, you could put the photo inside an archival page protector, which goes inside an archival scrapbook album along with other pictures. This allows viewing the picture and keeps peoples hands off of it. The album, when not in use, can be stored inside a chest or closet to keep dust out.

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2. Another method that allows you to look at the photo occasionally, yet minimize damage from touching it, is to put it inside a polyester envelope. The envelope can then be stored inside an archival photo storage box. The box allows for easy retrieval when you want to show it to others, plus provides further protection from dust and sunlight.

The same idea applies to other items you want to preserve. For instance:

3. Spray your child's grade school paper with a deacidification spray that also applies a buffering layer. The spray neutralizes the acid in the paper, which causes brittleness over time, and the buffering protects the paper from cross contamination should a non acid-free paper come in contact with it. Then put the school papers inside archival envelopes or file folders, which can go inside an archival box.
4. Put your mom's quilt or daughter's baptismal gown inside a heavy polyethylene bag. The bag is acid free, protects the clothing from airborne particles, plus allows handling for viewing. The bags can then be placed inside a storage box or closet to protect against sunlight and pests.

Include layering when you hand down items or give gifts. For example, if you want to pass on the family photos your parents had, put them in page protectors and albums before giving them away. Or deacidify the newspaper you bought on your grandchild's birth day, put it in an archival box, then present it as a gift to the new parents.

These examples illustrate the layering concept. If you have memories that are important, build layers of protection around them so the generations that follow can enjoy them also.

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