



CONSERVATION LEAFLET

March 2002 (revised July 2014)

REMOVAL OF FASTENERS FROM DOCUMENTS

Over time, a variety of fasteners—staples, paper clips, grommets, straight pins, brads, rubber bands, and ribbons—have been used to hold related documents together. All of these items can cause damage to documents. Metal fasteners rust and corrode, and brittle papers can break against the sharp edges during handling. While it may be too time consuming to remove all damaging fasteners, remove the most harmful—rusting paperclips, straight pins, and rubber bands.

Removing fasteners without causing damage to the documents requires special care. To prevent the document from shifting and becoming damaged as fasteners are removed, place it on a flat hard surface and hold it lightly in place with one hand on or near the fastener.

Staples. If documents are in good condition—strong and flexible—a staple remover may be used. Care must be taken in doing this since staple removers can tear thin paper or remove an entire corner of a document. If documents are fragile, use a microspatula (a small tool available from suppliers of archival products), to remove staples. Place the document face down and use the staple remover or the pointed end of the microspatula to lift the shanks of the staple one at a time. Turn the document over and carefully use the staple remover or the rounded end of the microspatula to pull the staple through from the front.

Paper Clips. Use a microspatula to remove paper clips, particularly if they have rusted or if the document is fragile. Gently press on the long side of the paper clip with one finger and use the microspatula to lift the short side of the clip straight up and away from the page.

Grommets. The improper removal of grommets will result in significant tears. The following method, which is safe and quick, can be used when necessary. The tools required are a set of punches with concave tips and sharp beveled edges, a hammer, and very heavy cardboard to protect the flat surface used. Place a punch that is slightly larger than the diameter of the grommet over it and strike the punch with the hammer to cut through the layers of paper and allow the grommet to fall out. Two or three strikes with the hammer may be necessary for thick stacks of paper. If documents are fragile, use small scissors to make a cut in the paper and carefully remove the grommet.

Straight Pins. Straight pins have a tendency to rust and become difficult to remove from paper. There is also a danger of pricking your finger. Use a microspatula to gently lift the head of the pin slightly off of the paper and then, use a small pair of pliers to pull the pin out by the head.

Brads. Place the document face down and use the rounded end of a microspatula to lift the flanges one at a time. Turn the document over and use the pointed end of the microspatula to lift the brad out of the paper.

Rubber Bands. In the early stages of deterioration, rubber bands become soft and tacky, often adhering to the paper fibers and to adjoining documents. In time, they harden and crack and become embedded in the paper fibers. An effective method of removing them is to use a microspatula to gradually break contact between the rubber band and the paper. To avoid tears, keep the microspatula flat, rather than flicking at the rubber band or trying to lift it from the paper. If the rubber band will not release without damaging the paper, leave it as is.

Ribbons and String. Ribbons fade and fray, and string can cut into fragile documents. Use scissors to cut ribbons or string away from documents. Many documents that are tied are tri-folded and may require humidification and flattening before other work can proceed.

Methods of Attaching Documents. Following the removal of damaging fasteners, use Plastiklips to reattach documents that are in good physical condition.

If documents are fragile, use one of the following methods to keep them together: fold a strip of acid-free paper (one inch wide by four inches long) over the top edges of the documents and attach a paperclip; segregate small groups of documents within a folded sheet of acid free paper; or place each group of documents in separate folders.

Fragile documents are best protected by encasing them in inert conservation quality polyester—sealed with double-stick tape around the edges. Polyester sleeves or folders are also effective. Note: encapsulation does not slow chemical deterioration. It only protects fragile documents during handling.

Supplies and suppliers. Plastiklips and microspatulas are available from archival products catalogs. Punches can be purchased from hardware or discount stores. The following companies specialize in archival products:

- Hollinger Metal Edge: www.metaledgeinc.com
- Light Impressions: www.lightimpressionsdirect.com
- University Products: www.universityproducts.com

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