

WHAT'S BEHIND YOUR FRAME?

Many of the materials used in picture framing can actually harm your artwork or documents. Even many of the materials that are sold as archival-quality could be potentially harmful. Poor quality framing materials can accelerate the deterioration of paper based objects. Oxidation and the release of acidic gasses from poor quality materials may cause objects to become embrittled, stained and discolored.

COMMON CULPRITS

Be sure to check (or have your framer check) what materials may be hidden behind your picture frames. Look out for these common culprits hiding behind your framed objects:

- Cardboard
- Foam boards
- Strawboard
- Old newspaper
- Lignin containing paper-based mat boards
 - check the beveled edge for yellowing or discoloration, an indication of acidic materials
- Kraft (brown) paper
- Non-archival tapes
- Works hinged to window mats rather than works hinged to the backing board

CHOOSE SAFE, ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

There are many safe and archival materials available to use in picture frames, including:

- 100% Cotton rag mat board
- Museum board
- Coroplast
- Archival corrugated cardboard (blue color)
- Melinex (archival polyester plastic)
- Archival paper (acid free and lignin free)

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR FRAMER

Learn the right questions to ask your framer when purchasing a new picture frame. Choose a reputable and ethical picture framer who is committed to the long term preservation of your artwork and documents.

How will my artwork be secured inside of the frame, and will the method of attachment cause any permanent changes to my object?

- Non-adhesive photo corners and Japanese paper hinges are some of the safest methods of attachment.
- Hinging with non-archival tape or even gummed linen tape may cause staining or other damage to your object.
- Dry mounting and spray mounting are often irreversible processes. Mounting an object to foam board could be especially harmful to your object.
- Have your object attached to an archival backing board vs. having it hinged to the window mat. An object that is attached to the window mat is in danger of tearing or skinning during future unframing.
- Your window mat should be hinged on its longest side to an archival backing board. Window mats left unattached to a backing board are more likely to sag or shift.

What is the mat made of?

- The best mat to use is 100% cotton rag mat or museum board (acid free and lignin free).
- Materials used to frame photographic objects should pass the Photographic Activity Test (PAT).
- Paper based mats sold as “archival” and “acid-free” may still contain lignin. Look for “lignin free”.

What kind of backing boards will be used?

- Acid free mat board with a secondary backing of Coroplast or archival cardboard is recommended.
- Foam boards are not recommended

How much UV Protection does the glazing offer?

- Compare all of the available glazing choices. The most expensive choice may not offer more protection than the most basic UV protectant glass choice.
- For especially sensitive objects display may not be recommended. Consider having an archival reproduction made for display and house the original objects in an archival housing.

By Annajean Hamel, NEDCC, 2014