



# EXHIBITS 101

The Basics of How to Curate & Install an Exhibit  
National Archives Conference for Fraternities and Sororities

June, 2016

# Exhibits 101

This workshop is intended to provide basic instruction in designing and installing a successful library exhibit. Thoughtful design ensures that an exhibit can be understood and enjoyed by a diverse audience, including people with disabilities. Careful selection of exhibit materials and proper use of supports helps protect library materials during exhibit. Topics discussed in this workshop will include:

- Designing an Exhibit
- Preservation Considerations for Exhibit Spaces
- Exhibit Installation: Materials and Procedures



# Designing an Exhibit

# Designing an Exhibit

*Aesthetics, clarity, and accessibility* are all important components of exhibit design. Thoughtful design ensures that your exhibit can be understood and enjoyed by a diverse audience.

# Selection of Materials

- What idea are you trying to communicate? Choose items to support this idea.
- How many items will be displayed?
- How will these items be displayed? Think three-dimensionally!
- Will they fit in the case? **Check the case dimensions!**

# Selection of Materials

- Does the item have visual appeal or impact?
- How does it fit intellectually, visually, and physically with the other items in the case?
- Is it damaged or fragile?
- How rare or valuable is the item?
- Consider the risk to the materials from theft, vandalism, environmental damage, inherent vices, insects

# Exhibit Layout

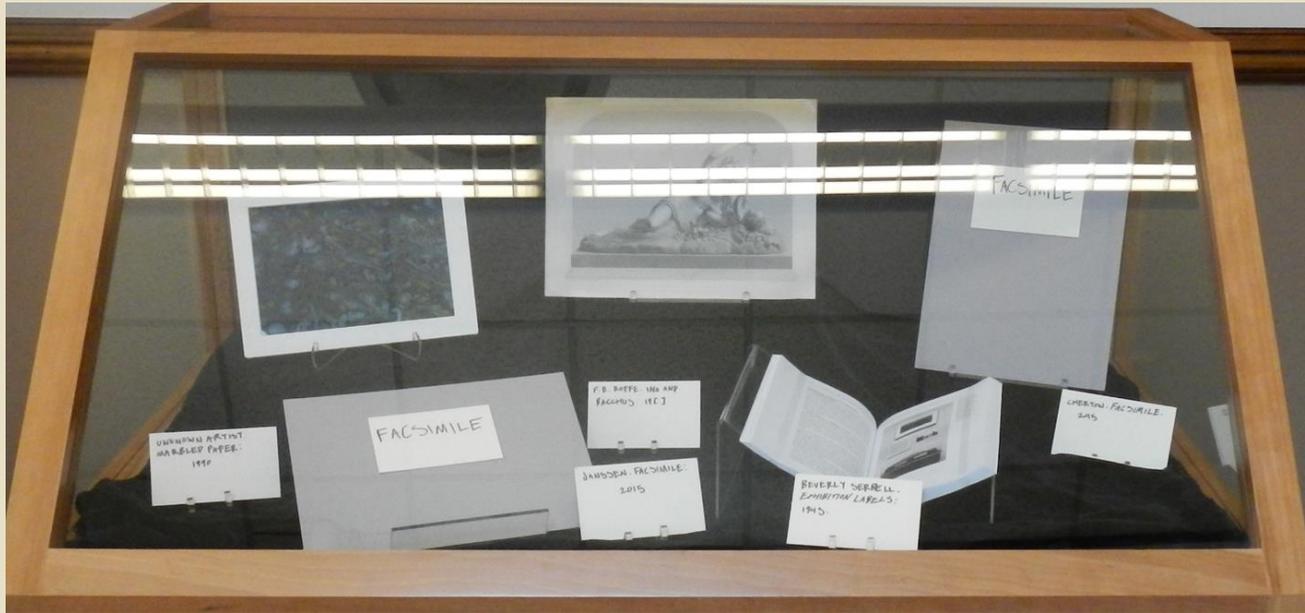
- Avoid clutter. Limit the number of items and display accessories.
- Use simple, preferably solid color backdrops for items. This improves visibility, especially for those with vision deficits.
- Use risers to take advantage of vertical space.
- Whenever possible, prop up exhibit materials at an angle to improve visibility.

# Bad Display Case Example



- Original color documents are displayed in a bright hallway.
- Flat paper items are sagging and unsupported.
- The glass weight is holding the desired page open, but it distracts from the information and puts uneven weight on the book. Polyethylene strapping should be used to keep a book open to the correct page.
- The descriptive labels are propped against the objects on display.
- The background fabric is a colorful print. This is distracting and may make the display inaccessible to a viewer with vision deficits.
- Items are displayed flat. This lacks visual appeal and may make them inaccessible to viewers.

# Good Display Case Example



- Flat paper items are supported with mat board, photo corners and easels.
- Polyethylene strapping gently secures the book's pages without distracting from information.
- Descriptive labels are mounted on board and displayed using easels.
- A neutral black cloth is used as a background. This improves visibility, especially for viewers with vision deficits.
- Risers and easels are used to fill vertical space and improve visibility for viewers in wheelchairs.

# Signs and Labels



**New Views:**  
*Recent Work from the  
Midwest Chapter  
of the Guild of Book Workers*



The Guild of Book Workers was founded in 1906 "... to establish and maintain a feeling of kinship and mutual interest among workers in the several hand book crafts." The Guild believes there is a responsibility among civilized people to sustain the art and craft involved with the production of fine books. Guild members work to broaden public awareness of the hand book arts, to stimulate commissions of fine bindings, and to stress the need for sound book conservation and restoration.



This exhibition highlights the work of the the Guild's Midwest chapter. Most of the works here are from the Midwest, but some have come as far as California, Massachusetts, and the Czech Republic.



The Guild's major focus has always been on bookbinding. Excellent examples of design binding appear in this exhibition. But the Guild appreciates & promotes all of the related book arts: hand papermaking & decorating, printing, calligraphy & illumination, & the conservation, preservation, & restoration of older book materials. More recently a stronger interest has developed in "artist's books". This broader interpretation & definition of the book has attracted a new group of devotees to the Guild. Welcome back to the "New View."



# Label Content

- Who is the audience? What do you want them to know?
- Identify the object in the label
- Avoid colloquialisms, technical language or acronyms.
- Keep sentences short, ideally 15-25 words.
- Use the active voice.
- Keep the whole label short.

# Label Design

- Ideal font size depends on distance between the reader and the label
  - Under 3 feet: minimum 20pt
  - 3-6 feet: 48pt or larger
- Suggested fonts:
  - Times Roman or New Century Schoolbook (serif)
  - Helvetica, Univers or Futura (sans serif)
- Do NOT use:
  - Condensed, extended, or very thin type
  - Script fonts or italics
  - All caps

# Label Design

- Label background should be solid and provide high contrast with the text
- Limit each line of text to 55 characters long
- Justify left margin and keep a ragged right margin
- Spacing between lines should be at least 20 percent greater than the font size used (example: 20pt font, 24pt spacing).



# Preservation Consideration for Exhibit Spaces

# Basic Preservation Concerns

- Environment: light, temperature and relative humidity levels, bugs and pests
- Physical support: book cradles, board supports, window mats, encapsulation
- Security: theft, vandalism, fire risk

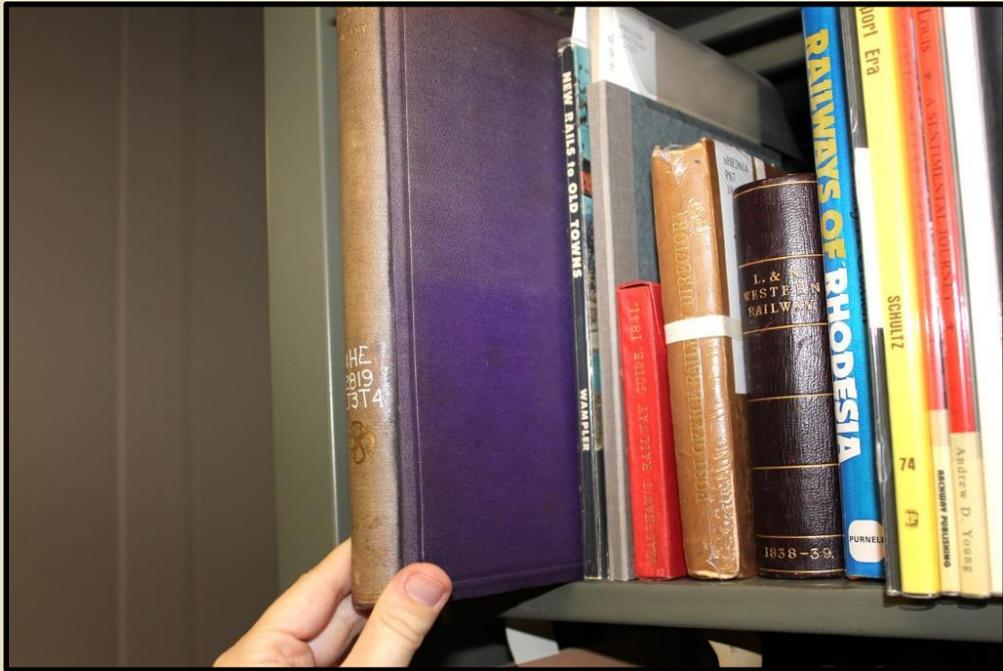


# Light Damage

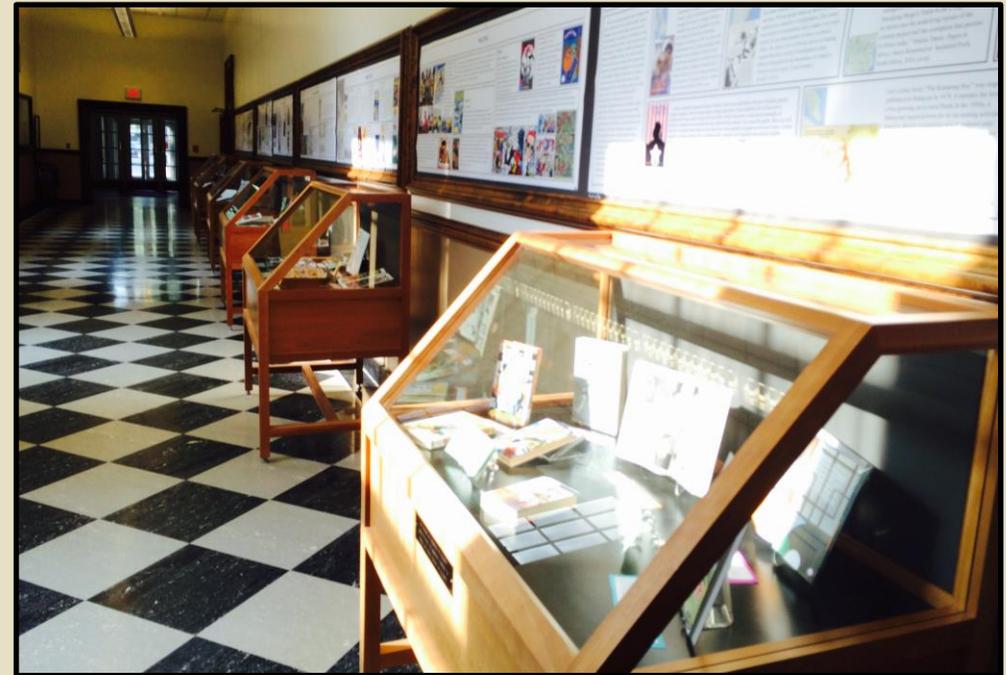


- We are using blue wool scales in the N-S corridor to determine how much fading can occur in a defined period of time in that area. No window coverings and minimal UV protection suggest that fading will be extreme to items displayed on the bulletin boards.
- Light Sensitive Materials:
  - Photographs
  - Documents using colorants – watercolors, ink jet prints, blueprints, paste papers, pen and marker
  - Textiles

# Light Damage



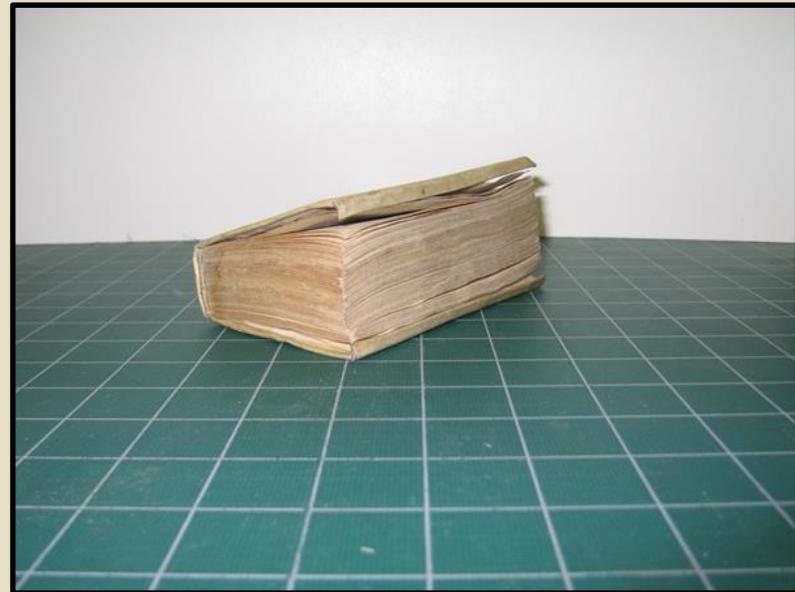
Visible light damage to the books spine and front cover.  
<http://blog.lib.uiowa.edu/speccoll/files/2013/07/purple.jpg>



Light that materials are exposed to in the North South Gallery.

# Temperature and Relative Humidity

- Gallery areas have no environmental controls and both areas are adjacent to exterior doors
- Materials which are particularly sensitive to fluctuating humidity or temperature
  - Vellum and Parchment
  - Photographs



Vellum bindings distorted by humidity.

# Conservation Recommendations

## Do's

- Take into account possibility of theft or damage
- Use a facsimile whenever possible
- Change the opening of a book to prevent excessive light damage to one page
- Support each item using proper cradles, strapping, board, easels, and risers
- Select items early enough to ensure time for proper presentation – conservation is available with enough time
- Contact the Exhibitions Committee with any conservation related questions

## Don'ts

- Display books with vellum or parchment bindings
- Display original photographs or other light sensitive items
- Hang original items on display boards
- Apply adhesive directly to an item to offer support
- Use items without the permission of the owning library



# Exhibit Installation: Materials and Procedures

# General Care and Handling

- Wash and dry hands before handling library and archival materials.
- Exhibit cases should be lined with acid-free materials, such as cotton, linen, polyester, or acid-free card stock when installing archival or sensitive materials.
- Do not lay exhibit materials on the floor.
- Avoid piling Library materials on top of one another, especially if adhesive may be present on the back of another item.
- Do not allow adhesives or fasteners to come into direct contact with original materials.
- Ensure that materials are properly supported. Items toppling over can cause irreparable damage.

# Books and Other Bound Materials

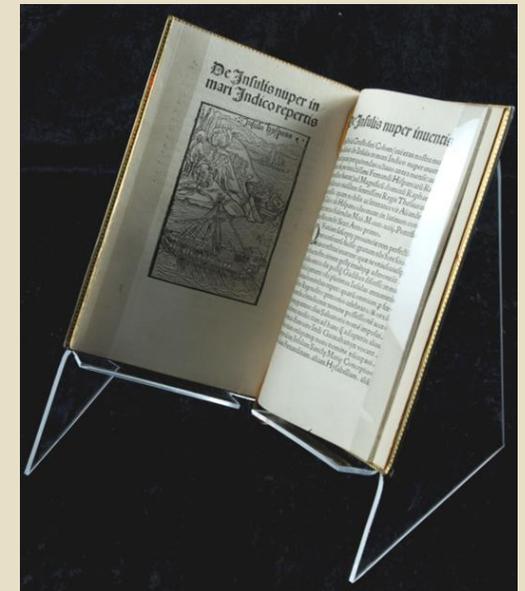
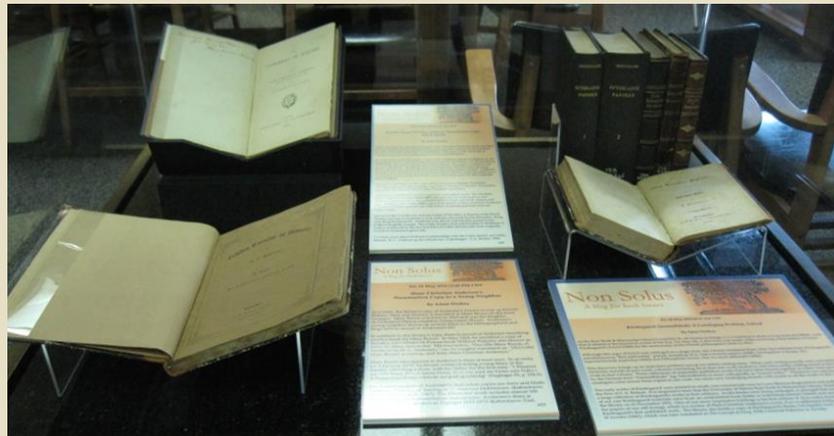


# Books and Other Bound Materials

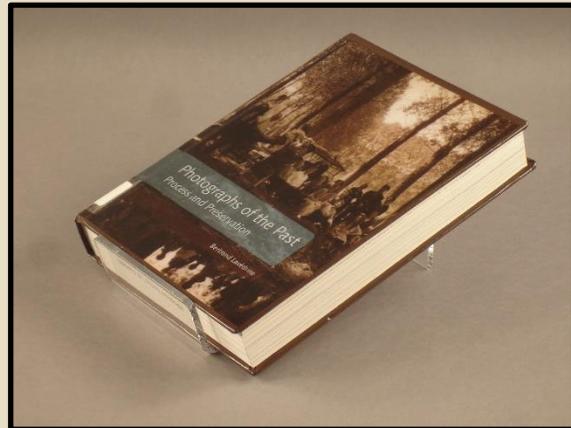
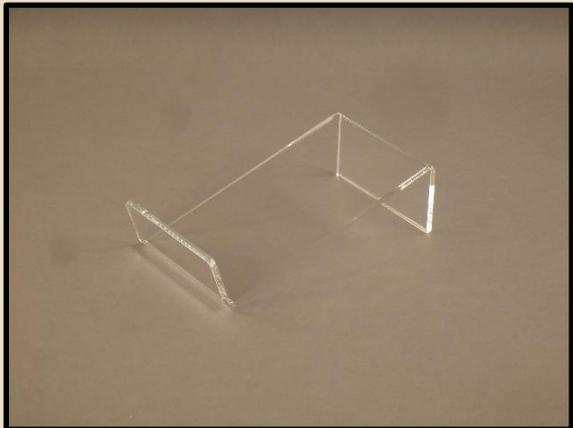
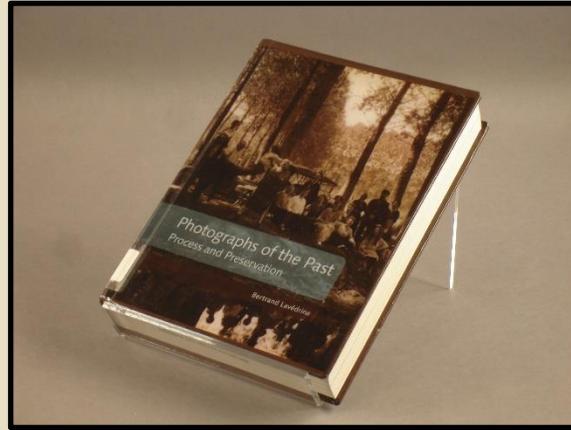
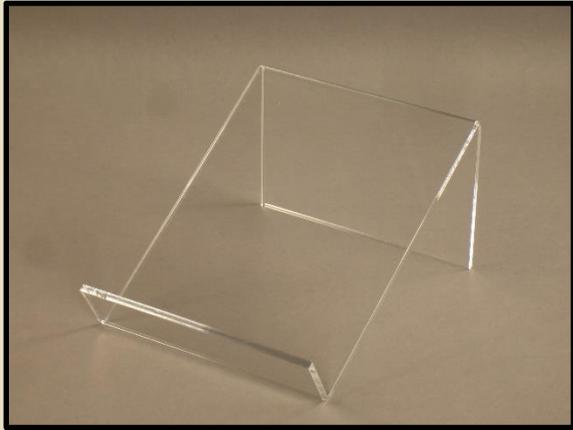
- Do not force books to open flat. Regardless of condition, a book should never be opened beyond 130 degrees.
- Use a book cradle to properly support bound materials. Cradles should be large enough to support the entire book. If the book is being displayed open, the cradle should support the covers at an appropriate angle – never force a book to open flat.
- If the pages won't remain open naturally, wrap a strip of polyethylene strapping around each side of the open book and secure it with double-sided tape. Do not allow the tape to come in contact with the volume.

# Plexiglas Book Cradles

- Custom, fabricated in Conservation
- The opening should not be strained
- Support the spine and text block of a book
- Monitor exposure times
- Consider changing the display pages or use digital surrogates

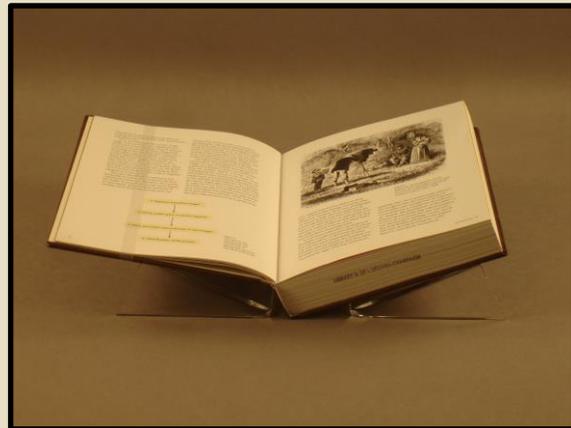
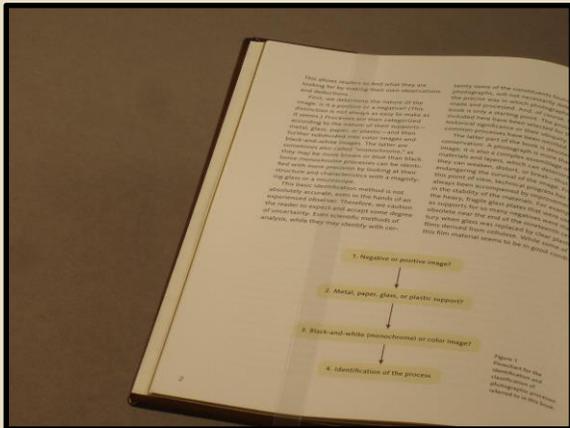
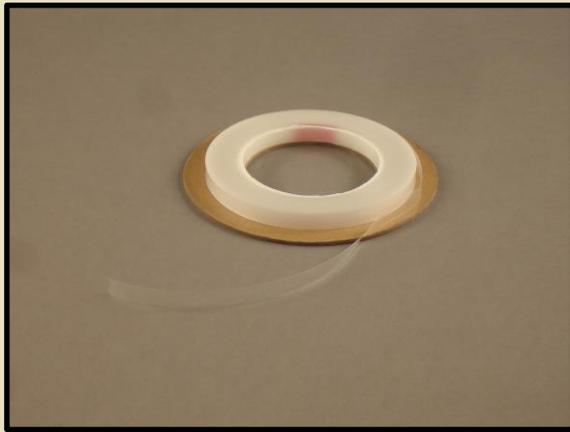


# Plexiglas Upright Cradles



Use upright cradles to display closed books. Cradles of varied sizes and angles provide visual variety.

# Polyethylene Strapping



Polyethylene strapping can be used to keep a book open to the desired page. Use double-sided tape to adhere the strapping to itself (not to the book!) from the back.

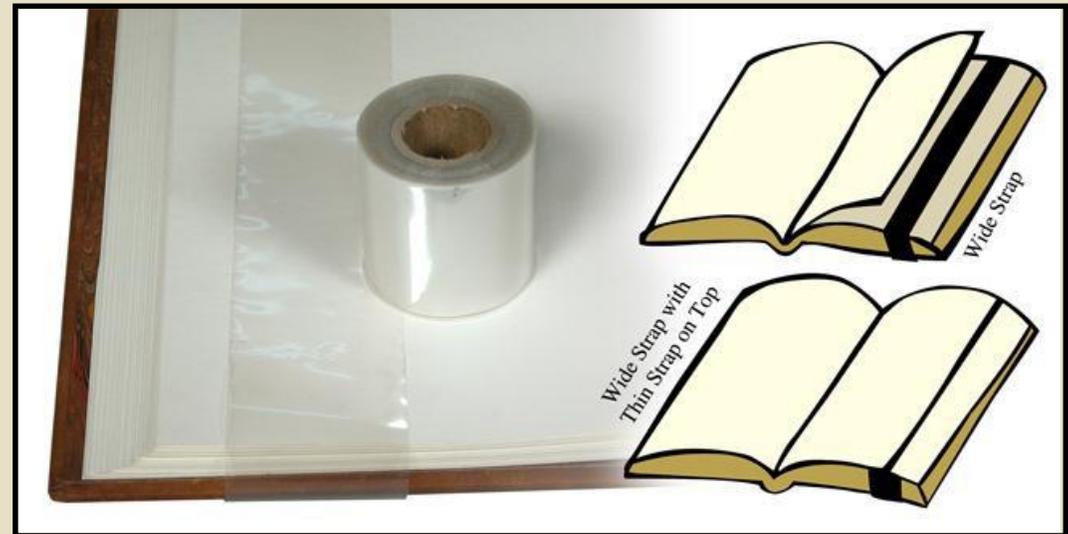
# Polyethylene Strapping

Good for

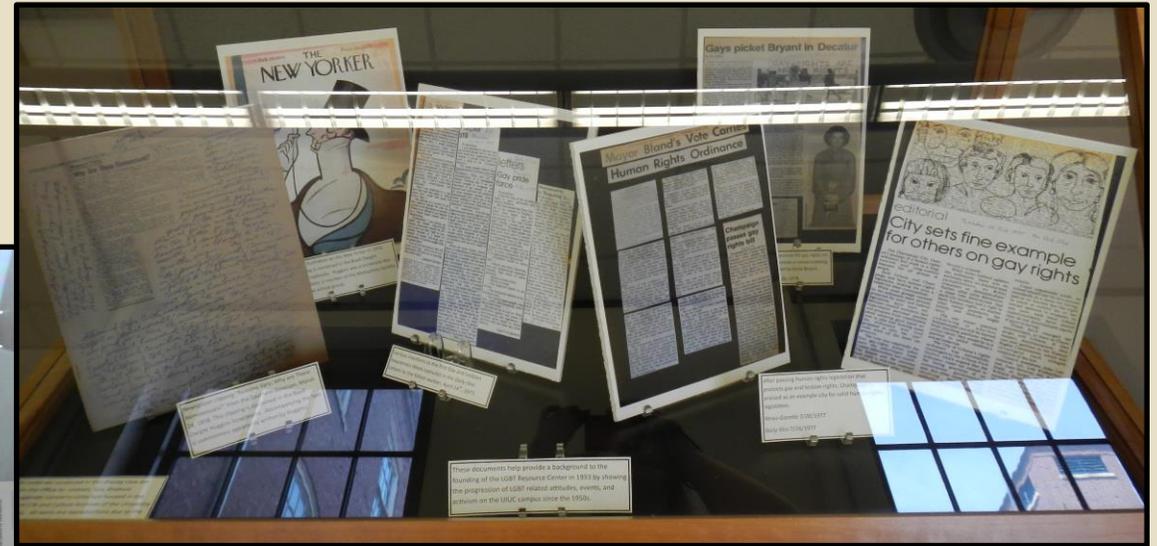
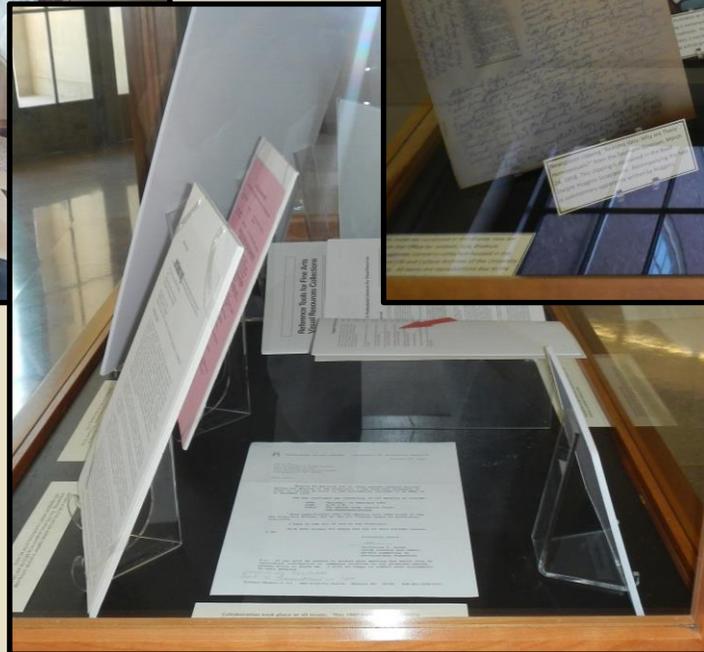
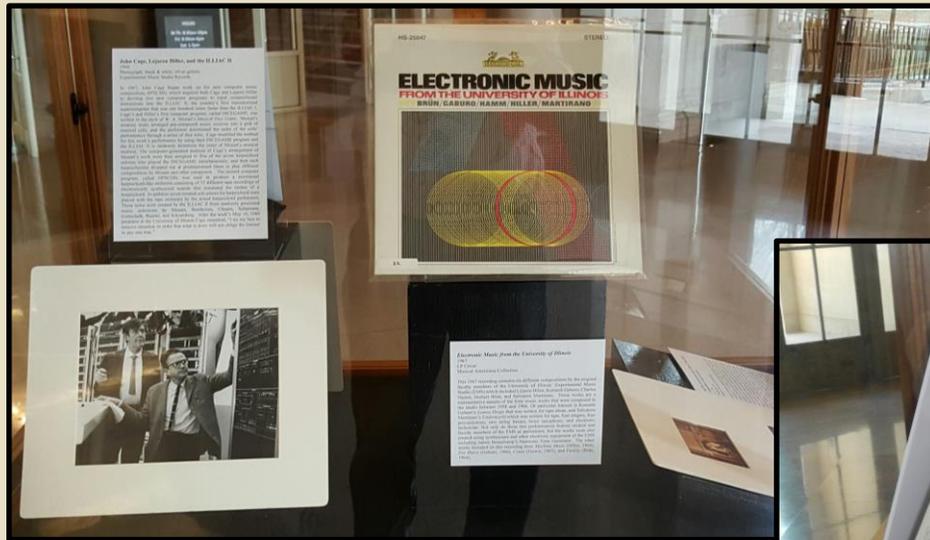
- Restraining pages
- Supporting textblocks
- Temporarily fixing books to their cradles

Pros

- Inert Material
- Softer than Mylar, better for brittle paper
- Comes in varying widths
  - 3/16", 3/8", 1", 2" 2 1/2"



# Photographs, Flat Paper, Unbound Materials



# Photographs, Flat Paper, and Other Unbound Materials

- If possible, use a good quality color copy in place of original materials.
- Unbound paper objects should be temporarily backed with acid-free card stock or mat board. Trim the card stock or mat board to be slightly larger than the object. Use photo corners to mount the object.
- Wear clean cotton gloves at all times when handling photographic materials.
- Do not allow materials to sag or slip out of place due to inadequate support.

# Museum (Mat) Board

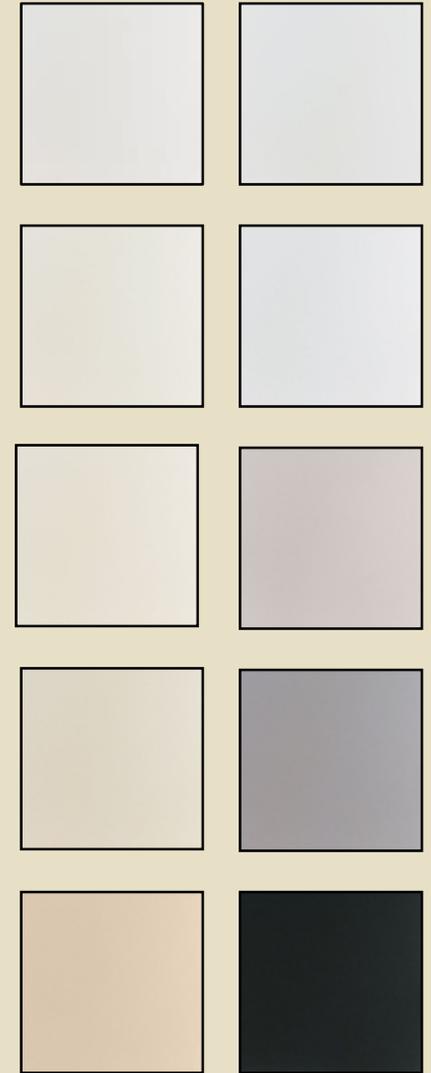
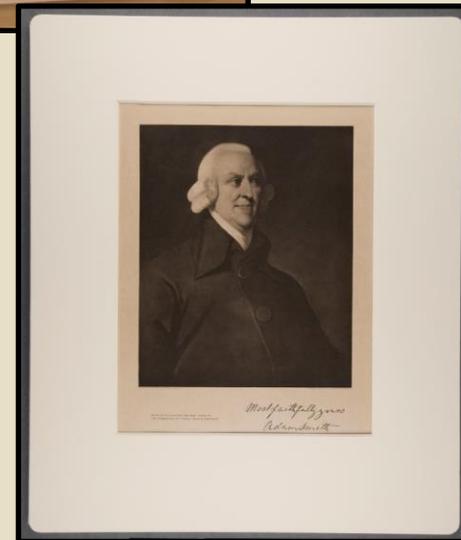
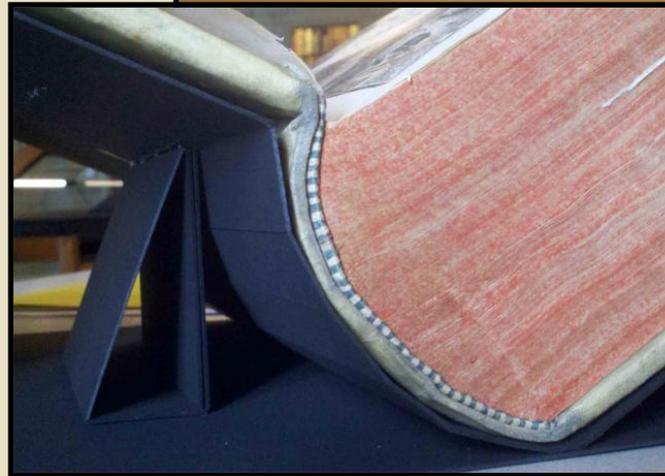
## Pros

- Acid free
- Many colors available
- Cheap
- Easiest to customize

## Cons

- Least sturdy
- Need weights
- Can abrade
- Disposable

Mats can be custom made for items on exhibit.

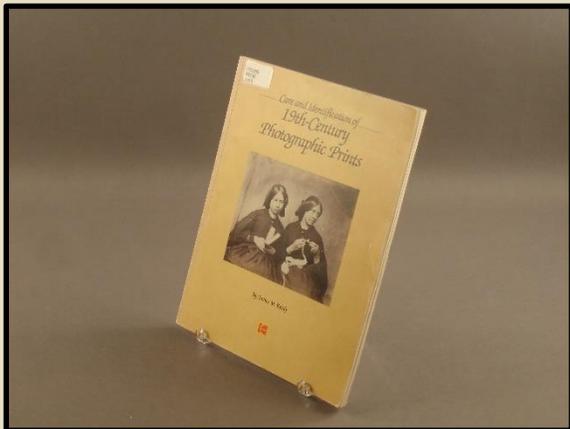
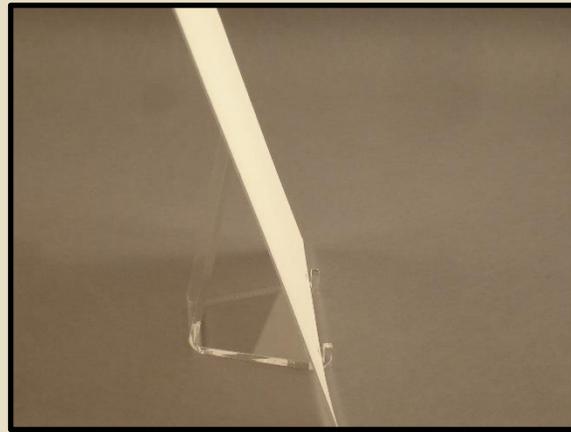
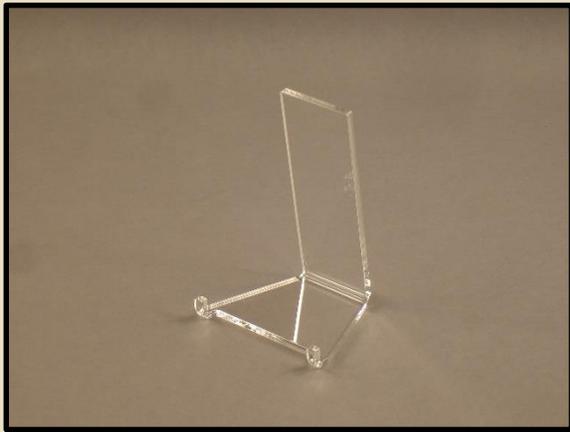


# Photo Corners



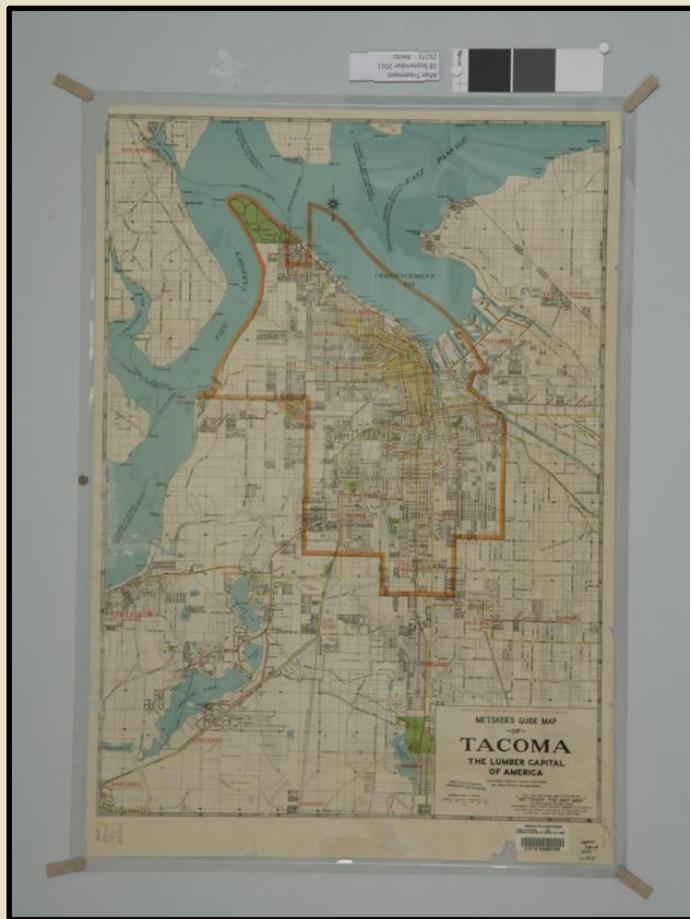
- Adhere photo corners to mat board to keep flat paper materials in place.
- Position the item on the mat board, carefully mark where the corner of the items sits on the mat board, and adhere the photo corners to the mat board accordingly.
- Carefully slide the corners of the paper object into the photo corners.

# Upright Easels



Use low profile easels to display thin books, pamphlets, or flat objects at a semi-upright angle. Place a sheet of acid-free board behind the item. Very thin items can be temporarily attached to this support board using polyethylene strapping or photo corners.

# Mylar



# Plate Easels & Mini Display Easels

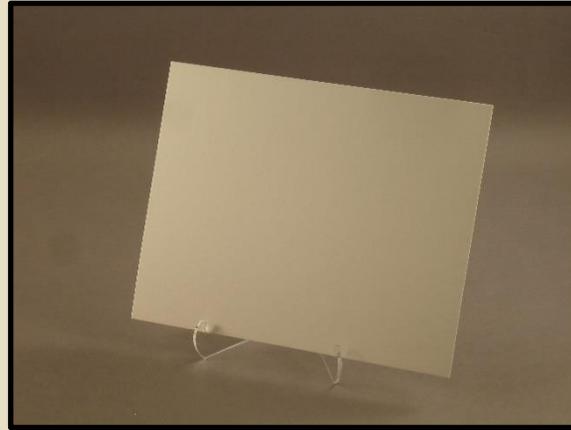
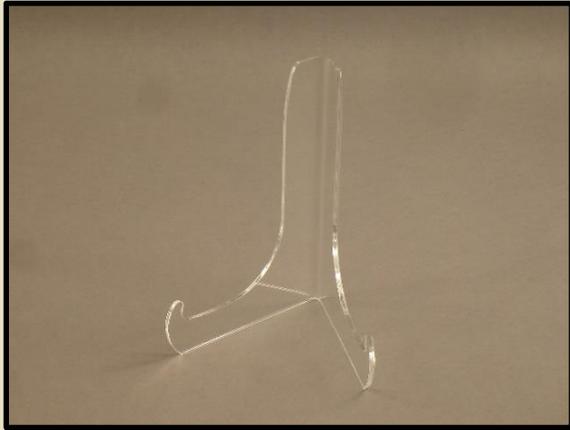
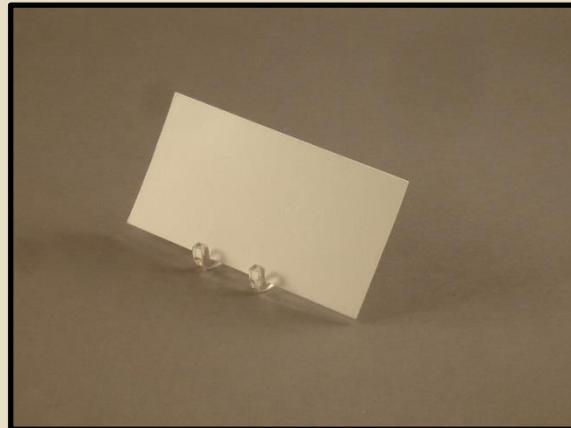
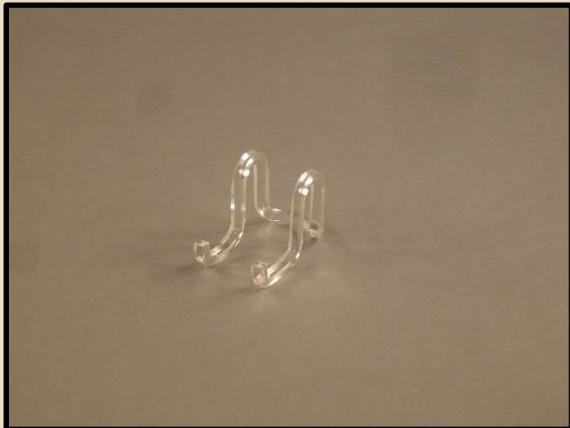
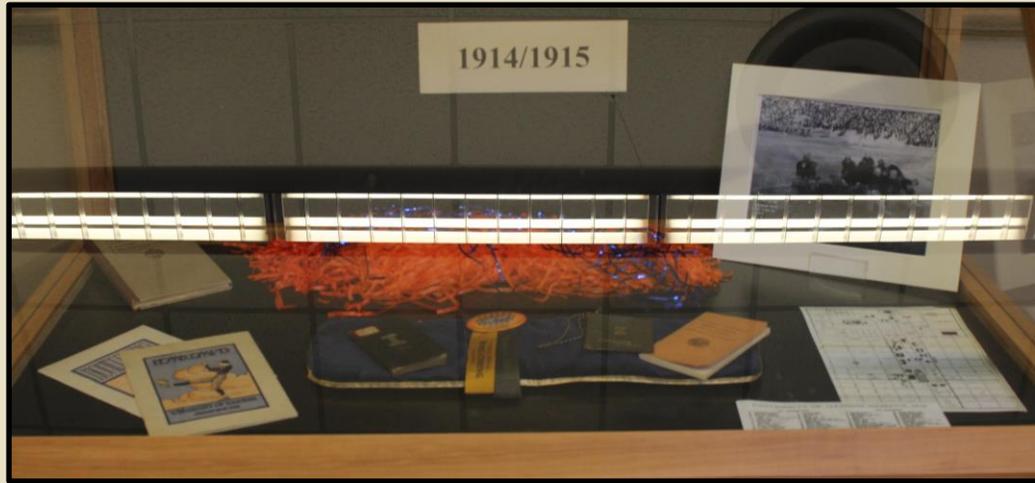


Plate easels are also good for supporting flat objects, especially those that are wider than they are tall. Again, use a sheet of acid-free board behind the item as a support.



Use mini display easels for labels.

# Other Types of Materials



# Other Types of Materials

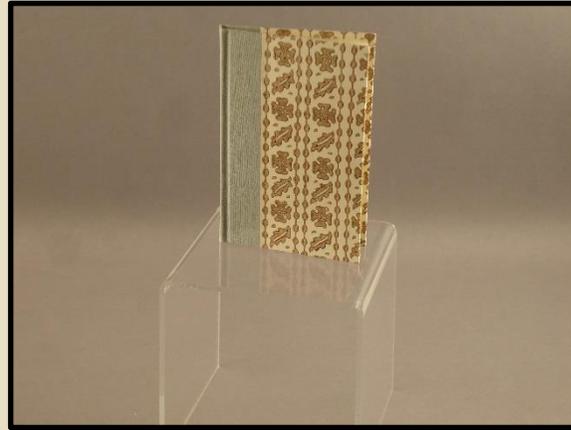
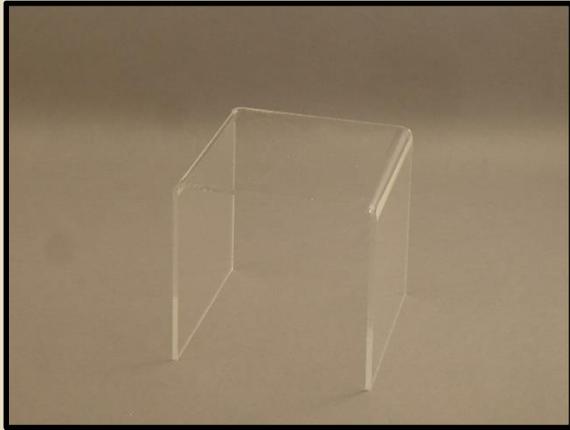
- If possible, textiles should be exhibited in a flat position rather than folded to prevent creasing, tearing of fibers, and uneven fading. If folding cannot be avoided, pad the folds with materials such as washed cotton or muslin sheeting, or acid-free papers.
- Wear clean cotton gloves at all times when handling metal, ivory, or bone artifacts to avoid damage that can be caused by oil from skin.
- Avoid displaying particularly light-sensitive materials like color photographs, watercolors, colored writing inks, and silk.
- Avoid displaying vellum and parchment, which are very sensitive to shifts in relative humidity.

# Hanging Objects

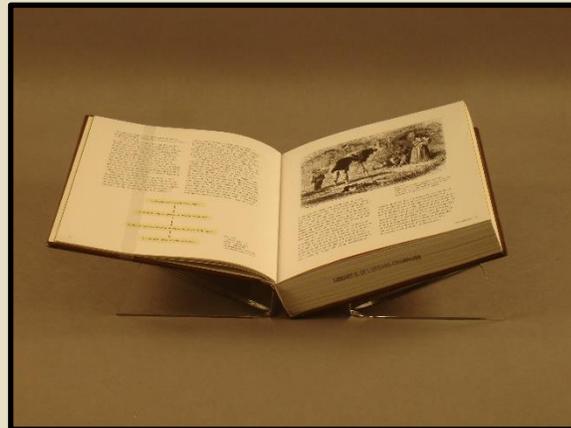
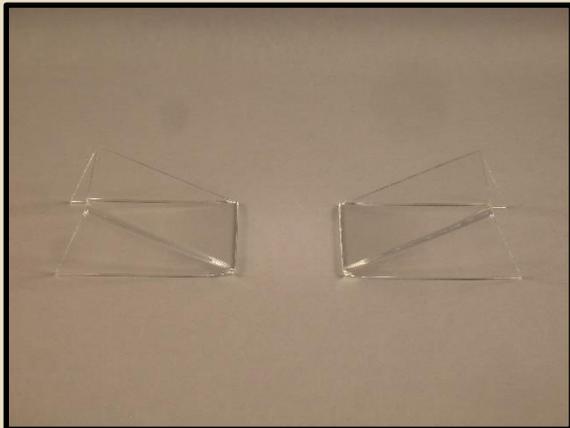
- Secure
- Reversible
- No damage to item
- No damage to case
- Inside of cases or on bulletin board (NS Corridor)



# Risers & Support Wedges



Risers lift objects into the vertical space of the cabinet, and can also be stacked to create a staircase effect. Drape black or neutral fabric over the risers to create a cohesive surface.



Wedges support an open book at a safe angle.

# For more information...

## **General Resources**

- Bibliography
- Exhibit Committee Website

<http://www.library.illinois.edu/committee/exhibit/charge.html>



# Thank you!

Don't hesitate to contact us – [excom@library.illinois.edu](mailto:excom@library.illinois.edu)