

Conservation Tips for Textiles

- Textiles should not be dirty. New items such as wedding dresses and christening clothing should be dry cleaned or laundered before putting them away. Older items and antique textiles should be examined by a textile conservator before storing them.
- Photograph items for record keeping and insurance purposes. Write down a description of each item and details about its importance and history. Label the box.
- Your workspace should be large enough to lay the item/s out completely. A large dining table can be used, or a clean floor space covered with a large, clean, white cotton sheet.
- Remove any jewelry, watches, belt buckles, and abrasive items that you are wearing. Clean, dry hands are essential for safe handling of textiles, but wearing white cotton or nitrile gloves is recommended. If storing in a Metal Edge Box, keep fabric away from the exterior metal edges as you work to avoid the possibility of snags.
- Fold your item as few times as possible and pad each fold with enough tissue so that the folds are gradual enough that the fibers along the fold edges will be protected from stress and breakage along the crease. Too much tissue is usually better than too little, but the item must still fit in the box.

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- Start by fully extending the object on the work surface. Figure out the best way to fold the object so that the number of folds is minimized. Any stiff or especially fragile or deteriorated elements should not be located along a fold. Take advantage of existing seams. Line the interior of the box with two layers of tissue at right angles. Leave some tissue extended outside of the box on each side. This will be folded over the top of the stored textile before the box is closed.
- Take the corners of a few sheets of tissue in each hand and crinkle the tissue, roughly pleat the tissue and draw it into a sausage shape. The sausage should be firm enough to hold the weight of the textile. Place this sausage along the location of the first fold. Make enough sausages to line the entire length of the fold. Fold the textile over the sausages. Repeat this process with each fold until completely folded and then place in box.
- Garments can have extremely complicated structures. All major areas should be padded. Puffed sleeves of a shirt or dress should be filled with tissue. Remember the item still must fit in the box.
- When the item is fully padded and folded, place it into the box and overlap the extending tissue over the top of the item(s). Place the lid on the box. If the box will be stored where there is the risk of leaks or flooding, the box can be placed in a polyethylene bag that is sealed with tape; a 2" clear polypropylene adhesive tape works best.