12. Keeping Books in Good Condition

Why keep books in good condition?

Books are made of paper, which is a delicate material prone to damage – particularly in tropical climates. This means books will be easily spoilt if they are stored carelessly or handled roughly. Books are also difficult and expensive to obtain in libraries throughout the world. For these two reasons, it is important to take extra care to keep books in good condition.

What does keeping books in good condition involve?

To keep library books in good condition, the librarian must anticipate problems. These range from coping with adverse weather conditions to pest infestation in the library.

The simple methods work best. The library committee should ensure the library is secure and weatherproof. Stop people from eating in the library, and try to sweep the floor and dust shelves regularly. You could encourage library monitors or volunteers to make a schedule so that some cleaning jobs are done every day in the library.

S. M. Abdullah, working at Mombasa Industrial Training Centre, Kenya believes:

The cleanliness of a library is important. Nothing is more dispiriting than walking into a library where the books and shelves are covered with dust and it is necessary to wipe the chair and table with a handkerchief before sitting down.

How to cope with water

In most countries, there are certain seasons when bad weather can be expected. Be aware of changes and listen to the radio for news about heavy rain and flooding. Water can be a library’s biggest enemy. Make sure that:
• The roof does not leak, as even a small drip can damage your stock beyond repair.
• Gutters are kept clear.
• Windows have shutters or louvres that can be closed when the weather is bad.
• Storm water cannot flow into the library.
• Books are kept on shelves at least 15 cm (6 inches) above the ground, so that if water collects in the library, there is less chance of books being damaged – and time to put the stock on higher shelves. The 15 cm (6 inch) space is also useful because it is high enough to allow you to sweep under the bookshelves and keep the library clean.

Figure 12.1. In order to keep the books clean, they are covered when not in use (Ghana).

How to cope with humidity

In tropical countries, the wet season and general humidity encourages mould to grow on books, papers, and audio-visual stock. If you are lucky and have electricity, you could try to budget for ceiling fans. Books suffer if kept in a room
with unreliable air-conditioning because of the repeated changes in humidity.

It is important to make sure plenty of fresh air can circulate. Leave the door and windows open during the day. If you have made a classroom library, in a lockable cupboard, it is essential that the books are handled regularly to ensure they do not collect dust and are exposed to fresh air. The easiest way to do this is to give readers as much opportunity as possible to look at the books.

Audio-visual equipment lasts longer if it is kept in an air-conditioned room because it is easily spoiled by humidity and mould. Store tapes, films, CDs, and videos in a dry, clean place, preferably in an airtight container with silica gel.

How to stop insect damage

Insects may be small but they can cause a lot of damage. Some insects, such as cockroaches, mosquitoes, and red and black ants, do not spoil books, but they do upset readers. These insects can be killed with insect sprays for sale locally.

The sprays are powerful, so instructions should be followed carefully. It is best to use them at the end of the day, when the library is empty.

White ants are difficult to remove and have destroyed many library collections. One tip is to varnish or paint shelves, and, if possible, to treat them chemically, before you put books on them.

_The best way to discourage insects (like termites, silverfish bookworms, etc.), apart from insecticides, is to make sure that the books are used a great deal and are dusted and wiped (with a dry cloth) regularly. The shelves must be kept clean and polished._

- Christine George, in her unpublished handbook for secondary school librarians in Sierra Leone
Always look out for signs of insect damage, and take action against insects as soon as you can.

If you see a book or magazine that looks as if ‘someone’ has been eating it, remove the book at once. Silverfish bookworms should be killed. You can shake them out of the book and then stand on them. If white ants come to your library, then pay for chemical treatment as soon as possible. If you delay, the ants may destroy all your books and even the building.

Insects cannot eat metal bookshelves. However, if you have metal bookshelves, you may have problems with rust, which also spoils books. The rule is to keep everything clean and to anticipate trouble.

**How to remove rodents**

Animals such as rats and mice can damage your bookshelves and stock. You could put down traps to kill them or use a specially made poison (but be sure to follow the instructions very carefully and store the poison in a safe place). Or you could borrow a cat. If you suspect your library is the home of rodents, act quickly. The best method is the one you would use in your own home.

**How to handle books carefully**

Damage caused by borrowers may also be a major problem. Books will stay in better condition if you teach readers how to hold and use stock carefully.

The weakest area of a book is its spine. If this breaks, all the pages will fall out. Teach readers to open books carefully.

If spines look weak, strengthen them with strong sticky tape inside and outside the cover. The spine may also be damaged if the librarian stamps the date label too enthusiastically. One reason that librarians tend to glue the date label at the front of the book, rather than at the back, is so that they can stamp a page that has the padding of other pages behind it. You may also find that it is a good
Figure 12.2. How to cover a book with plastic/paper.

1 Cut off the shaded areas of the paper or plastic – they are not needed.

2 Then fold the paper or plastic around the edges of the cover of the book (see dotted line).

If you are using paper then put a small piece of Sellotape at each corner to hold the cover in place.

3 Finally, strengthen the spine with tape on the front and back inside covers.

You can experiment with an old book to make sure you are doing it right.
idea to cover books with a dust jacket (cover) of sticky-back plastic or strong paper. Figure 12.2 shows you how to do this.

Figure 12.3. This librarian covers books in plastic to protect them (Ghana).

How to repair damaged stock

The most common damage is a broken spine. Use a rubber-based glue, which is slightly stretchy even when it dries, to glue the spine securely back into place.

If a hardback book has loose pages, you could glue them back into place. Try to avoid using clear tape, because it dries, shrinks, and then falls off. It can also stain books a yellow-brown colour.

But, if there is nothing else, then use clear tape to secure the pages. Figure 12.4 shows how to repair a book with glue.

There are other methods of fixing loose pages back into books.
For paperbacks, you may prefer to staple the pages together again with a giant stapler. If you are mending a thin pamphlet, you could try making a series of about eight or 10 holes 4 mm (1/8 inch) from the spine using a hole punch, and then securing the pages with string.

![Figure 12.4. How to repair a book with glue.](image)

Most librarians find their own way to mend books.

S. M. Abdullah, working at the Mombasa Industrial Training Centre, advises:

*A book that is torn and falling to pieces never attracts a reader. To mend these books, you need basic materials such as cloth, tape, glue, needle, and thread.*

Here are some tips on how to repair or prevent damage caused by borrowers:
• **Corners folded back** Some people like to remember where they are in a book by folding down the corner of the page. This spoils the book, weakens the page, and is annoying for the next person who reads it. Solve this problem by encouraging readers to use bookmarks.

• **Damaged covers** Damage to the book cover will weaken the book and pages will fall out. Use dust jackets (you can make these yourself using strong paper or sticky-back plastic) and strengthen weak areas with strong tape. Explain to readers that bending a book’s spine will cause it to snap just like a bone.

• **Lost pages** If you cannot find the missing pages, the book (especially if it is a story book) should be removed from the library. If you find the pages, you could try to stick them back into the book or even sew them.

• **Sticky pages** These are caused by readers making dirty fingermarks on pages or by eating food as they read. Stickiness can result in the page tearing. Sometimes wiping a damp cloth carefully over the sticky bit will clean up the pages.

**Looking after magazines**

Magazines may need special care too, but for different reasons. Because they are quite thin and are often arranged in large piles, they can easily be removed without the librarian noticing. One way to stop this is to make a magazine folder, as shown in figure 12.5 a and b, or simply secure a long piece of split bamboo down the centre fold of the magazine.

This helps stop readers from taking magazines out of the library without permission. It is recommended that you do not let people borrow magazines; instead, encourage them to read magazines in the library.
Weekly routine

Books may be damaged while they are on loan. If you see any books with torn covers, spines that need to be glued, or loose pages, put them on one side and repair them once each week (see chapter 12). If you cannot make repairs, the book should be withdrawn from the library stock.

Figure 12.5a. How to make a strong magazine folder.
Figure 12.5b. How to make a strong magazine folder.