



Environment and Building Systems Workshop

Part A

Cleaning Stations Activity

Organic Objects

Baskets

Textiles

Shell

Leather

Wooden Objects

General Tips and Guidelines:

1. Always carefully assess your object before beginning cleaning. Observe the object from multiple angles and always practice good object handling skills that we have discussed in previous workshops.
2. Always use clean hands, and wear nitrile gloves
3. Mentally list (and/or jot down) the components of your object. For example: a military jacket may consist of a wool exterior, with a silk or synthetic lining fabric. There may be metal buttons and additional fabric details attached such as pins, ribbons and patches. Take all of this into account when making your initial observations. Even if you don't know the technical aspects of the object's manufacture, note differences and the qualities of the materials present in any one object. Different materials will clean differently, and attached items to the main portion of the object may have fragile attachment points. We want to be aware of any and all of these complexities before we introduce cleaning tools and handling.
4. Assess the level of soiling. If the object is not in need of cleaning, then do not attempt to clean the object. If the object cannot be cleaned safely with the tools you have, then do not clean the object. Remember: Do no harm
5. If cleaning, test a small, inconspicuous part of the object with your cleaning tool (i.e. cosmetic sponge, soot sponge, swab). Determine the best method and proceed with caution.
6. If using a vacuum cleaner, remember to use a net or screen to prevent the material removed from being sucked into the vacuum bag. Start on the lowest suction setting possible. Use a brush to lift away surface dirt into the vacuum. Do not touch the vacuum to the object's surface. Proceed carefully and cautiously.

Additional Guidelines for Cleaning by Material Type (from Museums and Galleries of New South Wales: “Cleaning in Museums Helpsheet” from History SA)

Leather (especially saddlery)

-Only clean if necessary and only if the object can withstand it. Low suction vacuum cleaning is excellent for dusty leather in good condition.

-If you don't have an appropriate micro-attachment, use a gauze covering such as a nylon stocking over the nozzle. Keep the nozzle just above the surface rather than touching it to avoid scratching. You can use soft brushes to remove surface dirt, but you may risk scratching the surface. This is especially so for soft leather/suede (such as book bindings). For these items use another method.

-Leather dressing should not be a routine cleaning method. Only dress leather that is still in use, such as saddlery being used for hands-on demonstrations. Use a sparing amount of dressing. Leather items that are no longer in use and are kept free of dust should not be dressed. Conservation studies have shown that leather left undressed gradually loses its ability and need to absorb fats and oils, so dressing aged leather may cause more damage than it prevents by creating a sticky surface that will attract dust and increase the risk of mold growth and staining.

Textiles (including tapestries, upholstery, costume, table linen, curtains)

-Vacuum clean with micro-attachments.

-Use extreme care when working with fragile sections, such as lace and surface decoration.

-Vacuum through a small embroidery hoop covered with tulle to protect fragile sections. -

Strong textiles can be washed by a conservator, but it is not a generally recommended method. Washing should not be a routine cleaning method. The risks of washing are shrinkage, color bleeding, fragile or unexpectedly fragile fabrics not being able to take the strain of washing.

Wooden objects (including furniture)

-Handle wooden objects as little as possible and avoid lifting by handles or other possible weak points. Vacuum clean with micro-attachments and low suction. Use a gauze covered embroidery hoop for protection of delicate or decorated wooden items.

-Do not clean at all if decorated or painted areas are flaking. Seek professional advice instead.

-Use soft, lint free cotton or microfibre/microstatic cloths to gently dust polished wooden surfaces. Watch out for damaged areas. Wood is susceptible to rot, moisture damage, fungal attack and insect damage. Seek professional advice if this kind of damage is noted. - Do not use general household furniture cleaners – they contain silicone and some contain

