

# Caring for Collections action checklist

- A simple 5-step process for improving Collections Care
- A helpful and adaptable framework for everyone

Benchmarks in  
Collection Care  
for Museums  
Archives and Libraries

A Self-assessment Checklist



## Caring for Collections action checklist

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5 simple steps developed to assist the process of caring for collections, for professional and non-professional alike. While based on Benchmarks in Collection Care 2.0, there is no specific requirement for compliance with encoded professional practice and regulation.

This checklist has been created from the Basic level of performance of the original publication **Benchmarks in Collection Care 2.0 for Museums, Archives and Libraries** and as expressed in the **Benchmarks in Collection Care for Museums, Archives and Libraries Excel Spreadsheet** derived from it. They have been modified here to create an inclusive and accessible stand-alone tool, with a 5-step method and clearly defined aims.

Based on requirements for the Basic level of care in **Benchmarks in Collection Care 2.0 for Museums, Archives and Libraries** obtained from [www.collectionstrust.org.uk](http://www.collectionstrust.org.uk).

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### **Benchmarks in Collection Care 2.0 for Museums, Archives and Libraries**

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**Benchmarks 2.0** is an updated version of Benchmarks 1.0. The Collections Trust acknowledges the Benchmarks 2.0 Working Group, and all of the contributors to Benchmarks 1.0, including Jane Henderson, Peter Winsor, Helen Lindsay, Nancy Bell and Jonathan Rhys-Lewis.

**Benchmarks in Collection Care for Museums, Archives and Libraries Excel Spreadsheet**, is based on a spread sheet originally created by Chris Woods, Director of the National Conservation Service (<http://ncs.org.uk>)

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## Caring for Collections

5 steps to better collection care:

1. **Check through this set of aims quickly to see if yours match, and what you have already done - add comments and ideas**  
Some points will not apply to your situation
2. **Create an action list and make a plan. Decide what to do first – you don't have to start at the beginning**
3. **Take one step at a time - it can't all be done at once. Tick when aims met and celebrate!**
4. **Review in a year to see how it is going and decide what to do next**
5. **Repeat steps 1 to 4**

**Collection title:**

**Name of person responsible:**

**Name of owner if different:**

**Material types** - documents/photographs/books/albums/drawings/paintings/sound recordings/computer files/medals/other

**Size** - number of items/boxes/drawers/shelves/cupboards/rooms/other

**Action checklist creation date:**

**Review date(s):**

		Met	Partly met	To do	Not needed	First thoughts - comments/ideas/action list	Review – what's done/how did it go/what to do next/what you might need
<b>1</b>	<b>Aims</b>						
1.1	I am committed to the preservation and care of this collection because ... I have a written statement of this to be kept with the collection, and shared with others						
1.2	I have thought about how I am going to look after this collection and have written a statement to explain more about it and what I would like to do. I have answered questions like: Where has the collection from? How has it developed? Will I be adding to it? What information						

		Met	Partly met	To do	Not needed	First thoughts - comments/ideas/action list	Review – what's done/how did it go/what to do next/what you might need
	do I need to keep about it? Who will want to see it? What will I need to do to look after it? <i>If you are looking after a collection for a group or organisation you can write this up as a mission statement or policy. You may also need to consider any legal implications</i>						
1.3	I have thought about how I am going to look after this collection and have written plans. I have answered questions like: How will I keep information about it? How will I add to it? How will others see it? How will I look after it? How will I prepare in case of an emergency situation?						
1.4	I have fully briefed anyone helping and shown them my plans, including what might need to be done in an emergency situation						
1.5	I have resources to give to the care of this collection - this could include time, space, money, equipment, helpers						
1.6	I understand the need for learning more about the care of my collection, and have identified good sources of information and training						
1.7	I seek advice from experts on all aspects of caring for my collection. My helpers are also aware of what they need to do						
1.8	I ensure that any conservation work is carried out by an appropriately trained/professionally accredited						

		Met	Partly met	To do	Not needed	First thoughts - comments/ideas/action list	Review – what's done/how did it go/what to do next/what you might need
	conservator						
1.9	Where I employ others to care for collections or conserve items, I ensure that I have thought carefully about what aspects I need to be preserved, have agreed this with them and given them written specifications <i>If you are looking after a collection for a group or organisation you may need to consider job descriptions/specifications and contracts</i>						
<b>2</b>	<b>Buildings</b>						
	<i>Fabric</i>						
2.1	All buildings housing collections are of robust construction and all floors can safely support the load						
2.2	Buildings used to house collections are regularly inspected. All potential threats to collections such as leaky roofs, poor wiring, internal pipework, blocked gutters and ill-fitting windows or doors are identified						
2.3	Equipment such as electrical equipment is safe and protected with an RCD (Residual Current Device) where possible						
2.4	Buildings housing collections that are unoccupied for parts of the year are visited and inspected regularly						
	<i>Security</i>						
2.5	A security assessment is made at regular intervals and all risks, particularly to the perimeter of the building are noted						
2.6	The security of collections is assessed and people with access follow						

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	established procedures						
2.7 - 2.9	All access points such as doors, staircases, skylights and windows can be made secure. They are strong, fitted with locks, and have restricted entry by key or security devices						
2.10	Access to storage spaces/areas is restricted to assigned people, and others are accompanied						
2.11	Security is considered when contractors are working on the premises, and if necessary, arrangements made to supervise them and ensure collections are kept safe						
2.12	Access to keys/security codes is controlled						
<b>3</b>	<b>Storage</b>						
3.1	There is enough space to move items, and storage arrangements allow air to circulate freely						
3.2	Collections are not placed directly on the floor						
3.3	Collections are kept tidily						
3.4	Boxes, bags and folders are clearly marked to indicate their contents						
3.5	Storage areas for collections are used only for the purpose, and are not used to store non-collection material						
3.6	A clear, flat workspace is available in storage areas for working with collection items						
3.7	Books and volumes are not stored on their fore-edge or spine, or stacked in piles for a long time						

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3.8	Storage arrangements are improved wherever possible <i>If you are looking after a collection for a group or organisation there are specified standards you can work towards – maybe find out more</i>						
3.9	Heavy items are stored on lower shelves						
3.10	Transport or industrial items are stored in defined, accessible areas and given protection from wind and rain						
<b>Furniture</b>							
3.11	All shelving, cupboards, cabinets or other storage units or stands are strong enough to take the required load						
3.12	Items can be reached safely, and/or appropriate equipment is available for safe retrieval from high shelves						
3.13	Anti-tip stabilisers or mechanisms are fitted to shelves or drawers to ensure that uneven loads do not cause them to fall over. Heavier items/collections should be stored closer to the bottom than the top						
3.14	All items stored on shelves are housed completely within the depth of the shelf						
3.15	Cabinets and plan-chest drawers are not overfilled and are able to open freely without risk to the material they hold						
3.16	Large objects are stored on racks or pallets						
<b>Enclosures</b>							
3.17	Supplies of archival quality protective enclosures and/or packaging appropriate to the needs of the particular collection are readily available in a range of sizes						

		Met	Partly met	To do	Not needed	First thoughts - comments/ideas/action list	Review – what's done/how did it go/what to do next/what you might need
3.18	Containers used for physical protection are strong enough to withstand handling and the weight of the items they contain						
3.19	Items are packed or cushioned in boxes using archival materials						
3.20	Archival quality tape is used around rolled items in at least two places, adding tie-on labels where required, and securing safely without causing creasing						
3.21	Documents are not folded or modified to fit an enclosure						
3.22	Items are protected from dust and dirt						
<b>4</b>	<b>Housekeeping</b>						
4.1	I understand there are risks to collections from pest infestation. I can recognise the most harmful species and understand the need to control them						
4.2	Storage areas, display areas and furniture are cleaned and inspected regularly						
4.3	Advice has been sought on appropriate techniques, materials and equipment for cleaning storage and display areas and furniture						
4.4	Food storage, consumption and disposal is confined to areas well away from collections						
4.5	Items which show signs of pest infestation are kept isolated from the rest of the collection until treated						
4.6	Incoming items are checked for signs of infestation, dampness or mould. Advice is sought on the most appropriate treatment and action is taken to deal with any problems identified						



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4.7	Storage and display areas are monitored for the presence of pests. Traps are regularly checked and pests identified						
4.8	Records are kept of pest trap locations, pests found and action taken to control them						
<b>5</b>	<b>Handling, moving and use of collections</b>						
5.1	I have written guidelines for safe handling and transport of items/collections both for people and items. Risks are assessed before handling and moving large objects						
5.2 – 5.3	All items taken out of a building are physically protected and are packaged so as to prevent damage						
5.4	Equipment is available to help move heavy, large or difficult to access items						
5.5	Trolleys used to transport items/collections are stable and easy to manoeuvre and fully support the load						
5.6	All items sent out are handled, transported and housed in conditions no worse than their usual conditions						
5.7	Any mechanical apparatus used for moving material is fitted with an emergency stop mechanism						
	<i>In use</i>						
5.8	Guidelines/advice on good practice when handling collections are given to people/displayed in areas where people are using them						
5.9	People are made aware that smoking, eating and drinking are not allowed in areas where collections are kept and used						

		Met	Partly met	To do	Not needed	First thoughts - comments/ideas/action list	Review – what's done/how did it go/what to do next/what you might need
5.10	Unique, rare, fragile or vulnerable items are kept safe and users are watched over and helped with handling where needed						
5.11	People always use pencils around collection items						
5.12	Suitable gloves are used for handling any items where this is required, including photographs						
5.13	A flat surface that can support items fully is available						
<i>Display</i>							
5.14	The condition of exhibited items is checked and noted before and after display						
5.15	Vulnerable items on display are regularly checked						
5.16	Display cases are strong, secure and made from materials that will not harm their contents						
5.17	Access to items on display is easy for assigned people without compromising security						
5.18	Archives and books are not kept on indefinite display						
5.19	Copies of sensitive items such as photographs and watercolours are used for exhibition/long term display instead of the originals						
5.20	The weight of items on display is supported evenly						
5.21	Open books on display are tilted at no more than 30 degrees from horizontal. The opening required is fully supported in						

		Met	Partly met	To do	Not needed	First thoughts - comments/ideas/action list	Review – what's done/how did it go/what to do next/what you might need
	a naturally found position, avoiding force or strain on the binding materials and pages						
5.22	Book supports are designed to fit the profile of the book at the display opening. Pages are held in place using a safe material such as polyethylene strips						
<b>Lending and borrowing</b>							
5.23	Any item requested for loan is assessed for suitability						
5.24	There are written procedures with care instructions for borrowers, and a written agreement						
5.25	A condition report is written for each item before loan. If an item is thought to be vulnerable or valuable special arrangements may be needed to protect it, and some expert advice may be helpful						
5.26	The condition of each item is checked and noted again on return from loan						
5.27	A site report from the borrower giving details of handling arrangements, security and transport, and environmental conditions is helpful to reduce risks and give confidence in a loan agreement. <i>If you are looking after a collection for a group or organisation there may be specified standards you are required to meet and insurance considerations</i>						
5.28	All loaned or borrowed items are signed in and out by authorised people <i>If you are looking after a collection for a group or organisation there may be</i>						

		Met	Partly met	To do	Not needed	First thoughts - comments/ideas/action list	Review – what's done/how did it go/what to do next/what you might need
	<i>specified standards you are required to meet and insurance considerations</i>						
5.29	A single loan agreement is signed by both lender and borrower, it includes their contact details and the period and purpose of the loan <i>If you are looking after a collection for a group or organisation there may be specified standards you are required to meet and insurance considerations</i>						
<b><i>Operating or playing items</i></b>							
5.30	Mechanical or electrical items, or those with moving parts need to have formal approval for use						
5.31	An agreement about who can play items or operate equipment is needed to provide protection from damage						
<b><i>Labelling and marking</i></b>							
5.32	When numbering paper and photographs and other archive material, a 2B pencil is used to allow good legibility without causing indentations. Errors can also be corrected easily						
5.33	Insoluble security stamping ink has been used on library and archive material in the past, but this is not necessary with good security arrangements and can deface and devalue items						
5.34	Items or groups of items are labelled and/or marked with a unique number in a way that does not harm or alter the object and which is removable						
<b>6 &amp; 7 Environmental monitoring and control</b>							
<b><i>Monitoring and equipment</i></b>							
6.1 &	I understand the need for environmental						

		Met	Partly met	To do	Not needed	First thoughts - comments/ideas/action list	Review – what's done/how did it go/what to do next/what you might need
7.1	monitoring and control, other people helping me also understand.						
6.2	People carrying out monitoring have received the necessary training						
6.3	Data is collected, recorded and retained						
6.4	Monitoring equipment is used, calibrated and stored following manufacturer's instructions						
<i>Temperature and relative humidity</i>							
6.5	I understand the temperature and humidity requirements of different materials in the collection are understood						
6.6	Monitoring equipment is in use where the risk of unsuitable temperature and humidity has been identified						
<i>Light</i>							
6.7	I understand the light level requirements of different materials in the collection						
6.8	Monitoring equipment is in use where a risk of damaging lighting levels has been identified						
<i>Pollution</i>							
6.9	I understand the risk of chemical contaminants, and airborne gaseous and particulate pollution on items/collections						
<i>Vibration</i>							
6.10	I understand the risk of vibration to items/collections from sources such as building works						
<i>Control and equipment</i>							
7.1	See 6.1 above						
7.2	The collection is housed to protect it from extreme environmental conditions						
7.3	Simple measures are taken to improve						

		Met	Partly met	To do	Not needed	First thoughts - comments/ideas/action list	Review – what's done/how did it go/what to do next/what you might need
	the environment of stores and display areas such as closing doors, moving or turning off lights, providing entrance mats, and controlling temperature, humidity and light levels						
<b>Temperature and relative humidity stability</b>							
7.4	Items/collections are stored and displayed away from heating, air conditioning vents and windows						
<b>Light damage reduction</b>							
7.5	Exposure of any light-sensitive materials is avoided or reduced as much as possible						
7.6	Light sources such as LED that do not emit UV radiation are used						
7.7	Blinds, shutters, curtains and/or UV filters on windows are used to reduce visible and UV light in all areas housing collections. UV filters are checked and replaced when they become ineffective						
7.8	Sunlight does not fall directly on any light sensitive material in use or on display						
<b>Airborne pollution – gases and particulates</b>							
7.9	Items/collections are protected from excessive dust						
7.10	All windows and doors can be closed so that the building provides some protection from external airborne pollutants						
<b>Vibration</b>							
7.11	Collections are physically stable on their shelves or supports, and protected from the risk of vibration damage in transit						

		Met	Partly met	To do	Not needed	First thoughts - comments/ideas/action list	Review – what's done/how did it go/what to do next/what you might need
<b>8</b>	<b>Conservation</b>						
8.1	Items that are damaged or degraded, and require physical or chemical stabilisation are identified						
8.2	Items/collections requiring physical protection have been identified						
8.3	Results of inspections, condition assessments and/or surveys of items or collections are recorded						
8.4	A record is kept of any interventive conservation treatment undertaken. A conservator will provide a report that documents the work carried out. This will ideally include a description of the materials and structure of an item, a condition assessment, treatment options, decisions taken, treatments, materials used, and advice on future care						
8.5	Conservation records are linked to the item record in the catalogue or list						
<b>9</b>	<b>Copies (surrogates)</b>						
9.1	I am able to make substitute copies of fragile, or popular items to reduce handling and the risk of physical damage						
9.2	Items will be copied if they are used a lot, or are likely to be used a lot						
9.3	A system is in place for people to see the copies rather than the originals						
9.4	Surfaces and equipment used for imaging items are clean, dry and dust-free						
9.5	Fragile items are carefully assessed before imaging						
9.6	Items are not deliberately taken apart or						

		Met	Partly met	To do	Not needed	First thoughts - comments/ideas/action list	Review – what's done/how did it go/what to do next/what you might need
	broken to get images. A conservator can prepare fragile items in advance, or recommend other ways to support or hold them to get a good image without causing damage						
9.7	Preparation and selection for imaging is carried out with careful handling and respect for the preservation of items						
9.8	The imaging process is carried out with care to respect the handling and preservation needs of items and to make good quality copies						
9.9	Additional information known as metadata is captured for digital copies. Technical information that is essential for access now and in the future must be kept with the file						
<b><i>Photocopying and scanning</i></b>							
9.10	Where photocopiers or scanners are used by others, guidelines are provided to reduce the risk of damage						
9.11	Items that can be photocopied or scanned safely are identified						
9.12	Fragile or light-sensitive items are not photocopied or scanned by anyone						
9.13 – 9.17	[These refer to film-based copies such as microfilm or microfiche so have been left out here]						
<b><i>Modern media – such as vinyl, film, audiotape, videotape, and computer discs</i></b>							
9.18	Information on specific storage requirements, environmental conditions, and handling and access has been found for the media types in the collection. Some expert advice may be helpful						
9.19	Media that can be security protected						



		Met	Partly met	To do	Not needed	First thoughts - comments/ideas/action list	Review – what's done/how did it go/what to do next/what you might need
	against accidental and deliberate erasure is protected through the removal of write-protection tabs						
<b>10</b>	<b>Emergency preparedness</b>						
	<i>Prevention</i>						
10.1	All those helping preserve the collection have a basic awareness of the potential risks to the collection from hazards such as fire and flood						
10.2	I have assessed risks to the collection from hazards such as water pipes, drains and inflammable materials, and identified items that are particularly vulnerable						
10.3	I have implemented precautionary measures such as smoke detectors. Alarms are tested regularly						
10.4	Adequate drainage is provided in buildings where there is a risk of flooding						
10.5	Supporting information and paperwork are also kept safe. Computers are backed up regularly with a copy stored at another location						
10.6	Storage and display areas, and exhibition cases are protected from theft, vandalism, fire and flood						
10.7	Fire-fighting equipment is accessible. People know how to operate fire extinguishers which are regularly maintained or replaced						
	<i>Planning and Recovery</i>						
10.8	I have a plan which includes steps to be taken in an emergency. It includes emergency telephone numbers, the location of emergency supplies, and procedures for salvaging items						

		<b>Met</b>	<b>Partly met</b>	<b>To do</b>	<b>Not needed</b>	<b>First thoughts -</b> comments/ideas/action list	<b>Review –</b> what's done/how did it go/what to do next/what you might need
10.9	The emergency plan is kept up-to-date and people know what to do to in the event of an emergency						
10.10	Items to be rescued first in an emergency have been identified						
10.11	Emergency contact details are clearly displayed for people to see						
10.12	Any incident is reviewed however small, and lessons learned. Improvements are made to prevention measures, plans and recovery procedures where possible						

If you feel keen to find out more or progress to the Good and Best levels of Benchmarks in Collection Care it is available from [Benchmarks in Collections Care 2.1 – Collections Trust](#)