



The National Archives

## How to deal with wet documents

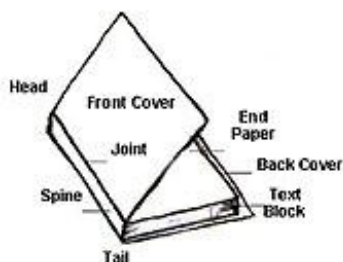
If your documents, books or photographs are wet following an accident or flood, immediate action needs to be taken to prevent mould growth and physical distortion of the paper. Although flood damage to some items may be irreversible, following the steps below can give your collections a good chance of survival. Most small or medium-sized private home collections can be easily and cheaply treated by air-drying. In the event of water damage to larger or valuable collections, or if in doubt about the best course of action, consider contacting a trained library and archives conservator for advice.

### Mould growth

Immediately remove wet items from flooded or damp places, as mould will begin to grow within 2 to 3 days. Mould spores flourish in warm, damp, stagnant conditions, and in the dark, so make sure the items are moved to a suitable environment before starting the drying process. First place blotting material, such as unprinted newsprint paper, paper towels, rags, etc., underneath the drying documents to absorb excess moisture. Circulating air will dry most materials and fans can safely be used as long as the airflow is directed away from the documents. See the table below for guidance on air-drying.

### Paper distortion

Paper-based collections will immediately begin to show signs of physical distortion, which makes the paper extremely fragile and easily torn or damaged. As no drying method can completely restore a collection, some cockling should be expected.



Wet book diagram

## Handling

The following handling precautions should always be observed:

Wet Books:

- Do not open wet volumes or close those that have fallen open
- Do not separate covers from text blocks
- Handle one item at a time
- Do not press water out of wet books

Unbound Documents:

- Keep all documents in order
- Do not blot surfaces of documents that have water-soluble inks

Photographic Material:

- Do not allow wet photographic materials to dry in contact with one another
- Do not touch the emulsion (print) side of photographic materials
- Seek assistance from photographic conservators for further salvage and recovery advice

<b>Material</b>	<b>How to air-dry</b>
Saturated Books	Stand on head on absorbent paper with covers open slightly; place absorbent paper between text block and covers; change absorbent paper as soon as it becomes wet and turn books alternately to rest on head and tail each time the paper is changed.
Partially Wet Books	Interleave absorbent paper every 20 pages with interleaving extending beyond the head (or tail) and text block; lay book flat; change interleaving when wet.
Damp Books	Stand on tail fanned open in a current of air; when almost dry lay book flat and place absorbent paper between covers and text block; reshape if possible; place light weight (covered in clean paper to prevent marking) on top until completely dry.

Bound Coated Papers/ Glossy Magazines	Interleave between each page with waxed paper; damp books should be stood on their heads and fanned open; fan through pages frequently to prevent sticking.
Unbound Coated Papers	Every sheet of coated paper should be separated from each other before drying; spread documents on table or floor and change absorbent paper beneath as it becomes wet.
Saturated Documents	Spread documents on table or floor and change absorbent paper beneath as it becomes wet.
Damp Documents	Flatten by placing between two sheets of absorbent paper and applying even pressure with weights until dry.
Photographic Prints	Remove from frame or mat; place on absorbent paper with face up and change paper when wet; if print appears to be stuck to glass do not remove and dry intact with the glass side down.
Photographic Negatives (roll or strip)	Dry emulsion side up on absorbent paper (change when wet) or hang carefully on a line with plastic clips.