

# Matting and Framing

Ford Conservation Center

2021

## Basics of Matting and Framing



Matting and framing is used to display, store, and safeguard works of art of paper, archives, and family documents. Proper matting and framing can help to protect these items from deterioration due to changing relative humidity, light exposure, handling, and other sources of damage. The following information is intended to explain the basics of matting, framing, and hanging art or other paper-based items. Consult a conservator for specific questions. See a framer you trust for help with your matting and framing needs.

Inside this issue:

Matting	1
Hinging	2
Adhesives	2
Framing	3
Hanging	4
Consulting a Conservator	5
Additional Resources	5

## Matting

Matting, matboard, or mat (all used interchangeably) is flat, paper-based material used to separate art from a frame. Matboard is used to securely house works on paper. Matboard comes in various sizes, colors, weights and types of material.

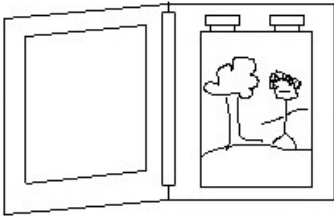
A mat for an object is a series of pieces constructed to protect the object. It includes a back mat and

window mat held together with a strip of linen tape. The object is attached to the back mat with hinges made of special Japanese tissue paper. Hinging is preferred over commercial tapes because it allows for easy removal of the object with minimal use of adhesive. The window mat construction allows the object to be seen while protecting it from handling while the back mat provides structural support for

the object.

Matboard should be acid-free, lignin-free, and made from alpha cellulose or 100% rag. Lignin is a component in cellulose that deteriorates rapidly due to its high acidic content. It causes paper to become brittle and discolor, and can affect nearby materials in the same way

Alkaline buffered matboard is a good option for acidic objects, like newsprint. The alkaline mat board also acts as a buffer to neutralize acids in the object that may develop over time. Matboard can be purchased from conservation suppliers and can be requested at most professional framing services.



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## Hinging

Hinges are used to securely attach the object to the back mat. They are always placed along the top edge of a work of art. The two most common types of hinges are “T-hinges” and “V-hinges.” These hinges are designed so that the object can be removed simply by cutting the hinge between the object and the back mat.

Each type of hinge is used for a different purpose. The “T-hinge” is generally used for works of art with defined margins. The object is over-matted, which means the edges are covered by the window mat.

“V-hinges”, or folded hinges, are tucked out of site under an object. This type of hinge is used for works of art with no definite margins, or



for objects that are “floated” in the window mat; this means the edges of the art are visible within the window.

## Adhesives

Conservators choose adhesives that are the appropriate strength and will hold for an indefinite period of time. It is important that adhesives do not discolor with age, and can be easily removed. Purified wheat starch paste is most commonly used for hinging works on paper. Commercial glues, pastes, or pressure sensitive tapes such as artist’s

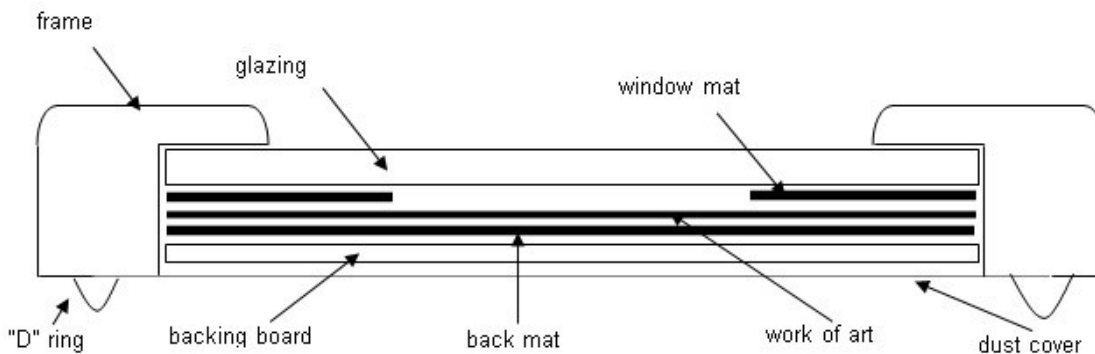
tape should not be used directly on a work of art or other paper-based documents. These materials can contain unknown additives, and the adhesives are not always stable. The results of aged adhesives cause staining, leave behind residues, and can deteriorate the cellulose support.

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## Framing

The most important thing to remember when framing an object is that it should not touch the glass or plexiglass (also called glazing). This helps to prevent the framed object from getting damp if moisture penetrates the frame and condensation occurs. A window mat also helps to create a space between the object and the glazing.

When deciding what kind of glazing to use in framing your object, consider the advantages and disadvantages of acrylic and glass. Acrylic glaze has advantages in that it is scratch resistant, lightweight, and UV filtering, and does not break easily. Never use acrylic glazing for works on paper with powder media such as charcoal or pastels. Acrylic



develops a static charge over time that can draw powder media off the paper.

Advantages to glass are its usability with all types of media including charcoal, and pastels, and its scratch resistance. However, glass is breakable, and the larger the piece, the heavier it is. It can also be expensive to purchase UV filtered

pieces of glass.

A frame must be deep enough to house the glazing, mat, dust cover, and backing board. To secure the backboard and matted object in the frame, conservators recommend non-rusting brass nails or offset clips. The frame package may then be sealed with a dust cover and linen tape.

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## Framing

Proper hanging and placement is an important element in the long-term care of works on paper. When choosing a location to hang your frame, there are a few things to keep in mind. Do not hang paper-based objects on outside walls, which are more prone to moisture and temperature fluctuations. Avoid direct sunlight, which can have a damaging and irreversible effect on paper. Do not place objects above working fireplaces.

When determining the proper hardware for the frame, fittings for a framed object must be

strong and secure. Avoid hanging a frame with picture wire or string as

these can easily break and cause stress on the frame parts. If wire must be used, use cable wire. It is preferable to use at least two D-rings with the appropriate weight rating for the frame. If one should fail, the other D-ring may prevent the frame from falling.



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## Consulting a Conservator

A conservator will be able to advise you the proper materials to use as well as the hanging hardware needed to safely hand your artwork. A conservator will also be able to direct you to a local framer who can professionally mat and frame your piece using appropriate materials and techniques.

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## Additional Resources

Northeast Document Conservation Center. *Matting and Framing for Art and Artifacts on Paper*<sup>3</sup>Retrieved <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/4.-storage-and-handling/4.10-matting-and-framing-for-art-and-artifacts-on-paper>

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## Conservation Suppliers

### Conservation Resources International

7350-A Lockport Place

Lorton, Virginia 22079

Toll free: (800) 634-6932

[www.conservationresources.com](http://www.conservationresources.com)

Archival housing/storage supplies, photographic supplies, general

### Gaylord Archival

P. O. Box 4901

Syracuse, NY 13221-4901

Toll Free: (800) 448-6160

[www.gaylord.com](http://www.gaylord.com)

General conservation supplies, housing supplies

### Hollinger Metal Edge, Inc.

9401 Northeast Drive

Fredericksburg, VA 22408

Toll Free: (800) 634-0491

[www.hollingermetaledge.com](http://www.hollingermetaledge.com)

Archival housing/storage supplies

### Light Impressions

100 Carlson Road

Rochester, NY 14610

Toll Free: (888) 222-2054

[www.lightimpressionsdirect.com](http://www.lightimpressionsdirect.com)

Photographic supplies, housing, matting and framing supplies

### University Products

517 Main Street

P. O. Box 101

Holyoke, MA 01041

Toll Free: (800) 628-1912

[www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com)

General conservation supplies, housing and matting supplies

### Talas

330 Morgan Ave

Brooklyn, NY 11211

Telephone: (212) 219-0770

[www.talasonline.com](http://www.talasonline.com)

Conservation supplies, photographic supplies, general



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