

Access to Special Collections Policy



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Policy Statement

This policy documents the conditions upon which Library readers are provided with access to special collections material held in the State Library of New South Wales' collection. These items are irreplaceable heritage materials which are unique, significant, and also often fragile.

The aim of this policy is to balance public access to special collections material with the Library's responsibility for the security and long-term preservation of the state's cultural heritage.

Definitions

- **Special Collections Material** – This includes manuscripts, pictures, oral history recordings, maps, rare printed items, archival newspapers and realia.
- **High Security Material** – This includes material of high value or significance which is stored in one of the Library's high security collection storage areas.
- **The Library** – The State Library of New South Wales.

Target audience

This policy applies to all readers wanting to use the Library's special collections material, including Library Fellows.

Operational requirements

1. Core principles governing access

The Library is committed to supporting the research work of scholars, students and other members of the public, through providing access to its special collections material. Coupled with this is the Library's responsibility for the security and long-term preservation of the state's cultural heritage by safeguarding these collections for future generations.

To minimise the physical handling of these unique and often fragile collection items, and therefore reduce the likelihood of any potential damage, requests to view are mediated and material is viewed in the Special Collections Area or another suitable venue. Where appropriate, Library readers are expected to have consulted other relevant resources first,

including published items (print and online), guides and indexes or surrogates (digitised, online, microform) prior to requesting the original material.

2. Reader access requirements

Readers need a Special Collections Library Card in order to request and access material from these special collections. This can be applied for [online](#) and then collected in person at the Special Collections Desk in the Mitchell Library Reading Room. Readers must present two forms of identification which provide their current address, photo and signature.

When using special collections material, readers must adhere to the [Special Collections conditions of use](#). These conditions are in place to assist the Library to preserve these unique collection items and specify information relating to the requesting of items, security procedures, correct handling and copying issues.

When readers request access to special collections material, Library staff will conduct a reference interview in order to:

- Understand the nature of the research being undertaken by the reader.
- Identify that appropriate indexes and surrogate copies including digital and microforms have been consulted if appropriate.
- Establish the type of access required, including the level of supervision or access to multiple copies to undertake comparisons.

The number of items to be requested will be verified through the reference interview process. Depending on the circumstance readers may request up to six manuscript boxes at a time (or up to 10 if they are stored offsite). If needed, more can be requested throughout the day if these are located in onsite storage. Different limits apply to high security items as specified in section 4 below.

Once retrieved from storage, requested material will be placed in a set aside area. These materials will be issued to readers in the Special Collections Area one box, folder or item at a time and depending on format, it may be weighed on issue and return. Readers must keep material in the same order and in the same folder as it is issued. If a reader requires access to more than one item at a time this should be confirmed in the reference interview.

If access to original archival newspapers is approved, these may also be issued to readers in the Special Materials Area in the Governor Marie Bashir Reading Room. These newspapers can also be requested with a regular (blue) Library Card.

When using special collections material readers must follow correct handling requirements as specified in the guide *Techniques for Handling Special Collection Items for Readers and Staff*. Copies of this printed guide are available at the Special Collections Desk. Library staff will discuss handling techniques with readers if required.

3. Reasons for restrictions to access

Reader access to some special collections material may be restricted. This includes the following:

- Items that are high security items. (see section 4 below)

- Items that have been donated to the Library may have access restrictions in place that have been specified by the donor (such restrictions will always be honoured) or by the Library.
- Items that are extremely fragile or in poor physical condition. This may be inherent in the format or be determined by Library staff once an item has been retrieved from storage.
- Original archival newspapers. Readers are expected to use online or microform copies. Requests for an exception to this will be considered, but must be made in writing and be submitted to the Manager, Information & Access (or a delegate) clearly stating the reason, including the issue date or date range required. If access is granted, this may be restricted to the specific section or pages required if the item is particularly fragile.
- Oral History recordings. Original masters will not be issued, readers will be provided with copies only, which may be digital.
- Sensitive collections and confidential information. Some Library collections include records containing people's personal information or content that is considered culturally sensitive to Indigenous Australians. Examples include medical records, records of children in care, legal records and Indigenous cultural material. Requests for access to sensitive collections require extra permissions and identification to be provided and should be submitted through the Library's [Ask a Librarian](#) service (7 working day turnaround time). Readers should consult with staff at the Special Collections Desk to determine access requirements for these items.
- Items that are undergoing conservation work.
- Items that are either currently being exhibited in a Library exhibition or are on loan to another cultural institution are unavailable.

4. Access to high security items

Some special collections items have additional security measures in place due to their value and/or significance. Some of these items are indicated on the Library catalogue by a call number with a "SAFE" prefix. Others may say that an appointment is necessary to view them.

Additional requirements apply for readers requesting to access these items:

- Requests for access to high security items must be submitted at least four working days in advance. Exceptions will be considered on application.
- Requests must be submitted in writing through the online Access to Collection Request form (<http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/access-collections-request>), or in person at the Special Collections Desk. Readers must specify the reason for their request.
- All requests for high security items will be forwarded to the Manager, Information & Access (or a delegate) for consideration and approval.
- Readers may request a maximum of two high security items. Exceptions to this are made if the retrieval of more than two items and/or the viewing of multiple items is required, for example in the case of a reader conducting extended or comparative research. Such exceptions must be approved by the Manager, Information & Access or the Executive Director, Library & Information Services.

- Reader viewings of high security items are usually conducted as supervised viewings by Special Collections staff. Exceptions to this can be organised for readers conducting in-depth research and readers should discuss these requirements with staff prior to visit. Library staff will arrange a specific time and location for the viewing in consultation with the reader. In some instances Library staff will handle fragile formats such as glass negatives, ceramics and textiles on behalf of readers.

Other special collections which have additional measures in place are items located in the Framed Collections Store. These items are indicated on the Library catalogue with a Physical Access Condition note that says “Access to this pictures collection via appointment only. Please submit your request through [Ask a Librarian](#)”.

- Readers will be taken to the Store by appointment to view the work accompanied by two Library staff.
- No bags are permitted
- The item/s are not to be removed from the racks or touched by the reader.
- If the reader wishes to view the verso, this request must be indicated in advance and staff will seek advice from the Manager, Collection Care or Senior Conservator Books, Objects and Paintings.

5. Copying special collections material

Readers are responsible for observing the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)* with respect to materials in copyright.

Readers must also adhere to the copying guidelines as specified in the [Special Collections conditions of use](#).

Readers need to speak with a staff member at the Special Collections Desk to clarify whether any restrictions apply to the item they are wanting to copy. The physical condition and preservation needs of an item are also considered.

Readers may be permitted to make copies of an item using their own equipment such as a camera or phone, however approval to do this must be obtained from Library staff, by submitting a “Copying by readers using their own equipment” form, available from the Special Collections Desk.

Responsibilities

Managers and supervisors are responsible for managing processes relevant to this policy and communicating this policy to staff and readers.

Staff are responsible for understanding and complying with this policy and communicating it to Library readers.

Related Key Legislation and Policy

Most relevant legislation:

- Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)
- Library Act 1939

- Library Regulation 2010

Most relevant policies:

- Staff Loans Policy
- Sensitive Collections & Confidential Information Policy (currently in draft)

Related Procedures

- Collections in High Security Storage: access, loans & retrieval
- Framed Collections Viewings
- Staff Work Loans
- Supervised Viewings
- Sensitive Collections

References

1. *Special Collections Conditions of Use*, (<http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/slsw-special-collections-conditions-use.pdf>)
2. *Techniques for Handling Special collections Items for Readers and Staff*, (copies available from Special Collection Desk)

Document history and version control

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Brief description
0.1			First Draft
0.2			Second Draft
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0.4	August 2017	LISMC	Fourth Draft
1.0	18 September 2017	CMG	Approved version