How to use special collections

The Library’s special collections include original material and rare printed material that's unique and surprising, but also often irreplaceable and fragile.

Visit the Special Collections area in the Mitchell Library Reading Room to use material from the Library’s special collections.

These collections include original material and rare printed material such as manuscripts, pictures, oral histories, maps, rare books and realia.

Librarians in this area can also help you with your research and using the collections, including our Ask a Librarian service if you can't visit in person.

How to request material

If you’re in the Library, please speak to a staff member to discuss your request and complete a request slip.

If you want to request material before you visit the Library, complete the Access to Special Collections Request form. We'll get back to you within 5 working days.

The access conditions and availability of the collection item will determine when it will be available for access. Staff may give you a microfilm or digital copy instead of the original. This is to help preserve the original.

WHEN YOU VISIT

You will need a Special Collections card to use material.

- You can sign up for a free card when you visit the Library.
- When you visit, you will need to show 2 forms of identification that together have your current address, photo and signature.

You need to follow the Special Collections - Conditions of use when in the Special Collections area. These guidelines help us to protect and preserve the Library’s special collections for future generations.

You're not able to bring any bags into the Special Collections area. This includes handbags, camera bags and laptop bags. Lockers are available for hire in the Mitchell Library.

Other items that you’re not able to bring in, include:

- food and drink including bottled water
- scanners including hand-held scanners
- pens, ink and highlighters.

You can bring in your own books and materials by completing a form at the Special Collections desk. This includes material you’ve requested from other Library collections.

Where to collect material

Collect material including offsite material from the Special Collections desk.

Pick up published material from the ‘collect shelves’ in the Special Collections area.
How to handle material

Staff will generally give you one item at a time. You may need to wait while staff weigh and record the material's weight.

When handling collection material you need to:

- have clean, dry hands and wear gloves if asked
- rest items on the table
- use pencils only
- keep material in the same order or folder
- do not mark documents or take notes on top of the material
- do not use post-it notes to mark pages.

Staff can provide you with resources to help with handling material, including:

- weights
- book rests
- item supports
- cushions
- gloves
- alcohol hand wipes
- acid free paper markers.

Staff may ask you to move material, use a specific table or to change seats. Other clients are not able to use material without speaking to staff. You’re not able to remove material from the Special Collections area.

Speak to staff at the desk if you’re unsure or need any help with handling material.

COPYING material
Speak to staff before photocopying and photographing material. Staff will need to check that it's not in copyright, restricted or too fragile.

Use your Special Collections card or copy card to print and photocopy material. Find out more about printing and copying [9].

You can also use your own equipment including a tripod to photograph material. You will need to complete a form before you can use your own equipment. Flash must be turned off when photographing material.

Scanners including hand-held and flat-bed scanners are not allowed in the Special Collections area.

Where to return material

Return material to staff at the Special Collections desk. Staff may need to weigh the returned material.

If you'd like to use the material again, speak to staff about having it put aside for your next visit.


Links