

**Book Repair And Conservation:  
Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts  
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It has been an often stated goal of the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) to introduce book repair as a service for our clients. Models have been prepared to illustrate typical treatment specifications that may be offered. The following is a brief outline of the topics I believe to be key in developing this service for a regional conservation center.

*Documentation*

Regional conservation centers are established to provide professional conservation services. A distinguished feature of professional conservation service, in comparison to the services of a library binder or microfilmer, for example, is full documentation of the condition of each item before and after treatment. This includes a written condition report (pre-treatment), a final (post-treatment) report, and photographic documentation before and after treatment. These procedures are built into the treatment stream of any professional conservation practice. Such a level of documentation may be considered excessive and prohibitively expensive for a book repair service. What is an appropriate level of documentation? Is no documentation, but relying, for instance, on the standard repair specification as a replacement for a written report, acceptable for a conservation center? Is the use of computer-generated treatment descriptions adhered in the back of a book an acceptable compromise? These are some questions that must be addressed.

*Selection*

Choosing the appropriate candidate for book repair can call for the client and service provider to make subtle differentiations between damaged books. First, because book repair implies treatment to specification (see below), the client should ideally be able to identify books that fit the repair specification. This can imply

that the client has a clear understanding of the repair specification, and is able to view the damaged book from the perspective of proposed treatment steps.

Are there clear criteria of selection? Selection criteria would necessarily include:

- 1) Examination of the text by the client and the repair technician to evaluate for:
  - a) Acceptable level of tears and losses, how much mending is tolerable;
  - b) Brittle or damaged paper (mold) – can the text be repaired and continue to be usable?
  - c) Previous repairs – is there such a thing as “non-damaging tape”, that is, can some repair tapes be ignored in repair?
- 2) Examination of the text block. Among the issues to be resolved are:
  - a) Does the necessity for resewing a text block take the book out of consideration for repair?
  - b) Is the adhesive consolidation of a loose text block through relining an acceptable shortcut?
  - c) Is the existing attachment of text block and cover salvageable, or must it always be strengthened with paste downs, tackets, or cloth spine linings?
- 3) Examination of cover:
  - a) What cover conditions are not reusable, such as, red rotted leather, frayed board edges, mold and water damage?
  - b) Does recasing in a new cover fit in a book repair specification? An issue with the latter is the question of the intent of repair: Is the maintenance of the artifact, or the usability of the text primary?

A second factor in selection is the cost of book repair. Assessing value of items for treatment is, of course, the responsibility of the curator or librarian. It is also the responsibility of the curator or librarian to weigh the cost of repair against the value of the book. Although the per item cost of book repair will be very small in comparison to the cost of conservation, the cost of repair will probably be at least three times the cost of the most expensive library binding option. Although the curator or librarian will assess when the extra cost of repair is desirable over a library binding, should the book conservator decide when the book is no longer a candidate for repair but for conservation?

### *Specification*

An advantage of conservation in the treatment of objects is that the specification is open-ended. This means that in approaching the item the conservator brings a variety of techniques and materials, and, ideally, the item defines the treatment. In book repair, one or more specifications is defined and items for treatment are grouped according to the specifications. The conservator begins with the item and derives the specs; the book repairer begins with the specs and defines the item (“This is a reback,” “this is a hinge repair”). In establishing a book repair service the definition of the specifications are key. A variety of specifications are desirable; however, too many options can lead to a random, “How shall I do it this time?” approach.

For library binders the single most important specification decision for any item is leaf attachment. In book repair, where the leaf attachment is assumed to be largely intact, the central decision is the choice of the cover-to-text attachment. This aspect of book repair is crucial because the repair is an attempt to save the original cover which is often damaged in several ways, and restore a broken cover-to-text attachment to usability. Similar to leaf attachment for library binders, the basic options for cover-to-text attachment are based either on adhesive or sewing. Some options include:

- 1) Adhesive attachments:
  - a) Hollow tube adhered to the spine on one side and the spine of the cover on the other;
  - b) The BookLab collection maintenance repair based on a Japanese paper hinged endpaper with a broad adhesive attachment to the spine and hinge to the inside cover board;
  - c) The Japanese paper hinge, typically a narrow strip of paper added to either side of the joint of cover board and text block. (This technique has been presented and refined by Don Etherington.)
- 2) Sewn attachments:
  - a) The CCAHA models use a cloth spine lining that can be sewn through the fold, or through the shoulder, and adhered to the inside cover boards;