

Videotape Care and Handling Recommendations

The life expectancy of videotape is short compared to that of many other library materials. Factors affecting life expectancy include the age, format, and condition of the tape, storage conditions, handling procedures, and the availability of playback equipment.

As with all machine-readable information, preservation must be proactive to ensure future access. Preservation measures will include providing a good storage environment, proper handling, and periodic reformatting as the tape ages or as the format becomes obsolete.

For more information, please see the bibliography, "[Care and Handling of Videotape](#)."

Storage

- Store tapes in a cool, dry environment. Keep temperature and relative humidity fluctuations to a minimum ($\pm 5^{\circ}\text{F}$, $\pm 5\%$ RH from set point). Store tapes at room conditions if they are used often. Tapes used infrequently can be housed under cold storage conditions, but they will need at least 24-48 hours to acclimate to room temperature and humidity prior to playback.
- Shelf videotapes in an upright position as you would a book.
- House a tape in its container when not in use. Discard paper slip cases and replace them with ones made from an inert plastic such as polypropylene.
- Properly label the tape and its container. Include the title or subject, producer, the date the tape was recorded, and run length of the program. Information such as the tape format (VHS, digital VHS, etc.), production standard (NTSC, PAL, SECAM, etc.), and any other helpful publication or description information.
- Store tapes away from playback equipment, televisions, and other electrical equipment.

Handling

- Keep storage and playback areas free of dust, dirt, food and drink, smoke, and other contaminants.
- Keep handling to a minimum. Do not touch the tape itself.
- Remove the record tab on all cassettes to eliminate accidental re-recording.
- If a tape is viewed often, have a use copy made to reduce wear on the original.
- Always fully rewind a tape after viewing. If you stop a tape in the middle of a program, forward to the end of the tape prior to rewinding to ensure an even tape pack.
- Do not attempt to play, repair, or recover damaged tapes. Seek professional help immediately.*

* During business hours, call the Weissman Preservation Center at **617-495-8596** or Conservation Services, Harvard College Library, **617-496-2403**. For emergency telephone numbers during non-business hours, see <http://preserve.harvard.edu/emergencies/harvard.html>.

Equipment

- Keep all playback equipment clean and in good working condition. Consult the VCR owner's manual and follow the manufacturer's recommended maintenance schedule and procedures.
- Purchase a name-brand, cloth-and-alcohol VCR cleaning system and follow the manufacturer's directions.
- Protect machinery with dust covers. Dirt and dust in the machine can cause interruptions to the signal (dropouts) and may scratch the tape.

Available from <http://preserve.harvard.edu>
<http://preserve.harvard.edu/guidelines/videotape.pdf>

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