WHAT IS A TIME CAPSULE?
A time capsule helps preserve the memory of a place, experience, or people at a special time. People often make time capsules for someone to open many years in the future—the 1938 World’s Fair buried one to be opened in 1999! You or your family can make one, too.

Your time capsule could celebrate a summer vacation; the year you were a special age; your friends, family, pet, or school; or something else important to you.

WHAT CAN I PUT IN A TIME CAPSULE?
That depends on what you care about and the size of your capsule. Choose pictures or other items that remind you of the time capsule era. These interact to cause chemical reactions and damage. Water (moisture) starts reactions that damage materials. Undesirable pollutants in the environment (like dust and fumes) also contribute to deterioration. Heat and light speed damage. Some damage we can see easily, but often only a microscope or chemical analysis can reveal it.

SOME VERY BASIC PRINCIPLES
Every object is made of chemicals—liquid, solid, or gas; in many forms and combinations; from smaller-than-an-atom particles to elements and compounds. These interact to cause chemical reactions and damage. Water (moisture) starts reactions that damage materials. Undesirable pollutants in the environment (like dust and fumes) also contribute to deterioration. Heat and light speed damage. Some damage we can see easily, but often only a microscope or chemical analysis can reveal it.

BUT WHAT CAN I DO?
Use preservation-quality storage and exhibit materials. “Archival” and “acid free” have no sure meaning. Use high-quality buffered (pH 7-9.5) or neutral (pH 7) material, or plastic boxes, tissue, rolls, folders, mats, backing, and other coverings or padding. Look for products that pass the photographic activity test (PAT). Read labels and ask questions. The more protection, the safer your item.

Comic books have many preservation needs in common with books and photos, but were traditionally printed on low-grade newsprint pulp paper and can quickly become acidic and brittle.

FIND A STABLE STORAGE SPACE
Store comic books in a clean storage area where temperature and relative humidity (RH) are moderate and stable: 68°F or less, and between 30-40% RH. Moisture and temperature-speed decay. Low humidity can crack, peel, or curl pages. Avoid attics and basements and provide good air circulation. An air-conditioned room or closet is best.

Don’t expose paper to fumes, plywood, cleaning supplies, or cardboard. Good housekeeping helps protect your treasures. Check regularly for signs of rodents—eliminate them if found!

PROTECT FROM LIGHT
All light, especially the ultraviolet (UV) part of the spectrum, causes fading and other damage. Store and display items away from natural and artificial light. Comics and newsprint are particularly vulnerable.

FIND A STABLE STORAGE SPACE
Store textiles in a clean area with stable temperature, and relative humidity (RH) below 65%, since moisture encourages mold. Avoid attics, basements, and garages. Textiles are vulnerable to pests, which thrive in dark, undisturbed, dusty spaces. Prevent pests with good housekeeping, including vacuuming. Check regularly for signs of insects or rodents—eliminate them if found!

Because we use textiles almost constantly, we forget they need preservation, too.

PROTECT FROM LIGHT
Light causes fading and speeds deterioration. Store textiles away from natural and artificial light and limit display; avoid sunlight, and minimize indoor lighting. UV-filters (in frames, or on windows and fluorescent lights) don’t prevent deterioration—only slow it.

USE PRESERVATION STORAGE ENCLOSURES
Use preservation-quality enclosures to protect textiles from dirt, fading, and unnecessary handling. Use unbuffered (neutral) tissue for protein fibers (wool, silk, fur) or when fiber content is mixed or unknown. Use buffered tissue for cellulose
HOW DO I MAKE A TIME CAPSULE?

Your container and everything inside should be made of materials that conservators call “stable.” This means the chemicals in your items won’t react quickly to cause rust, brittleness, fading, or other damage.

HOW TO MAKE A TIME CAPSULE

Lay small, flat textiles like samplers, handkerchiefs, and historical fragments in a simple preservation-quality tray or folder to prevent flexing and folds. Roll larger flat textiles around a preservation-quality tube to avoid creases and distortion. Do not roll textiles with stiff linings, 3-D components (like tassels, sequins), or fragile velvet piles, or costumes. Pad costumes, wedding gowns, uniforms, hats, and baby clothes with tissue to support shape and prevent crushing. If you fold quilts or coverlets, use tissue to pad folds; make the fewest creases you can. Store textiles in a preservation-quality box. Don’t stack heavy textiles on top of delicate ones.

HANDLE WITH CARE

Don’t use paper clips, rubber bands, staples, marking pens, or highlighters—all can stick, stain, deform, or otherwise damage comic book issues.

Store comic books vertically. Store like sizes and types together, with good support, preferably preservation-quality backing boards.

Store comic books in preservation storage boxes that are the right size for the issues. Do not over fill the boxes.

Handle gently. Wash and dry your hands well and often, use two hands to support items you move. Use mat board to support larger or fragile flat items.

For more information:

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This text is by the American Institute for Conservation, www.conservation-us.org.

For information about time capsules:


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Photo: “Mother and child—Apsaroke” by Edward Curtis, 1908. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-USF34-033065-D.


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