



Division of Paleontology General Guidelines for Handling Collections

Humans are the most common agents of specimen loss and damage. As a person who is continually handling specimens, the most likely person to lose, damage, or destroy a specimen is you.

1. When you open a cabinet, check carefully before slowly pulling out any drawers. Often specimens are tightly packed and are in contact with the bottom of the drawer above.
2. If you must remove an entire drawer, make sure that you can support the weight of the drawer before doing so. Drawers are often of differing depths – pull the drawer out slowly and be aware of when you are nearing the end of the runner.
3. Fossil specimens are often both fragile and heavy. Before you pick one up, think about how you will lift it. Is it light or heavy; are some parts of it more fragile or weakly attached than others?
4. With a larger specimen, try lifting the object an inch or so clear of the surface, then immediately put it down. This will give you a sense of any weaknesses, instability or flex in the specimen.
5. With heavy specimens, make sure you have cleared the area that you are moving them to before you pick them up. Make sure you are capable of lifting the specimen alone, and ask for help if you are in any doubt.
6. Never examine a specimen in a place where it can fall all the way to the floor. Hold it above a drawer, or tabletop, so that it has less far to fall if you drop it, and where you could easily find it.
7. When working on heavier specimens, always lay a sheet of ethafoam, foam rubber or some other cushioning material down on the tabletop for the specimen to rest on.
8. Think about how you put specimens down. Don't let the full weight of the specimen rest on a fragile structure.
9. Never leave specimens out overnight, or for prolonged periods of time – it increases the risk of accidental damage.
10. Specimens are kept in order within cabinets and shelving, so make sure you put them back *exactly* where you found them.
11. Never force a specimen back into a box, drawer, or cabinet. Take the time to make sure it fits properly.
12. Don't take single elements from different specimens for the purpose of comparison; it increases the probability that you won't be able to put them back where they belong. Instead, take out the whole skeleton from the drawer or cabinet.
13. If you have pulled out an entire drawer, make sure that you return it to the same pair of runners in the cabinet – it is easy to damage projecting specimens by not allowing sufficient clearance above and below the drawer.

Accidents sometimes happen, even with the most careful workers. If you break something, do NOT just put it away. Make the appropriate collection manager or the Supervisor of Fossil Preparation aware, so that repairs can be made, and the long-term preservation of the specimen can be ensured.