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Encapsulation Notes

Think carefully before you encapsulate a document. Because there is no room for air circulation, acids forming in the paper cannot escape, and instead are trapped inside the encapsulation, accelerating deterioration for the object you are trying to protect. I try to use encapsulation either for fragile but undeteriorated materials that are going to be handled frequently or for materials that are so brittle that they cannot be handled without doing damage. For most materials except for those cases, it's a better idea to just place your document in an acid-free folder that is large enough to contain it.

The polyester film used in encapsulation has a static electric field associated with it. This can be used to your advantage. For example, when you encapsulate something very brittle, fragments of paper will usually stay in place because of the static. However if you encapsulate something with friable media (pastel, charcoal, pencil, colored pencil), the static can pull the media right off the page. If there is friable media on your document, it is better to use an acid-free folder to protect your document.

This video shows a basic encapsulation procedure. A few more advanced techniques are worth mentioning. First, if your document only has media on one side of the page, you can put a sheet of acid-free alkaline buffered paper behind your document to help neutralize acids. Second, you can place thread at the inner edges of the tape before you seal the encapsulation. This will create a barrier between the tape and the document, so that if the document shifts, it will not get caught in the tape.

Encapsulation Supplies

Tools

- Cutting mat
- Break off knife or scalpel (do not use X-acto knives)
- Straight edge
- Bone folder
- Weight

Supplies

- 3 mil Polyester film
- 3M #415 double sided tape (1/4")
- Alkaline buffered paper (optional)
- Linen bookbinding thread (optional)