STATE LIBRARY VICTORIA
What's your story?

When framing artworks on paper in order to hang and display them, it is important to use good-quality materials and conservation framing techniques. Conservation framing requires a strong frame, appropriate glazing, a window mount or spacer and a sealed backing board.

This arrangement protects the work from damage during storage and provides physical support during handling. When framed, a window mount also protects the work from contact with the glazing, preventing condensation and mould growth.

Mounting

Use good-quality materials for mounting. Specify 'museum quality' or 'conservation style' mounts – 'acid-free' and 'alkaline buffered' are also desirable characteristics in a mount board. Window mounts should have separate front and backboards, joined at one edge (usually the left or top edge) with cloth tape. The artwork is hinged to the backboard (not the window) with paper hinges, usually along the top edge of the work. This allows the work to hang freely in the mount and react to changing atmospheric conditions. Alternatively, use a spacer that sits between the work and the glazing layer. Both systems prevent contact between the artwork and the glazing, which reduces the risk of damage should condensation occur.

When commissioning picture framing, ask to see examples of the proposed style or consult a conservator. Choosing a style of frame is a matter of personal taste, but some frames will offer more protection than others. Try to choose a frame that is at least 2 centimetres in depth (from the front, where the glazing is, to where the frame rests on the wall). The larger your work, the more important it is that the frame has this depth and, as a result, greater strength.

Choosing appropriate glazing is also extremely important:

- Acrylic glazing (e.g. Perspex® VA) is usually the best choice as it is designed to offer a high level of UV protection and is unlikely to shatter if the work is accidentally dropped. (Not all acrylic glazing provides the same level of UV protection; check with your framer.)

- However some works – such as soft pencil drawings, pastels and other loose media – are not suitable for glazing with acrylic, as plastics generate a static charge that can attract pigment particles. Glass should be used for these works.

- For a very large work, the glazing layer may need to be thicker to ensure that it does not warp and touch the artwork.

When a frame is assembled it should have a strong support board that will protect the back of the artwork. Ask your framer to use fluted plastic board such as Corex™ or card/foam laminate such as Foamcore™. This board should be secured with non-rusting staples, pins or points. Seal the gap between the support board and frame with gummed tape. This will prevent any insects, dust or other debris entering the frame.

Hanging

When hanging an artwork it is preferable to use two hooks on the wall, one at each side of the frame. This distributes the weight of the frame over two points instead of relying on the strength of one hook. Avoid hanging artworks by using staples or bent tacks. If you do hang from one point use the appropriate strength framing wire, not fishing line or string.

Avoid hanging frames on external walls, as mould growth on the back of frames is more likely. A small piece of cork (or similar) on the back of the bottom edge of a frame will aid air circulation and help prevent mould growth.

Further information

Heritage Collections Council, 1998. *reCollections*. Canberra, Collections Australia Network.
See collectionsaustralia.net/sector_info_item/24 (accessed June 2013).

For advice call State Library Victoria's conservation inquiry line on **03 8664 7359** or toll-free on **1800 999 735**, or visit the website at slv.vic.gov.au/conservation-guides.