CONSERVATION GUIDELINES
Edge Stamping of Bound Library Materials (HCL)

These guidelines for edge stamping of library materials in the Harvard College Library (HCL) describe current practice in HCL Conservation Services. The goal of the edge stamping program is to contribute to the provision of a secure environment for the Library’s collections. In general, edge stamping policies should be developed in collaboration with security and circulation staff.

Edge stamping is a prominent, permanent property marking that is readily visible to security personnel. As a theft deterrent, the edge stamp is difficult to eradicate or conceal.

Stamps and stamp pads:

The stamp should read HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY. To ensure consistency of font and size across HCL, Conservation Services staff will order, pay for, and distribute the stamps. Permanent, quick-drying black ink stamp pads made of felt or sponge should be used with the stamps.

HCL stamps have a sans serif typeface for clarity and ease of cleaning. The standard stamp comes in two sizes: one for a narrow text block and one for a wider text block. Use the larger of the two stamps whenever possible.

Stamping techniques:

Books processed for HCL, whether new acquisitions or older items that have been repaired, digitized, or otherwise treated by Conservation Services, are stamped. Exceptions to this rule are noted at the end of these Guidelines.

When stamping, grasp the book firmly so that the edge of the text block presents a smooth, solid surface. Ink the stamp before each application. For both ergonomic reasons and to maintain a clean, clear image, it is important not to stamp with too vigorous a motion or too much pressure. Both can lead to injuries of the wrist, slipping of the stamp, and smudging of the image. While it is desirable to have a clear impression, do not stamp multiple times with the intention of trying to create a “perfect” one. Apply the stamp in only one place: the center of the fore edge of the book.

In edge stamping, as in all other aspects of conservation, treat the book gently. A neat, well-aligned image is the goal. Books should always be processed in a manner that reflects proper care and handling techniques and sound ergonomic practice.

1. Special collections material should never be edge stamped. Materials in the Theodore Roosevelt Collection in Widener, for example, are not stamped, even though they circulate. Materials in departmental libraries are not marked with the HCL stamp. Instead, they receive department-specific stamps.
2. If an HCL book has already been stamped with any one of a variety of stamps that have been used in the past, it is not necessary to re-stamp the book. This will only create a messy text block.

3. Books with rough or irregularly trimmed pages, gold leaf, fore edge treatments, or black/dark colored edges should not be edge stamped. Instead, the stamp should be placed at the bottom of the verso of the title page. If just the fore edge is rough and the head of the text block is smooth, apply the stamp to the head of the text block.

4. Books with text blocks that are narrower than the narrow stamp should not be edge stamped. Instead, the stamp should be placed at the bottom of the verso of the title page.

5. Media should be labeled, not edge stamped. Most media formats are too fragile for firm handling and their housings are usually made of plastics. Ink will not adhere to plastic surfaces or to glossy paper.

6. Materials transferred from other libraries raise issues for the library that receives them. Attempting to remove or cover previous markings is difficult and potentially damaging to the structure of the text block or appearance of the book. Usually the best choice—and certainly the most cost effective—is to do nothing, allowing the book to be routed based on the item record and the ownership markings on the barcode, call number label, or date due slip.

For further information, please consult the Binding and Shelf Preparation Manager, HCL Conservation Services. See Preservation and Imaging Staff Directory.

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