



CARING FOR VIDEOTAPES

Most videotapes are on magnetic tape, which is a relatively short-lived medium. Videotapes should be kept in a stable environment with controlled temperatures and humidities. Although many archives place magnetic media in rooms below standard room temperature, the important factor in maintaining the tapes in your home is to find a place that does not fluctuate in temperature.

The following tips can help you extend the life of your videotapes. However, even when properly stored, magnetic media may only have a life span of perhaps 20-30 years. Keep in mind that tape quality varies tremendously and many tapes on the market are not ideal for long-term storage. In order to preserve the images they contain remastering and reformatting is necessary. Although expensive, copying and reformatting completed by an experienced video technician can be worthwhile because these experts are able to retain the most information and get the clearest sound and picture. Remember that as technology improves, formats become obsolete. Make sure that you do not get stuck without the appropriate player for your tapes. It is likely that videotapes will be obsolete within the next decade.

For more information visit the Conservation Online Web video preservation Web site:
<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/bytopic/video/>

GENERAL STORAGE PRACTICES

- Keep tapes in climate controlled conditions (preferably around 70 F, and 35% - 45% humidity).
- Avoid storage in hot areas such as near windows, a heater, or on or near any type of equipment, including TVs and VCRs.
- Avoid storage near electrical or magnetic fields such as speakers, headphones, refrigerator magnets, etc.
- Never store tapes directly on the floor. A minimum of 3 inches off the floor is recommended.
- Avoid storage under or near water pipes, water heaters, sinks or any areas where water is used.
- Record tabs or buttons should always be removed immediately after recording so that you do not accidentally record over them.
- Tapes should always be stored in their cases to protect them from dust, moisture, and other environmental problems.
- Tapes and their cases should always be labeled with clear information.
- Tapes should always be stored on their sides with the spine vertical as you would with a book on a shelf (see illustrations on p. 2); never flat with the reels in a horizontal position. Horizontal storage can result in serious damage to the edge of the tape and result in a distorted image.

REWINDING NOTES

- Completely rewind tapes after use and before they are boxed and reshelved.
- The best way to rewind a tape is to fast forward it completely to the end, and then rewind it completely. This should give the best chance of having a uniform tension throughout the tape.
- Over time leaving a tape only partially rewound can result in a crease in the tape causing disintegration of the video and audio signal.
- Tape rewinding machines are not recommended. They tend to rewind tapes at an uneven tension, and can stretch or otherwise damage the tape.

EQUIPMENT

- Equipment should always be well maintained and serviced regularly.
- A machine that is out of alignment or has dirty or clogged heads can scratch or ruin a good tape.
- If uncertain about equipment, always use a “test tape” (one that can be easily replaced) to check that the machine is functioning correctly before playing a Master Tape or any tape that may be irreplaceable.
- Never try to force a tape into a player.

TAPE QUALITY

- Always use good quality tape stock for use as both Masters and copies.
- Stay with well-known brands of tape that you know work for your needs.
- Cheap, poor-quality tapes can result in poor recordings and often block up the heads of a recorder.
- Beware of very cheap, pre-recorded tapes as they have a tendency to clog the video heads and sometimes break during play. They may even jam in a VCR, rendering both tape and player useless.



Correct ways to store videotapes.



Incorrect way to store videotapes.

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