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### **Proper Basket Handling**

During our class consultation session with basket weavers, basketry experts, and ethnobotanists, one statement struck me during all of the conversations. Abe Sanchez, a native weaver, commented that, “people don’t know how to hold baskets.”<sup>1</sup> Several other attendees nodded in agreement as Abe continued by demonstrating how people often grab the top or rim of a basket when they should be holding the body and supporting the weight of the whole object. This conversation inspired me to create an infographic showing proper (and improper) methods for handling basketry items of different types, sizes, and conditions. This infographic could be printed as a poster and hung on the wall in basket storage areas. There, it would be visible to museum staff members, special visitors, and researchers who may want to handle the baskets.

Native American baskets are made of organic materials, and are therefore susceptible to damage from a variety of causes, including insects, improper storage conditions, and mishandling. The use of proper handling techniques may ensure the safety of both the basket and the person handling it.

Before touching or picking up a basket, hands should either be washed with soap and water and dried thoroughly or nitrile gloves should be worn. This action prevents the transfer of oils and dirt on one’s hands from transferring to the basket.<sup>2</sup> Next, the basket should be thoroughly examined for any weaknesses or areas of damage. If a basket is very fragile, it should not be handled directly, but placed on a tray. If the basket is stable enough to be handled, it should never be lifted by the rim, handles, straps, or other attachments. These features may be weak and easily damaged or detached.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the basket should be held with both hands supporting the base and body.<sup>4</sup> For very large baskets, where this is not possible, it may be necessary for two or more people to carry the basket together.

After handling, the basket should be set down flat on its base or replaced in its appropriate storage box or mount. If these simple guidelines are followed during the handling and moving of basketry items, careless damage may be avoided and the life of the objects may be prolonged.

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<sup>1</sup> Abe Sanchez, January 31, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Odegaard, “Appropriate Handling of Museum Objects [Tutorial],” The Sustainable Heritage Network, <http://www.sustainableheritagenetwork.org/digital-heritage/appropriate-handling-museum-objects-tutorial>.

<sup>3</sup> Marjorie Shelley, *The Care and Handling of Art Objects, Practices in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Odegaard and Grace Katterman, *A Guide to Handling Anthropological Museum Collections* (Tucson, Arizona: The Western Association For Art Conservation and Nancy Odegaard, 1992), 34; Odegaard, “Appropriate Handling of Museum Objects [Tutorial].”

## Bibliography

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Odegaard, Nancy and Grace Katterman. *A Guide to Handling Anthropological Museum Collections*. Tucson, Arizona: The Western Association For Art Conservation and Nancy Odegaard, 1992.

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# Proper Basket Handling



Proper handling will help prevent damage and prolong the basket's life!



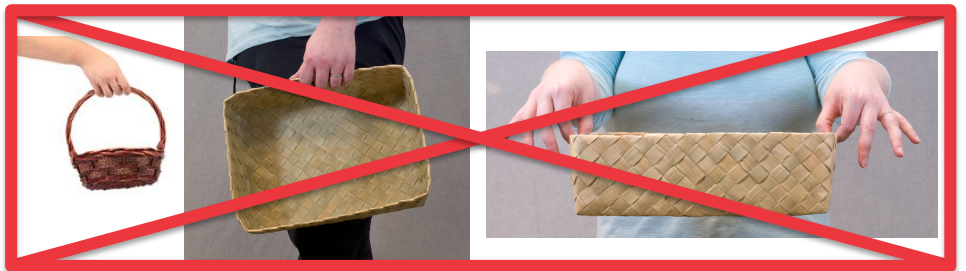
**Wash hands or wear nitrile gloves before handling baskets.**



Examine the basket for weak areas before handling. **Do not hold fragile objects in your hands.** Place it on a tray before moving or handling it.



**Never hold a basket by a handle, strap, or rim. These features may be fragile and could break.**



**Use Both Hands.**



**Support the basket's base.**

**For larger baskets, support the bottom edges and sides.**

