

Appendix B

How Can I Preserve my Time Capsule Objects for the Future?

Time capsules have been sealed in everything from old shoeboxes to nitrogen-flushed, humidity-controlled, air-tight containers of stainless steel. Even among experts, there are different opinions about what it takes to preserve objects for the future. Everyone agrees, however, that dampness, temperature swings, sticky adhesives, and sunlight are all bad for objects. This sheet gives you several options for your time capsule container and suggests steps you can take to protect your objects.

What kind of time capsule should I use?

There are many different types of time capsules. Some are more elaborate than most people need. On the expensive end of the spectrum are burial vaults with sensors that detect moisture, temperature changes and other possible hazards to objects. Other expensive types of time capsules are specially made copper or stainless steel containers. The objects in these containers are sometimes sealed inside glass globes and the containers are sometimes flushed with argon or nitrogen gas prior to sealing to remove all the oxygen from the time capsule. Common time capsules that are not buried underground are cornerstones of buildings and bank vaults.

It is important to remember that you do not need to go to these extremes to make your own time capsule at school. You can make a simple time capsule that is stored somewhere in your school. You can use an ordinary box with a lid. If possible, line the box with acid-free paper to prevent the acids in the box from interacting with your objects. This container should be closed to protect it from dust and light but should not be airtight so that it does not trap moisture. When you are ready to store your above-ground time capsule, store it away from heat (attics) or dampness (basements). You should also try to avoid putting it in a place that experiences large temperature changes like a garage or out building. An ideal place might be in the back of your closed or a cupboard.

Regardless of what kind of time capsule you make, remember to put it in a place that will remain undisturbed until your designated time of opening.

How should I assemble my time capsule?

Once you decide on your container, the theme of its contents and what objects you want to include, you are ready to assemble your time capsule. You might consider wrapping your objects in acid-free paper or clean cotton cloth to prevent them from touching and potentially damaging each other. You might also consider putting small items in envelopes and putting tags on larger items. Use a #2 pencil to mark directly on items or tags. Ink from pens can fade or run.

Be sure to include a complete list of the objects in your time capsule, including what they are or why they were chosen. Objects that seem familiar to you today could be mysterious to people of the future. Whoever opens the capsule will be able to check the contents of the capsule with your inventory list. Finally, mark on the outside of the capsule the date it is to be opened.