

# HOW TO MAKE A MEMORY BOX

Memory boxes contain objects that help us to reflect on the past and recall people and events. They can be based on a particular era or theme such as the 1960s, wartime or sport.

## Why make a memory box?

Our homes are filled with objects that hold a personal memory; letters from loved ones or a toy from childhood. Putting these items in a memory box is a way of presenting objects and the memories associated with them so that others are able to learn and discover.

Memory boxes can also help to generate conversations between age groups. Young children might play a game -guessing what an object is or what it might be used for i.e. glove finger stretchers or a sardine tin opener. Older people might find their own memories are stimulated by an object in the box or discussions about an object – perhaps they owned a similar item.

Memory boxes are being used more and more to engage people living with memory problems like dementia or Alzheimer's Disease. Memory boxes provide opportunities for conversation and mental and emotional stimulation which can benefit those suffering from memory problems.

Finally, the simple act of creating a memory box – particularly if you make this an activity you do with friends or relatives – can be fun and enjoyable and may one day be a wonderful memory in its own right!

## What goes inside a memory box?

Memory boxes are as unique as their creator(s). Here are some tips on what to include:

- Put in objects that can be easily handled
- Avoid using items that are precious, heavy or sharp
- Include objects with stories associated to them – you might even want to attach a photo or a short letter to a particular object
- Try to make sure there is a theme connecting the items in the box – this will help someone to understand the context of the items and recognise why they are important and valuable

If you are not ready to part with your possessions, you could visit a charity shop to find similar objects to place in the box. You can also make high quality reproductions (scanned and colour printed) of photos and letters rather than putting the actual item in the box. It is a good idea to laminate documents and photos so that they will survive lots of people handling them.

If you are seeking to create a more advanced memory box, consider adding an audio recording to accompany the objects. Have a look at the How To Record an Oral History for more information.

## Presentation

You need to consider how the objects in the memory box will be presented, labelled and stored. Some objects may no longer be in regular use and people might not recognise what they are. Therefore, you should consider labelling all the objects – even those that you think are obvious. This can be something simple like:

Cricket ball, 1930s, donated by ----- OR  
Ceramic doll with Victorian style dress, 1940s,  
donated by -----

The labels can be attached to the object (perhaps handwritten tags tied to items) or on a single sheet of paper that lists all the objects found in the box.





### Storage and protection

Think about how the memory box will be used. You might be creating a memory box to be used by the local history society or community group, who will take it out and about to people's houses or to special events. If the box is going to be on the move, try and find a container that will be hard-wearing and protect the content from knocks and drops – as well as being easy to carry around! For example, you might put the objects in a hard shell suitcase with wheels. If the box isn't likely to be transported very much, a standard archive box might do the trick. But if you are using cardboard, make sure that it is not stored in damp conditions.

You will also need to think about protecting the objects both during travel but also from handling and use. Here are some suggestions for protecting the items:

- Pad the box on the inside with foam or bubble wrap
- Create compartments within the box for each object
- Put paper items or photographs in a file so that they don't get crushed or crumpled
- Be clear about the need to be respectful and careful when handling the objects; if people understand the value of an object - either sentimental or financial – they will understand the need to take care with it.

But do expect some wear and tear over time and remember that accidents do happen.

### Sharing your memory box

The most exciting part about putting together a memory box is sharing it with others. Remember, a memory box is not like a time capsule! It should not be put up on a shelf and forgotten about but regularly used and explored so that everyone can learn through your personal experiences.

At some point, either before or during the memory box making process, you should consider how you will share it with a larger audience. Consider contacting a local museum, gallery or library and ask for their help in creating and sharing the memory box; they may want to use the box in their work with local schools or families. Knowing how the box will be used will help you to select objects and share memories which you think might be

interesting and informative for others.

### Further support and guidance

Storage boxes:

Preservation Equipment Ltd:

[www.preservationequipment.com/Home](http://www.preservationequipment.com/Home)

MicroClimates, the archival storage system:

[www.archivalboxes.com/](http://www.archivalboxes.com/)

Labeling objects:

Viking Direct: Coloured Strung Tags-White (Viking Number Q24-CTAG250-WE)

Articles relating to the benefits of using memory boxes with individuals living with memory problems: *This is your life, Living with dementia*, June 2009, [www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents\\_info.php?documentID=1006&pageNumber=1](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=1006&pageNumber=1) [accessed 1 April 2010].

Hong, Chia Swee and Jane M. Hibberd. *Museum outreach: making memory boxes*, *Journal of Dementia Care* 17: 1 (January/February 2009): 16-17.

Schweitzer, Pam and Errollyn Bruce. *Reminiscence, communication and conversation*, *Journal of Dementia Care* 16: 5 (September/October 2008): 18-20.

