

Oh My God, The Cat Ate My Scroll!

Or How to Evaluate and Fix Mistakes and Other Damages

By Mistress Cori Gora

It's 4 a.m. the morning of coronation. You have just spent six hours and four pots of coffee finishing the County scroll that is being given today. You take a brief potty break before putting everything away, and when you come back to the table you find that Gato, the Maine Coon Cat, has walked across the scroll by way of you wet pallet, leaving itty bitty kitty prints all over the calligraphy and a particularly artistic tail swish through the miniature. Kill the cat? Maybe. Save the Scroll? Yes, it is possible.

This article will cover four areas of information about repairing scrolls: preventing damage, evaluating damage, general materials and techniques to fix damage, and a smudge and spill removal guide.

Prevention

Damage occurs in many ways. Most spills happen to people who eat or drink when working on scrolls. In addition to the fact that this is an unhealthy practice for the artist (see section on safe and healthy workspaces); soda, greasy food and crumbs can really do a number on your work. The BEST way to prevent food stains is to keep food/drink and scrolls well away from each other. Another common source of spills and splotches is your art supplies—the paints and inks you are working with. Obviously, you CAN'T keep these out of the work area. There are a couple of things you can do to help here.

1. First, always work with a cover sheet. This can prevent a number of problems—paint drips from brushes, minor ink spills (especially when you use a moisture resistant sheet such as glassine), and acid and oils from your hands contaminating your artwork. Keep in mind that cover sheets can not be used over wet or damp artwork.
2. Next, evaluate your work methods—are you someone who loads up your brush heavy and then drips? You need to work with your palette close to your work, and maybe try a little less paint on your brush. Do you work with your paints very wet on your palette? This can lead to problems if the palette gets bumped or overturned. Move your palette farther away from your work. Try your work setup various ways and keep track of when and how often the inevitable blops and near-misses happen. This will allow you to fine tune your work methods.
3. Organize your workspace. If you're right handed, try keeping your pallet, water and your ink to your right. Always try to set up your work space the same way. If you don't have to hunt for the palette, you're less likely to blop on the scroll.
4. Deal with the distraction factor. If like some scribes, you bring your work to local group meetings and fight practices, or you do field scribing at events, you will probably find your mistake level rising rapidly. In addition to the

people who bump tables, or brush up against the arm with the paint brush, the general hubbub can cause a calligrapher to turn a he into a she or even completely leave out a line of text. Illuminators are not immune to the distraction factor—colors have gotten reversed on arms, and ivy leaves have had radical size changes in crowded halls. If you are easily distracted, keep your scribing at home, or at least in a quiet area of the hall. Quiet space at home can make a big difference as well, as any scribe who accidentally copied a line from a TV commercial can attest.

5. Dents and creases can be easily prevented. We all know we're supposed to store scrolls flat, but do we? From the number of dents, curls, and waves I've seen, no we don't. Flat and under the cover of stiff boards isn't just for transport. Scrolls need to be safe even when they are in your house. More dents and creases are caused by people working on the edge of the table than any transport accidents. Be aware that the entire scroll is supported before you work on it.
6. Pencils can be another source of dents. How many of us have erased pencil lines only to find them still presses into the paper long after the graphite is gone? Draw more lightly. If you need some help training yourself to do this, go out and get the tiniest mechanical pencil you can find -- .3 is good. These are made of harder lead so they leave a lighter line, but if you try to press hard, the lead breaks. Negative reinforcement is a wonderful training tool, especially the third or fourth time you have to put in new leads.
7. When waiting for a scroll to dry before putting it in your portfolio (and please DO wait for it to dry completely), put it up high out of reach of small children, errant housemates, and helpful pets. It makes for a more serene family life, I guarantee it.

Evaluating Damage

Do Not Throw Away Any Work until you have had another scribe look at it!

What do you do when your preventative measures haven't worked? There are some general guidelines for dealing with damage to scrolls. First, evaluate your work. If you can't be objective, have another scribe look at your work. Is the mistake REALLY a mistake or will a simple design change accommodate it? It really ISN'T a problem to make your ivy leaves blue—even if you DID plan for them to be red.

If you decide it really is a mistake, your first preference will probably be to make it appear as though it never happened—i.e., to remove it.

Your second preference would probably be to make it appear as though it were there on purpose. In other words, incorporate it into the design elements. You can cover up mistakes with additional design elements—line endings, extra knotwork, more leave, more flowers.

But you don't HAVE to cover the mistake. Embellish it instead. For example, you can draw figures of workmen lowering the missing "e" into the kings name. This is a period technique.



There are other period techniques you can use as well. Up arrows pointing to missing words and letters are found in a number manuscripts. Connecting lines that go around the end of the text line to bring together a work that doesn't fit are used. In Celtic manuscripts, mistakes are often outlined in a series of red dots that essentially meant, "ignore this". Blame Titivillus – he was the patron demon of scribes, and he goes from scriptorium to scriptorium, collecting scribal mistakes in a sack. Make a note on the scroll that Titivillus had a hand in your scroll. There a number of period examples of scribes passing the buck, so why can't we?

I made ^a mistake

it didn't
fit

IGNORE me

Materials and Equipment for Repair Work

And how to use them

1. first, let any mistake dry BEFORE you try to deal with it or you will make it worse.
2. Use an absorbent material to wick up liquid. Don't blot or wipe.
3. Don't use white out, and white paint is "white out".
4. If a stain runs too deep into the paper, you can remove part of it and then paint a design over it in a darker color. Obviously, this doesn't work for margins.

Materials that are useful in fixing mistakes are listed below with a description of the correct way to use them. You'll notice we have gone from the least destructive to the paper surface to the most destructive. When correcting mistakes, try to use the tools in the order listed, so as to do the least damage to your paper surface.

1. **Paper towels**-Dip corner of paper towel into spill to wick up liquid, as well as to wipe brushes and other equipment. Blotting can spread damage. This is your first line of defense. Remember, always wait until your mistake is dry before you try to fix it.
2. **Scum bag or Eraser bag**-a small bag of fine particles of plastic or rubber eraser that can be used for general cleaning of paper surfaces. This is particularly good for removing graphite dust (from pencils) and fingerprints. Work your scum bag in a circular motion so you don't leave defined stroke marks on your surface. This can be used over dry paint, ink and gold leaf. Please note well the "DRY". There is also an archival document cleaner available that works the same way, but may have some chemicals added. It is called a "dry-cleaning" bag. Both are available in many larger art stores.
3. **White Plastic Erasers**-Used to remove pencil lines and surface dirt. Also used to slightly burnish the surface after use in more abrasive tools. Work in a circular motion to avoid leaving obvious areas of erasing-feather the edges of you erased area into the non-erased area. Please note that we specify the WHITE erasers. Colored erasers can leave colored marks on the paper that can be harder to remove than the original mistake. This caveat applies to any

of the other abrasive tools as well. **Feathering** means to erase outward from your mistake in ever lightening circles. This feathering technique is used with several other pieces of equipment as well.

4. **White Stick Typewriter Erasers**-getting harder to find with the advent of word processors and computers, but they are still available in bigger office supply stores. They usually have a blue brush on one end to flick away eraser crumbs. These are useful for cleaning off surface spills and mistakes of many kinds including ink and paint. They can be used to gently diminish the look of deep pencil dents. These erasers are also used to “polish” the paper a bit after scraping our deeper mistakes. As with other erasers, work in a soft circular motion.
5. **White Emery Boards or Emery Boards**-found in beauty stores and departments, these are a bit more abrasive than the typewriter eraser. Work both types in a circular motion and check your surface regularly to be sure you haven't removed any more material than necessary. Boards are flat sticks about 3/8ths inch wide, covered with sand-like abrasive. Blocks have more give than board and can be cut into shape for easier use. Boards give a bit more abrasive power, but also need a more careful hand, as a result. Use them the same way as typewriter erasers. Be sure when you purchase the boards that they are flexible enough to lie flat on the paper—using the edge can cause damage if you're not careful and some don't have any grit on the edges.
6. **Single Edged Razor Blades**-the kind that is used as replacements blades in paint scrapers. You can actually use the scraper itself, if you want—I find using just the blade gives me better control. A **curved X-acto knife** will work better for most people as it is easier to keep the point from digging into the paper. These are for the deepest stains and remove significant amounts of depth from your paper. To use a blade, hold it perpendicular to the paper surface at all times, and gently scrape the surface, making sure to remove no more paper surface than absolutely necessary. **DO NOT** try to work in a circular motion. You are better off trying to scrape toward yourself. If this method does not work, chances are the stain goes all the way through the paper and it cannot be removed.
7. **Magnifying Glass**- useful for making sure that you remove the least amount of material from your surface as possible. Lighted and mounted magnifying glasses are even better for seeing what you're doing at the same time as you are actually working, but any kind will work our fine.

8. **Burnisher**-this doesn't necessarily mean a gold leaf type burnisher, but the dogtooth agate is the best for our purposes. Some scribes have even used the back of a spoon. The idea here is to smooth out the surface that you have just roughed up while correcting your mistake. Rub the area you erased or scraped in a circular motion, again feathering the edge of the mistake out on to the surface of your paper. This is especially important where you intend to do calligraphy. It helps prevent bleeding.
9. **Gum Sandarac or Pounce**-this is available from a number of different mail order sources. This comes in either a crystal form that needs to be powdered and placed in a loose weave bag or already powdered and sometimes even bagged. The idea is that the fine powder sifts through the bag onto the paper as you gently rub the bag over the surface. It soaks up any oils, etc. from your paper and smoothes out the surface. It is especially helpful when you have somewhat older paper that tends to bleed when calligraphed.
10. **X Acto knife**-this is the last option and can only be used to save portions of a scroll. This works best when the text is screwed up too badly to fix but the illumination is still okay. It may also work in the opposite direction, but usually, it is easier to just re-do the calligraphy on the new illumination. The idea here is to cut the block of calligraphy out and remount the illumination on a new sheet of paper and re-do the calligraphy. This works best if the inside line of the illumination is straight and solid, such as a solid band with knotwork within it. It can still be done with styles like French ivy leaves, but the fix is more noticeable. It is almost impossible to do with styles that have the calligraphy tightly integrated into the illumination. Be sure to use archival glue for mounting the illumination to the new piece of paper.



Roberta

Smudge and Stain Removal Guide

Coffee and Tea – wick away moisture and allow to dry. These will stain the surface. If it is only a small area, try erasing or scraping, it might not be too deep. Go from tool 2 to tool 6 in order. Use the least invasive one possible. You may also want to consider staining the entire paper with the tea or coffee. Make it look intentional.

Grease – this is almost always a stain that can't be removed. Blot it with paper towel then pounce with Gum Sandarac. You can also try to soak grease out of the surface using plain talcum or cornstarch, no perfume please.

Ink Splatters and Spills-small ones can be erased or scraped. Large ones can sometimes be blotted then later erased or painted over. Be sure to burnish the surface after erasing, especially in calligraphy areas. Also try pouncing the surface to prevent calligraphy from bleeding.

Misspellings-incorrect letters can be scraped off most scrolls-use a combination of type writer eraser and razor blades. If you scrape carefully, you can remove parts of the letter and change them into the correct ones. Another option is to calligraph the correct work and paint around it in gold or a color. This works if it is an important work or the recipients name. Be sure to treat all the appropriate words with the same effect (i.e., both King and Queen).

Oil- treat as grease.

Paint Splatters- typewriter eraser or scrape, then burnish. Pounce if it is an area to be calligraphed.

Paint Water-treat as coffee

Smearred Calligraphy-erasing or scraping around the actual letters will work if done carefully. If an entire work needs to be removed, use a foam core mail file to carefully sand the ink off, working in a circular motion. Erasing over the letters will fade them, they can be darkened again with a technical pen or black paint or ink and brush. Don't try your calligraphy pen, it will almost certainly bleed.

Smearred Illumination-sometimes erasing or scraping a dry surface and repainting will work. Treat any smears that extend onto unworked surfaces as a regular splotch. Don't put on too many layers of paint, and be sure to try and paint darker colors over lighter ones. Check your paint's transparency and bleed through factors when choosing what colors to use for over-painting.

Soda-white sodas are similar to water. Dark sodas should be treated like coffee. The sugar content of soda must be kept in mind. It will cause the surface to attract dirt, so frame as soon as possible. The surface may need to be leaned regularly as a result.

Water-wick up any left on the surface and allow to dry. Pounce surface with Gum Sandarac before calligraphing. If any worked area is affected, treat as specified above.