Common Risks: The “Usual Suspects”

**Light exposure:** UV is especially harmful, but all light causes some damage.

**Temperature and humidity fluctuations:** slow, gradual, seasonal fluctuations are acceptable, but wild swings in temperature and relative humidity (RH) over short periods of time – days or weeks – are not.

**Indoor air pollution, dust, and other particulates:** good ventilation in storage areas to minimize the build-up of pollutants and particulates in the air is essential.

**Pests:** insects and rodents can cause significant physical damage. They can feed on starch-based adhesives and coatings, textiles such as wool, and paper.

**Mold:** biological damage such as mold is not only a threat to collection material, but also to human health. Mold thrives in conditions with temperatures over 70 degrees F and over 50% RH. Mold spores can remain dormant in collection material for years, and then bloom and spread when conditions are right.

*Handling:* Handling is even more of a concern for scrapbooks than for other types of book and paper materials. The very nature of their complex structures, the variety of their contents, and their attachment methods make them increasingly susceptible to damage with repeated handling.

*Inherent Vice:* Inherent vice is what truly sets scrapbooks apart from other book and paper materials in terms of risk. The structures themselves are often constructed of materials prone to deterioration. The contents often carry their own inherent vices, many of which will accelerate the deterioration of other components of the scrapbook. Finally, attachment methods often fail in these structures as they age – adhesives/tape fail or creep, pins and staples corrode, etc.
Sensible Solutions (or, There Is No Silver Bullet)

Interleaving:
Use unbuffered glassine or a material like Phototex paper for interleaving between pages of photographs. Use a buffered paper such as a lightweight Permalife for interleaving acidic paper.

Isolation/Encapsulation:
Isolate problematic materials, such as anything sticky, or organic materials that are leaching acids. Use buffered paper envelopes or, to maintain visibility without the need to remove the item from its enclosure, use an inert polyester film such as Melinex (formerly called Mylar-D).

Preservation Surrogate/Digitization:
In some cases, it may be necessary to discard or remove an original piece of ephemera. In this case, a preservation surrogate can stand in for the original (clearly labeled as a surrogate, of course!) Digitization is another option for preserving a record of a scrapbook's original format or for providing an “access copy” if the original is too fragile to be handled by visitors.

Stabilization/Conservation Treatment:
A conservator or knowledgeable conservation technician can stabilize detached items, repair failing binding structures, and perform a full range of conservation treatments on scrapbooks. If professional conservation work is beyond the reach of available resources, then I strongly recommend taking a reputable workshop in basic conservation methods such as paper mending before attempting to perform any repairs, especially if the scrapbook in question is collection material of historic value.

Rehousing (including disbinding and/or disassembly)
Housing scrapbooks in supportive enclosures is always a good idea. Not only does the enclosure afford physical protection from light and particulates, it also creates a microclimate in which the scrapbook is somewhat buffered from temperature and humidity fluctuations.

**Disbinding:** If the original binding structure has no historical significance, and is causing damage to the scrapbook contents during handling, then one option is disbinding and rehousing the pages of the scrapbook in a portfolio or folder in an archival document box.

**Disassembly:** Because disassembly (a term which here refers to removing the ephemera from a scrapbook) destroys the artifactual value of the scrapbook as an historic object, obliterating the meaning inherent in the creator’s original placement of the ephemera, full disassembly is not recommended, except in very limited, extreme cases. One case in which I always recommend disassembly is “magnetic” photo albums. These structures are so problematic – with aggressively creeping adhesive, and rapidly-deteriorating PVC cover sheets – that I categorically recommend removing photographs and other items from their pages and rehousing them.