Loose pages are a common problem seen in books that are deteriorating. Loose pages can occur as a result of frequent use or as a result of poor storage and mishandling. Moreover, the aging of the materials the book is made from has an impact in both of those scenarios.

**Why are the pages of my book falling out?**

It is very important to figure out the reason for loose pages, so that you can understand how they can be fixed (or if repair is even possible). The pages could be loose because the sewing holding the pages together has failed. Frequent use and/or poor storage conditions can cause pages and plates that were originally tipped (adhered with a line of glue) to loosen or come out.

**Diagnosing loose pages:**

- If the text has one or more “starts” (a start is where a whole signature is poking out at the fore edge) and has multiple pages falling out, there is a good chance the sewing has failed. Aged sewing may become weak and allow individual folios or whole signatures to come loose. In this case it is necessary to re-sew the book; tipping in pages cannot fix the problem and will in fact just create a mess. **[SUMMARY: This problem can’t be fixed by tipping in loose pages.]**

- If the problem does not involve failed sewing, but rather is in the category of loose plates or a loose page at the beginning or end of the text, this problem can be fixed by tipping in the loose material. **[SUMMARY: This problem can be fixed by tipping in loose pages.]**

- There is another situation that can result in text pages coming loose that involves brittle paper. The best paper is made from chemically stable, long-fibered pulp. Papers made of inferior materials will over time become stiff and fragile. If the pages of a text are brittle, the sewing thread holding the pages together can in fact cut apart the very pages it is meant to contain. When this sort of damage occurs, it initially manifests itself in a characteristic way: the most inner and most outer leaves of each signature will be prone to breaking free from the sewing that holds the text together. Consequently there will be a regular pattern to the loose pages (for example, every 16 pages you could find two loose pages). When the deterioration within the text continues, even more leaves will break out of the book, but at the outset, the pattern of every “x” number of pages will hold. With a text this brittle, it is so compromised that it cannot withstand much use and there is no repair work that can truly remedy this situation. If not too many pages have yet been affected, it can be possible to tip in the loose pages although the book cannot withstand use. **[SUMMARY: This problem can perhaps be slowed but not halted by tipping in loose pages, and in some cases there will be so many pages loose that tipping in is not even possible.]**
How to tip in loose pages:

Given your diagnosis of what has caused the loose pages, decide if “tipping in” is the correct technique for the problem at hand (i.e., why are the pages loose and is tipping in the correct solution?).

If tipping in is a viable solution to the problem, then collect your tools:

- Pointed scalpel (a new blade is advisable)
- A cutting mat (self-healing if possible)
- Ruler (non cork-backed; steel)
- PVA and a small brush (a fan brush works well)
- Wheat paste (to be mixed into the PVA)

Steps:

1. To tip a loose/detached page back into place, first check to see if the page needs to be trimmed in order for it to fit. Sometimes a loose page won’t go back into the book as far as it did originally, meaning the width of the page will have to be reduced so that the page can fit properly. Usually the trimming happens at the margin closest to the binding (gutter) edge.

2. When the page is trimmed and ready, run a small line of glue along the gutter edge of the loose page. The glue should not go any father than ¼” into the page. It is best if you blot this line on a piece of newspaper to remove any excess glue. It is important not to have too much glue because an overabundance of glue can spread beyond the intended area.

3. Gently put the page into place making sure the page is lining up with the rest of the text. Once the page is down, it is difficult to make significant adjustments, so work carefully to get the page into its proper place when it first goes in. Once satisfied with the position, close the book and place a weight on top of it. Dry for about 15 minutes and wait an hour before any extreme handling of the text.

A Tip on Tipping

For pages (such as plates) that are too stiff to function well after being tipped in, it is best to put a strip (called a “guard”) of a thinner or more flexible paper on them prior to tipping them into the book. A Japanese paper like okawara makes an excellent guard material when torn in a strip ¼ wide and to a length slightly longer than the height of the page. Tip approximately 1/8” of the guard (lengthwise) onto the back side of the gutter edge of the loose plate. Apply a narrow line of glue to the part of the guard extending off the page (glue only the guard!) and lay the guarded page into place in the book. The page now swings freely on the guard when the page is turned. Note: Using this technique, most pages and some plates will need trimming in order to fit in the book. Study the situation before you start to determine whether to trim at the fore edge or the spine edge. [Note: Guilded or deckled pages should not be trimmed at the fore edge.]