

Courier Training Framework:

Example Scenarios

The following scenarios have been put together as examples to accompany the courier training framework. These give trainees an opportunity to explore the types of situation a courier can face and discuss possible approaches. These are fictional examples, based on general experiences of what types of situation can occur.

Scenario 1

Situation: You are at the venue, and it is the first time we have lent to this institution. You have two paintings to condition check and install, which you oversaw being unloaded last night and placed into storage. When you arrive for your unpacking appointment you bring the cased works through from storage into the gallery and there is a very strong smell of paint in the display space. You ask when the walls were painted and the technician say he thinks it was finished last night. You are due back on a flight in the afternoon and have an important meeting tomorrow. There are couriers from two other institutions present, one is already installing their works but the other seems hesitant and you overhear them asking about the paint as well. The staff from the venue are very keen to unpack as they say that there is a press event tomorrow so all works have to be in place.

What would you do?

To be completed by trainees after discussion.

What is recommended?

You could call the registrar straight away, but it would be useful to try to ascertain some more facts first. It would be useful to find the venue registrar or exhibition manager and ask if they can verify exactly when the walls were painted. Once you have the facts, calling the registrar is the next step. They will be able to help you decide which are the feasible options so you can discuss these with the venue. If the paint smell is very strong, it is highly likely that not enough off-gassing time has been given (and there is a chance that the paint may even be tacky and might possibly stick to the frame, even if it is dry to the touch). If this is the case, it may not be suitable to install the objects. It is likely that your registrar will consult with conservators and assess how vulnerable the objects are and advise accordingly. Together you will have to decide whether they stay in their packing until the paint has had time to dry (to minimise double-handling), or if there is an option to condition-check them ready to be installed later. If so, is it appropriate for them to be unpacked in the gallery or would they be at an increased risk here (both due to the paint fumes and the level of activity in the space)? Is there somewhere else they could be unpacked and checked, then stored which is secure and environmentally suitable?

Your registrar will be looking at all the possible options. As this is a venue you have not lent to before, it is unlikely they would agree to waive installation supervision to resolve the issue, but they will need to consider if this is appropriate. Although the press event is tomorrow, it may be that the opening is not for another week. There may be pressure to install the work rather than lose the opportunity for the press event, and your registrar may need to consult with management about whether the risk to the works is significant enough to warrant a delay in installation. It may be that you are asked to stay longer, or return in a few days (if there is enough time), or potentially you may agree for another colleague to return for install. It is possible that the couriers from the other institutions may be staying longer, or may need to

return for the same reason – courier sharing might be a possible solution, but again they would need to think about how suitable this is, and whether it is compatible with insurance arrangements and the loan agreement.

Try to keep a good line of communication with the venue staff, as this will avoid unnecessary tension. If the situation is becoming uncomfortable, it could be helpful to ask your registrar to ring their counterpart to advise on next steps. The most important thing is to ensure any decision has the backing of your registrar, and that you do not proceed with any of the options under pressure without first thinking about all the solutions, and the risk to the objects. Ultimately if there is a risk to the objects, it should be in the venue's interests to avoid this as well as they are liable for the condition.

Scenario 2

Situation: You are installing three artworks with three different curators (each with their own team of art handlers) within the same exhibition. You arrive at 9am and need to leave for the airport in the late afternoon so you should have plenty of time. The installation is moving very slowly and the curators are all keen to see how the works look in the spaces before committing to hanging them. After some hours, you realise time is becoming short and even though you point this out, nothing moves faster. Suddenly the museum director (also one of the curators) insists on taking everyone out to lunch. Everybody tells you to relax and that you have plenty of time. Lunch takes forever and time is running out as you feared. You manage to install one work, but have two more left and now it is the time you were meant to leave for the airport.

What would you do?

To be completed by trainees after discussion.

What is recommended?

This scenario highlights the need for good communication and time management, and also demonstrates a common issue that can arise when layouts are planned to be done 'on the day'. It is important for the lending organisation's registrar to confirm whether this was agreed, or whether a position and layout was already confirmed. Many organisations require a confirmed layout in order to approve security and environmental factors specific to the insurance, loan agreement or works being loaned, so this is worth checking. If a more flexible layout has been agreed, then really it is the responsibility of the venue to ensure this is achieved within the timeframe of the courier trip. It is important in this situation to communicate concerns early, both to the curators (who may be delaying the process without realising the impact), and to whoever is in charge of scheduling, so they can take action and manage the teams. It is helpful to call your registrar before the schedule becomes unmanageable, to discuss alternative options. This may involve staying later / additional days, or sending another courier. Or there may be flexibility to agree for the venue to install the remaining works without any supervision if you have no concerns about their ability to do so, and the works do not require your particular installation skills.

Scenario 3

Situation: You are installing a painting with a gilded frame at an overseas venue in a country where you don't speak the language. There is a translator helping interpret your instructions to the art handlers, all of whom seem very professional. The work is heavy and a load bearing plinth has been prepared by the venue to take the weight of the work. Your organisation has a policy requiring all loans to be handled with latex (or nitrile) gloves. When you mention this, it takes a long time for the team to find gloves and they seem unhappy to wear them, but they eventually do. The work has been lifted out of its case and transit frame, to be condition checked. At this point you notice that some of the art handlers seem to be complaining and gesturing toward the work and the gloves. When you ask the translator if there is a problem, she goes to speak to the head art handler and they discuss the issue (this seems quite heated). When the translator returns, they say 'there is no problem'.

What would you do?

To be completed by trainees after discussion.

What is recommended?

Your concern at this stage should be ensuring that the work can be safely handled. If the team are not used to the gloves, they may be worried about moving the heavy work into place safely as gloves could make gripping the frame more difficult. With a heavy work, there could be a genuine risk of damage through slipping. If this is the case, check with your institution (via your registrar) to see whether handling the frame without gloves would cause damage to the surface. Alternatively, does the venue have some picture lifting equipment they can use to ensure lifting is minimal? You should definitely explore the issue further with the translator, making it clear you are happy to hear any concerns about the method being requested, or you can ask if the head art handler can run you through how they plan to get the work onto the wall, which might help identify any issues.

Scenario 4

Situation: You are travelling with an exhibition and have just finished working with the team to load the crates on to a truck and trailer. The drivers suggest you have lunch at the museum restaurant before you take off as it is a long way.

What would you do?

To be completed by trainees after discussion.

What is recommended?

One of the key principles of couriership is to never leave the truck unattended. Unless the collection venue has a secure lockable space for the truck and trailer, and this is ok with the organising registrar, then it is important someone stays with the truck at all times. You would expect the courier (and the drivers) in this situation to have prepared so that they are ready to get straight on the road, but this is not always possible (sometimes things take a lot longer than planned). It is important in this scenario to know where your next destination is. If you are working to a schedule, then you should get some lunch you can eat on the journey (it may be that you need to be at the airport for a certain flight, or perhaps the next venue has delivery restrictions). If you do need to take a quick food or comfort break, then take it in turns and make sure you agree who is staying with the truck. If there is a delay to the schedule, then make sure this is communicated to everyone involved (this might be shipping agent staff at the airport, or receiving staff at the next venue).

Scenario 5

Situation:

You leave the borrowing museum early in the morning on schedule to accompany a crate to the airport for palletisation and onward transit home. There are no delays on the road and everything is going according to plan but when you arrive at the airport the agent tells you that you are very, very late and he appears to be incredibly stressed. He hurries the crate off the truck (which leaves) and then tells you that there is no time for loading onto a pallet. The only option is for the crate to be loaded directly into the aircraft. He reassures you he has done this many times before and can send you a picture of the crate after loading. He says that 'plenty of other international museums allow this' and that you have to decide immediately otherwise you (and the crate) will miss the flight.

What would you do?

To be completed by trainees after discussion.

What is recommended?

This is an unusual scenario as you would expect the journey to have been arranged to fit with the airline's stated 'lock-out' time for presenting palletised cargo. You would also expect the agent to be more attuned to the safety of the work, and to offer other options rather than applying pressure to do something potentially risky. 'Loose-loading' of cargo should be avoided as this offers no mitigation against the risk of damage in transit. You should make clear that this is not acceptable, and ask the agent to look at all the alternative options, at the same time calling your registrar who will be able to reassure you this is the right course of action and can also start looking at alternatives and letting the borrowing venue know. It may be possible to put the crate into a container. These can be quicker to load than building a whole pallet from scratch. If there really is no alternative, then you will need to start looking at the next flight and ensuring the safety of the crate in the meantime. Once a new flight is found, depending on the delay, it may be acceptable to palletise straightaway and secure the palletised crate in the aircraft warehouse. Some warehouses have temperature controlled lockers for cargo. Ideally the truck should not have left so quickly, as this would have provided a secure and controlled place to leave the crate until a solution was found.

Scenario 6

Situation:

You arrive at the borrowing museum to find that the case in which your objects are being displayed is empty, even though you know from drawings that there are other objects being displayed alongside yours. There are no captions in the case either. On further discussion, you discover that your objects are due to be placed towards the front of the case, in front of other objects, some belonging to the borrower, some from another lender. You ask about the captions and are told these will be placed in the case but won't be arriving until the next day.

What would you do?

To be completed by trainees after discussion.

What is recommended?

Establish whether the other objects (including the ones borrowed from other organizations) are available and ask for them to be installed before/with your objects. Contact the registrar to see if the caption can be placed the day after (perhaps assess in conversation with them whether using a 'fake' caption might help to get the exact position so your objects don't need to be moved). If the other objects sharing the case are not on site, or are due to arrive before you leave then you will need to discuss the other options with the registrar and the team at the venue. If you need to stay to supervise installation, ensure that the venue or your registrar have confirmed the additional hotel and per diem arrangements, and re-arranged your travel as needed.

Scenario 7

Situation:

When you arrive for unpacking and condition checking at the borrowing venue and bring out your condition report (on paper) the lender informs you that they have a condition checking software and intend to do all condition checking within their system using a computer/tablet.

What would you do?

To be completed by trainees after discussion.

What is recommended?

It may be risky to agree to use another system. You are not familiar with it and perhaps someone else from your institution will travel as courier for the deinstallation and this may cause further confusion. You can insist on your own report and your report only. Or you can let the borrower use their system as a complementary tool in addition to your own report (if the system proposed allows you to add many new images of the object this could be an advantage). If you decide to use their system as a support, explain that your report is the primary document to be used in case of disputes, and ensure any changes in condition are captured on your report.

Scenario 8

Situation:

You are at the airport and have just finished loading your crate on a container/pallet and you are about to be taken to your gate from the cargo area. The agent now tells you that they have changed type of aircraft and this new plane is too small for container/pallet loading.

What would you do?

To be completed by trainees after discussion.

What is recommended?

You should ask the agent when the next possible flight that can carry container/pallet loaded crates is. Then make sure that the container/pallet is placed in a protected area such as VIC (Very Important Cargo) or is supervised by the agent or the agent's representative while waiting for the next flight. If the wait for the next flight is not too long, then it is possible that no other measures needs to be taken. You may wish to check with your conservators their advice. Consider balancing the risk of the object being in an uncontrolled environment for longer (albeit buffered by its case) versus the risks of more exposure to handling (depalletisation and restorage, then repeating the palletisation process). If awaiting the next available flight is a viable option, the agent should be able to rebook you and the crate and take you to the gate. If the wait is long and inflicts on your unpacking appointment the following day (if there will not be enough time for acclimatization of the crate) then you may need to call base in order to reschedule the unpacking.

Scenario 9

Situation:

You are at the borrowing venue and have completed condition checking. When the art handlers look at the back of your painting, they realize that there aren't enough fittings on the back of the frame to install the artwork in accordance with their insurance requirements. There are two fittings, but they need at least three and ask you if they can make a new hole.

What would you do?

To be completed by trainees after discussion.

What is recommended?

You may have discussed this possibility already before your journey with your art handler or conservator. If that is the case, you already know if the borrower is allowed to make a new hole or not and if you prefer hand tools or electric. If you don't know, you should call base and ask for advice. Things that may help the decision are to understand if the frame is original (to the object), and whether it has a backboard etc. or any pre-existing holes which might be utilised. If your institution agrees to a new hole, you should make sure that an experienced person carries out the procedure. If you don't get the permission to add another fitting, then you must find another solution to the problem together with the borrower's staff. It is important that the work is installed in compliance with insurance requirements. Perhaps the institution can add other layers of security such as an alarm or movement sensor. They may need to discuss options with their insurer and/or change insurance. Since institutions have different systems and requirements it is helpful to be prepared and to have discussed different scenarios with your art handler/conservator before the journey.

Scenario 10

Situation:

You are traveling with a delicate collage on paper and the flight to your destination is delayed with many hours. You were supposed to unload at the museum at 1 PM today and then be there for unpacking and installation at 1 PM the following day after 24 hrs of acclimatization of the crate. When you finally take off your flight is delayed by ten hours and it is 10 PM when you land. The agent at the destination tells you that it is too late in the evening to go to the museum for unloading. Nobody will be there to let you in. You are still scheduled for unpacking and installation the following day at 1PM.

What would you do?

To be completed by trainees after discussion.

What is recommended?

You should make sure that the crate is stored safely and within agreeable climate after arrival. If you can't go to the museum the shipping agent needs to find another solution, one that complies with your organisation's standards, and the insurance. Normally you and the crate will be taken to the shipper's storage facility. Then your unpacking appointment may need to be rescheduled. If the crate has not been able to start acclimatization, then it needs to be taken to the museum for the agreed time for acclimatization before unpacking and if the new unpacking appointment conflicts with your homebound journey then the ticket needs to be changed and your journey prolonged.

Scenario 11

Situation:

When you start the video call you notice that the borrower is using a laptop, positioned on a table. It is difficult to get an overview of the exhibition space and the condition check and installation of the object. How would you proceed?

What would you do?

To be completed by trainees after discussion.

What is recommended?

You could outline the issues and ask the installation team to explain how they plan to proceed so that you can see all the aspects. They may already have a plan for this. If not, work with them to agree a solution. Do they need to reposition the laptop at each stage? Or is a more mobile option needed (a portable device) so you can see the detail more easily.

Scenario 12

Situation:

You are part way through your virtual courier appointment. After having condition checked the objects you are couriating virtually, the borrower lets you know that the showcase is not yet ready. They think it will take about 30 minutes and the borrower proposes to call you back later. The museum is in another country, and though you have been using English to communicate, and it has been a challenge to ensure you are understood.

What would you do?

To be completed by trainees after discussion.

What is recommended?

It would depend on what the risks are to the objects if there is a miscommunication. You could ask to stay online, or make sure that the object is somewhere safe before you disconnect. It will be important to ensure there is no miscommunication, so you would need to clarify what time you will reconvene and how. It would be a good idea to follow up in writing to help ensure everyone is clear.

Scenario 13

Situation:

You are booked to undertake a virtual courier appointment – supervising installation of a complex sculpture at an overseas venue you have not lent to before. It is 12 noon at the venue, but 9pm your time. You log onto the call and the video is working but the audio is not. Despite everyone's best efforts, they cannot seem to get their audio working. They type into the chat function that they need to carry on with the installation as they are under pressure now to get this object installed as there are a lot of other dependencies. What are you going to do?

What would you do?

To be completed by trainees after discussion.

What is recommended?

You should revisit what the risk is, and whether you can manage this or not using the method they propose. Does the borrower have clear written instructions? Can you agree a mechanism for you to provide advice and instruction as needed via the chat function with agreed stopping points? Can you use another means of communication (e.g. another platform or a mobile phone) to talk to them simultaneously? Hopefully with good solution-focussed communication you can find another way to mitigate the risk. If not, you need to consider postponing. Bear in mind if they get it working before the end of their working day, it could be the middle of the night for you. Are you able to facilitate that?