



# Hang-Ups

Technical advice for  
technical problems

**Q:** *Can you clear up my confusion on just what the term pH means in relation to preservation papers and boards?*

**A:** The pH measurement indicates, on a scale of zero to 14, the relative acidity or alkalinity of a given solution. The pH values from zero to 7.0 indicate acidity, and those from 7.0 to 14.0 indicate alkalinity. The rating of 7.0 (+ or - 0.5) is considered the neutral range. As the pH measurement gradually shifts from 7.0 toward zero, it indicates more acid. Likewise, as the pH increases from 7.0, the solution is more alkaline.

The pH rating is based on a logarithmic scale divided into increments of 10. Even a small shift signifies a considerable change. For example, a pH of 4.0 is 10 times more acidic than a pH of 5.0. Matboard manufacturers usually disclose the pH value of their boards on a specifier. If the pH value is not indicated, call the company and ask. Keep in mind that the pH is not permanently fixed; it can change when exposed to external pollutants.

You should always keep in mind that a pH measurement above 7.0 does not automatically indicate a preservation-quality paper or board. The term "acid-free" is loosely applied to all sorts of framing materials, and it cannot be defined with precision. It is wise to find out exactly what materials were used to make any board or paper you use. The materials used should always be clearly indicated on the specifier or sample; if they are not, contact the manufacturer for more information. ♦

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"Hang-Ups" is compiled by PPFA Technical Coordinator **Diane Day**, CPF, from HelpLine questions. If you have a technical hang-up or source question, send an e-mail message to [helpline@ppfa.com](mailto:helpline@ppfa.com), or call the PPFA HelpLine at (888) 542-4844. Please have your PPFA member number ready when you call.