



Weeding Guidelines

Overview

Weeding (also known as deselection) is an essential, though difficult, element of collection development that ensures the library's materials are useful and accessible. Every library's print collection is limited by the space available to house it, and collections should change over time to reflect changes in the community and in the library's goals. Weeding is a periodic or continual evaluation of resources intended to remove items that are no longer useful from the collection.

Why Weeding Is Necessary

When libraries do not weed regularly or consistently, customers have trouble finding interesting and relevant materials. Removing outdated or worn-out items makes the collection more visually attractive and more inviting to users. Patrons trust the library to supply information that is easy to find and up-to-date.

All of these are positive factors from the customer's point of view. For the librarian, weeding has additional advantages. It finds the gaps in your collection so that you can make new purchases with confidence and creates space for those materials. Paradoxically, weeding is a good way to increase circulation by drawing attention to materials that had previously been overlooked.

Why It Doesn't Get Done

If weeding provides so many benefits, why is it so hard to do? Below are some common reasons why weeding is avoided and responses that may help you decide to tackle a weeding project. (1976 *CREW manual*, pp. 19-20; 1995 *CREW manual*, pp.53-55.)

- ***"It takes too much time."***
A careful weeding plan will actually save you time by making maintenance, search time and shelving operations more efficient. Plus, weeding doesn't have to be done in one huge block - in fact, it is most effective when done gradually and carefully.
- ***"I can't bear to throw away books."***
This is a common misconception. Weeding does not necessarily mean that books are thrown away - they may be recycled in your community or passed on to another institution that can make better use of them.
- ***"I'm worried someone will get upset if I get rid of anything."***
Be ready to explain to your community why weeding is necessary and how it is conducted. Avoid "crisis weeding" where many materials are removed at once.
- ***"I don't feel comfortable getting rid of public property."***
Keep in mind that weeding is not arbitrary or destructive. Your good judgment and deliberate pruning will make the library more useful. Some books are literally dead wood.
- ***"If I toss it today, I'll need it tomorrow."***
This is possible, but not very likely. If it does happen, don't panic. Use your skills to find another source for the information: a more recent book, a current encyclopedia, a periodical article, the Web.
- ***"If I weed, I won't have enough books."***
What is "enough"? Your goal is probably to have a quality collection. Focusing on the quantity of materials in your collection will not improve their quality; in fact, it can actually harm the collection as a whole by diluting the impact of your most useful materials.
- ***"Weeding means admitting to mistakes."***
Turn this around for a more positive outlook. If something is worn out, it was a good choice. If it's dated, it's a testimony to the passage of time. If it hasn't been used, it could mean that times have changed, your audience has changed or that it didn't fit in the collection. We can't know everything!

Planning Your Approach

Probably the most well-known weeding method for public libraries is the CREW method: **C**ontinuous **R**eview, **E**valuation and **W**eeding. Most of the information contained in this discussion of weeding is drawn from this method or modifications of it.

Another method, developed by Stanley Slote, is based on research indicating that the best predictor of future use is past use (circulation). If you prefer a method that uses formulas, you may want to consider this one for your library.

You should keep the following in mind when you are planning your approach to weeding:

Schedules and Records

Most libraries will benefit from a complete weeding once a year. If this seems too daunting, start by scheduling individual sections and expand your plan as you establish a routine. Keep records of your progress to reduce overlap. Plus, a concrete measure of your progress keeps your morale high.

Setting Goals and Priorities

Some areas are obvious targets. When your shelver says, "I just can't get one more book on that shelf," weed it soon. Tackle one small section at a time and complete it before you start the next one. You will weed more effectively and you won't get frustrated as easily. Keep in mind that weeding is a process!

Weed as You Go

Examine materials as they are returned to the circulation desk. Set aside damaged and obviously outdated materials so that they can be evaluated. As you move through the collection, keep an eye out for weedable materials.

Getting Down to Business

After you have planned your approach, you can start your weeding project by setting the stage (completing final preparations), gathering materials needed for the weeding project, and defining your weeding criteria.

Setting the Stage

Each section should be shelf-read before you begin to weed it. Try to choose a time to weed when the library is closed or likely to be empty so that you can wear comfortable clothes and maximize your efficiency (i.e. minimize distractions and interruptions).

Gathering Materials

Using a book truck, gather some weeding supplies, including:

- Circulation records and shelf list
- Slips indicating a weeding decision (retain, mend, discard, etc.)

- Some sort of place marker - a piece of cardboard or a book wrapped in bright paper
- A notebook and pen to record your stopping place and ideas for displays.

Defining Your Criteria

The following criteria should be considered for each item in your collection. You will probably make decisions based on some combination of these criteria - that is, an item should probably not be discarded based on meeting only one of these criteria.

The CREW method uses an acronym, MUSTIE, to indicate when an item should be removed from the collection. MUSTIE stands for:

Misleading and/or factually inaccurate:

Ugly (worn out beyond mending or rebinding):

Superseded by a new edition or a better source;

Trivial (of no discernable literary or scientific merit);

Irrelevant to the needs and interests of your community;

Elsewhere (the material may be easily borrowed from another source).

Additional weeding criteria include:

Condition: If a book is in poor condition, it may be considered for removal depending on your ability and willingness to mend it. Problems to watch for include a broken spine, fragile or brittle paper or bindings, bent corners, torn or missing pages, defaced pages or covers, insect or mildew infestations and books that are just plain worn-out.

Age: Evaluating an item's usefulness based on its age is a tricky issue, especially for books. In truth, most old books hold very little value (monetary or otherwise) in a public library. Library customers generally prefer new books, regardless of content. Some questions to ask when considering age as a reason to withdraw an item: Is the book so fragile that it can't withstand normal library use? Does this item have local historical value? If so, perhaps it should be given to the local historical society. (If your library serves as the town's archives, you'll probably consider housing those materials separately from the regular circulating collection anyway.)

Frequency of Use: When was the last time an item circulated? How often is it used in the library? If you want to keep the item, perhaps it could be moved to a more visible or attractive location.

Multiple Copies: Sometimes you will discover that you have many more copies of an item than you realized. Perhaps some of them were donated

copies, you have several different editions of the same work, or it was a very popular subject or best-seller that has fallen into decline. Does your collection contain material that provides better, more current coverage? Extra copies are often excellent candidates for book sales, trades or donations.

Currency/Accuracy: When evaluating currency, the key issue is relevance. History books may not be especially current, but if they are still relevant they should be kept. Materials on computers, law, science, technology, health and travel on the other hand, need to be current to be useful. For example, if your health guides don't discuss AIDS and other disease prevention issues, you will need to remove them and update your collection. Other items likely to be out of date quickly are travel guides, atlases, subjects that change frequently such as college entrance exams, guides to elected officials and anything related to fashion or fads. Fiction can become outdated, too. Bobby Goes to the Sock Hop will probably not set afire the hearts of today's teenagers.

Another issue to consider is appropriate coverage. Since society is constantly changing, what was an accepted view of minorities or women years ago might be considered inappropriate today. Your goal should be to offer balanced coverage while preserving Intellectual Freedom.

In addition to using MUSTIE and the weeding criteria stated above, we have compiled additional weeding considerations for each section of the *Dewey Decimal Classification* and other typical collection categories.

000s - General: Classic titles are retained in this area, particularly in *library science*. Weeding can generally be directed by the use of circulation statistics. *Library science* titles will be retained as long as they provide appropriate support for staff professional development.

Computer books are retained as long as their subjects remain in fairly broad use. Last copies of books on programs and hardware no longer in general use may be retained for those remaining patrons who are still using them. Because new editions of computer books are often cumulative in their coverage of upgrades, older editions are retained as long as they remain relevant, but weeding in this area in general should be more frequent. In general, books on hardware and software should be seriously considered for weeding after 3-5 years and 2-4 years respectively.

100s - Philosophy and Psychology: Classic general works of philosophy and psychology should be maintained and weeded for condition and replaced when necessary. Self-help titles may be weeded as their popularity declines. Occult and witchcraft titles are replaced through attrition.

200s - Religion and Mythology: Bibles should be weeded for condition and replaced as necessary. Popular spiritual works may be weeded as demand declines and new titles become popular.

300s - Social Sciences: The social science collection should be aggressively weeded of dated material. Primary consideration is given to keeping the collection current, particularly in areas of personal finance, law, taxes, and real estate. New titles are preferred rather than replacement copies. Because law materials date rapidly, retrospective development is not feasible. Weeding must be done continually with updates and new editions purchased to replace the old titles.

400s - Languages: The language collection is stable. Currency is not paramount in instructional material nor is it a significant factor for weeding. Instructional material may be retained as long as it is in good condition and continues to circulate. Language material should be considered for weeding when it is 10 years old and has not circulated in 3 years.

Material in special language collections should be retained and weeded in accordance with guidelines described for each subject area of the general collection.

500s - Pure Sciences: The 500s contain subjects in which information dates quickly or changes (*e.g.* physics, astronomy, etc.), as well as subjects such as mathematics where information is nearly timeless. Therefore, weeding must be aggressive in the more time-sensitive areas to ensure the availability of accurate, up-to-date information, while in other areas retention can be based more on condition and level of use. For the more time-sensitive subjects, anything over five years old should be closely examined for accuracy and discarded if necessary. Some subject areas may be examined more frequently on a case-by-case basis.

600s - Applied Sciences: Due to the high use in most subjects here, this area must undergo thorough routine weeding based on condition. Staff must be particularly vigilant about areas in which current information is of utmost priority. Health and medical material should be evaluated annually. The

library's *Deselection Guidelines* should be applied conscientiously. Many branches may need to weed aggressively to make room for newer material.

700s - Arts and Recreation: All material in this section benefit from on-going and routine weeding based on condition. Additional scheduled weeding efforts using the *Weeding Guidelines* is recommended. Books on subjects that are not time sensitive should be evaluated and retained as appropriate to maintain a broad and balanced arts section, either regionally or system-wide.

800s - Literature: Classic and current authors are retained, with weeding done on the basis of lasting influence and demand. Since literature is fairly stable, concentrated weeding can be done on a five-year cycle to replace damaged books and withdraw outdated material.

900s - History, Travel and Geography: In general, a history or geography title is removed from the collection if it has not circulated in three years. However, many works of history are classic titles and should be remain in the collection. Travel material is generally retained for three years, except for travel/adventure memoirs, which are retained as long as circulation statistics indicate ongoing interest. Multiple copies, materials in poor condition, and superseded titles are weeded on a continuing basis.

B - Biography Retention of titles is based on the enduring importance of the subject. Biographies of notable people should be withdrawn only if interest in that person has ceased as demonstrated by circulation statistics.

Adult Fiction: Classics, local authors, and notable contemporary authors are retained indefinitely as use dictates. Replacement copies of classic titles are purchased systematically as part of the *core collection* process. Donated copies of popular titles are added to replace worn-out books as needed. Duplicate copies of titles are weeded for condition and as use diminishes. Titles that do not circulate are discarded via the normal weeding process.

Young Adult and Children's Fiction: Watch for outdated topics, oversimplified or abridged classics when the original is appropriate for age and reading level, and multiple copies of series books. Replace worn out classics. Young adult fiction should be less than ten years old. With so many varieties of picture books on the market, your collection should be chosen on

the basis of good stories and illustrations. The CREW Manual advises against flimsy bindings and trite cartoon-based books.

Young Adult and Children's Non-fiction: Consider these materials using adult criteria, but look for inaccuracy and oversimplification. "Something" is not better than nothing if what you have is outdated or inaccurate.

The Reference Collection: Weeding the reference collection requires some special considerations, especially as more reference collections include electronic resources. Use of printed materials is more difficult to determine since most reference works do not circulate, but you may be able to tell how often a book is removed from the shelf. Use of computer resources can also be tracked. Most of the criteria for removal remain the same as for circulating collections, with the possible exceptions of use and currency. Some sources are considered reference "classics" and may be valuable for many years. Others (especially scientific, medical and technological works) may be quickly outdated. Many reference works are issued in revised editions, and previous editions can usually be removed. Dictionaries are an exception to this rule, particularly unabridged versions. Another exception is any new edition that supplements rather than replaces an older edition, such as quotation books.

Audiovisual Materials: Non-print media should be weeded on a regular schedule just like print materials, although it can be harder to judge content and quality without spending a great deal of time watching or listening to each item. Keep in mind that non-print materials can be difficult to borrow through interlibrary loan. Other issues to consider when evaluating non-print materials include format and condition. Is the format still available? If not and the material is not replaceable, you may want to investigate transferring unique materials to current formats. Watch for broken cases, missing pieces, poor sound or visual quality and scratched or warped tapes or CDs. Tapes that become twisted should be discarded. Some audio book sources can replace a damaged tape at low or no cost. Language tapes (and manuals) should be replaced if possible. Videocassettes should be examined for wear after 100-150 circulations; they will probably need to be replaced after 200-250 showings. Compact disks are relatively sturdy, but they can be chipped, cracked or scratched. If you circulate computer disks, be especially wary of computer viruses that can be transmitted via disk. Disks can be demagnetized easily, and floppies can be bent or otherwise damaged.

Last Copy Guidelines

Weeding collections involves many decisions and one area that needs addressing is last copy of a title record. When a branch is weeding materials from the shelf, either from an inventory report or due to spotting a section or title while browsing, the materials should be checked and noted if it is the last copy.

If the item registers as “Last Copy”, place the item aside to assess the following:

- Local Author/History
- Famous author
- Prominent award-winner
- Fiction series
- Classic title in any field with original author
- Only relevant title on the subject
- Newer edition available
- Available to reorder current edition
- Reallocate title to a different location
- Physical condition
- Projected use
- Rarity

If the branch staff seeks a second opinion, send the material into Technical Services and an appropriate Collection Planner will be contacted to evaluate the last copy.

Withdrawal Guidelines

As new standing order materials arrive, e-mails are sent out by Cataloging to withdraw older editions of the same title. Cataloging staff will verify with the appropriate Planner if there are questions regarding a replacement edition or version. Collection Planners are responsible to update their sections with new editions and to identify titles that need withdrawal. Planners will notify Cataloging when a new edition replaces an older edition.