



VISUAL MERCHANDISING

for public libraries

practical strategies for applying bookstore insights to public library collections
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PYRAMIDS

Always pyramid your materials from all angles. If you are dealing primarily with faced-out materials, pyramid the height of the items. If your items are flat on a surface, tallest stacks or thickest materials go towards the center. Check and adjust frequently as materials are taken. Think of this as your chance to play real-life Tetris. *Note: You do not have to pyramid spined-out materials.



FACE OUT / FRONT UP

Face the cover of materials out as much as possible, whether that is flat on a table or standing up on a shelf. Be sure all items that are standing up on shelves are parallel to the edge of the shelf, approximately an inch from the edge (fronted-up), and in line with each other. As with pyramiding, check and adjust this frequently.



Note: If your library has slanted shelves, you are among the luckiest librarians around! This aesthetic can be used in all collections to maximize face-outs and make shelves appear full. A few rules – always place at least one spined-out item between faced-out stacks (or single books). If you choose this shelving method, commit to it-- ditch the book ends, they aren't necessary.



BALANCE AND SYMMETRY

This is the most complex and subjective of the concepts described, as well as the one that will take the longest to master. Don't be discouraged. You will come to instinctively know what works and what doesn't seem quite correct. A balanced display is one that is not weighted too heavily in one spot or another. Symmetry in display does not necessarily mean even numbers, but rather a purposeful display construction that evenly distributes materials throughout.



Note: When selecting items for display, keep your themes broad enough that they are easily refillable. Use them to highlight portions of your collection that might not be browsed as often as others. Also, don't be afraid to mix genres as long as the intended audience is the same. For example, this display mixes teen and adult materials of all genres.

STRAIGHT LINES

(Be overly picky.)

Straight lines.

Straight lines.

Straight. Lines.

Straight lines force the eye to systematically move through a display. They are the easiest way to maintain a clean display and arguably the most important all of the rules. Being overly picky does not make you a nag. It means you are embracing the idea that it's OK to demand that merchandising become a priority. While perfection *probably* can't totally be achieved, striving to create displays (and maintain them) that are as close to perfect as possible is both important and achievable.



NO PROPS

See also: Temporary furniture, tablecloths/scraps of fabric, Ellison Machine cutouts, and clip art. I know - it's almost blasphemy. Trust us, you do not need them. They distract from the very things you are trying to give attention to and provide an unnecessary barrier between the patron and the materials. If your display looks like a sculpture, people will be afraid to touch it. Let the books display themselves. They will be stunning in their simplicity.



The same is true for any signage you may use. Avoid overly-decorated signs with small print and intricate font. Instead, develop a generic sign with a striking but simple background that can be changed easily and used across different displays. Choose a font that is bold and simple and make it large enough to be seen from across the room. If you must use imagery keep it to one picture and make sure it's large enough to fill the entire background. If you have an established brand identity, embrace that aesthetic for your signs, including colors, fonts, and overall style.