

WEEDING LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

Just as gardeners must remove unnecessary weeds to keep their other plants healthy, so do librarians daily face the need to evaluate the books on their shelves. To assist with this process, the following guidelines are offered for “weeding” a library collection. Remember a most important first step: the Library Board must be kept informed of this ongoing evaluation of strengthening the library’s collection.

Weeding based upon appearance. The most universally accepted criterion for weeding is based upon appearance of a book. Often, however, this criterion calls for caution (to avoid discarding rare and/or historically important books) and for judgment (to determine whether or not the book should be replaced or rebound). Some of the specific advice is to weed:

1. Books of antiquated appearance which might discourage use.
2. Badly bound volumes with soft, pulpy paper and/or shoddy binding.
3. Badly printed books, including those with small print, dull or faded print, cramped margins, poor illustrations, or paper that is translucent so that the print shows through.
4. Worn-out books whose pages are dirty, brittle, or yellow, with missing pages, frayed binding, broken backs, or dingy and dirty covers.

Weeding of superfluous or duplicate volumes. Some examples to weed:

5. Unneeded duplicate titles.
6. Inexpensive reprints.
7. Highly specialized books when the library holds more extensive or more up-to-date volumes on the same subject.
8. Superfluous books on subjects of little interest to the local community.

Weeding based upon poor content. Weed:

9. When information is dated.
10. When information is unsuitable.
11. When improved editions exist.

Weeding based upon age alone. Weed:

12. Almanacs and yearbooks that have been superseded.
13. Travel books after ten years.
14. Junior encyclopedias from three to five years.
15. Senior encyclopedias at least every five years.

Suspect and re-read any non-fiction title which is more than five years old, taking into account actual information changes and availability of up-to-date materials.

Weeding based upon use patterns. Weed:

16. Books not circulated in three years that do not appear in a standard book list.
17. Books not necessary for reference or historical perspective.

Keeping criteria. If we know what to keep, we can weed the rest. While weeding the collection, the following should be kept in mind:

1. The fact that a book has not circulated during the past three years is not proof that it is not needed, since potential circulation value may still exist.
2. Keep a title if it is listed in one of the standard catalogs.
3. Keep a title if it is of historical community interest.
4. If a title is being used frequently (although meeting other criteria for being weeded), it should probably be retained.
5. Having something is not always better than having nothing. Use interlibrary loan.

Wallace Bonk in *Building Library Collections* (Scarecrow, 1979) writes: "In a small, working collection, the following suggestions for weeding might be useful. No one should seize upon these suggestions as an infallible formula: it is imperative that the librarian recognize them as suggestions and not laws."

General Reference Works: Bibliographies and encyclopedias are of little use after five years, though exceptions may be made in specific instances; almanacs and yearbooks may be discarded when they are superseded (usually annually).

Religion and Philosophy: Retain systems of philosophy, but discard historical and explanatory texts when superseded, older theology, old commentaries on the Bible, sectarian literature, sermons, and books on the conduct of life, popular self-help psychology, and other guides to living which are old or no longer popular. Be sure to take into account the use made of such materials, which will vary greatly from one library to another. Discard self-help psychology books when no longer popular.

Social Sciences: Requires frequent revision, because much of the material will deal with problems of temporary interest which can be replaced later by historical coverage of these topics. Economics, investments, taxation, etc. need careful watching (tax guides removed annually). Historical works on economics, political science, education, transportation, etc. should be kept if there is demand. Generally, keep basic materials on customs and folklore; be guided by use.

Language: Discard old grammars, ordinary school dictionaries (rarely discard the larger dictionaries). Weed the rest of the collection on the basis of use.

Pure Science: Discard books with obsolete information or theories; all general works which have been superseded, unless they are classics in their field. All ordinary textbooks can usually be discarded after five years. Botany and natural history should be inspected carefully before discarding. Astronomy dates rapidly.

Applied Science: Try to keep this section up-to-date by discarding older material. Five to ten years will date much of the material in such fields as medicine, inventions, radio television, and business. For home economics, cookbooks, gardening, and some materials on crafts, etc., watch the use patterns.

Arts, Music, Hobbies, Etc.: Discard sparingly in the fine arts. Keep collections of music, engravings, fine illustrated books.

Literature: Keep literary history, unless it is superseded by a better title; keep collected works unless definitely superseded; discard poets and dramatists no longer regarded in literary histories and no longer read; discard the works of minor novelists whose works have not been re-issued and who are no longer of interest to readers.

History and Travel: Discard much contemporary writing which is now recorded in basic histories (as World War II materials), historical works which are only summaries and are not authoritative, and works of travel over ten years old, unless distinguished by the style or importance of the author. Keep histories which have become literary classics. Keep anything related to local or regional history.

Biography: Keep collected biography, but individual lives of persons whose importance is no longer great may be discarded when demand declines. Keep anything that may be useful for local history.

Generally, the following classes should be inspected carefully as potential areas for drastic weeding: privately printed verse, memoirs, and essays; subjects not currently popular; unused or unneeded volumes of sets; publications of municipalities; multiple editions of books; incomplete runs of periodicals, or periodicals which are not indexed.

Fiction: Use standard lists as a basis for weeding. Discard duplicate copies of best-sellers no longer being read.

*Adapted from **The Crew Method: Expanded Guidelines for Collection Evaluation and Weeding for Small and Medium-Sized Public Libraries.** Revised and updated by Belinda Boon, Library Development Staff, Texas State Library, 1995.*

WEEDING THE VIDEO COLLECTION:

Weeding is an essential part of collection development that will ultimately contribute to building a strong, well-used collection. That said, why is it so many of us have trouble weeding our video collections? Does the librarian question the need for providing accurate, up-to-date information in good, usable condition? Probably not, and yet many still hesitate to weed video collections.

There may be many reasons for this hesitation. Many libraries have not passed the level of a core collection and don't feel ready to discard any part of such a small collection. As yet, videos probably don't get such a large part of the material's budget that weeded titles can be easily replaced or updated. And, videos have a perceived high value, based on cost and partly on their non-book format. But despite these reasons, and others, just as we weed our book collection, we must weed our video collection to keep it growing, thriving and healthy.

Remember that videos are no more or less sacred than books. It is the librarian's responsibility to provide the public with an up-to-date, attractive collection of materials from which to choose. Weeding is a positive step toward that goal.

Guidelines for Weeding a Video Collection

1. Develop a weeding plan, breaking the collection down into small, workable subject/genre sections that can be easily evaluated.
2. Keep circulation statistics on individual titles and weed when a title no longer circulates. Apply different standards though, to popular movies and informational tapes. They won't circulate the same.
3. Under ideal circumstances, you can expect 200 plays from a video-cassette. Anything over 100 is good for a library video. Weed titles when they get too many plays on them, before they damage a patron's VCR.
4. Look at the physical condition of the tape itself. If the plastic outer shell is broken or damaged and cannot be repaired, weed the tape. And, just as with books, an unattractive package can be the kiss of death for a video.
5. Videotapes that are more than 4 years old should be carefully evaluated. Exposure to heat and cold and other elements limit the life of a library video.
6. Examine the condition of the tape inside the shell. Tapes with obvious physical damage to the film, foreign material inside the shell, or poor picture or sound quality should be weeded.
7. Check for content currency. Apply the same standards for informational videos you do for nonfiction books in terms of timeliness. (By the way, many videos come to us without dates anywhere on them; I strongly urge you to place some kind of date on your videos during processing!)
8. Recognize that distributors frequently use cheaper quality videotape in order to reduce the price of many titles. This cheap tape just won't last as long as higher quality tape. Take this into consideration when weeding.