

Weeding and the Teacher-Librarian

WHY WEED?

A quality library media center offers learners a dynamic collection of materials, materials that are carefully selected to meet student needs. Materials on a library's shelves, as well as electronic and online resources, should be continuously and systematically evaluated for relevance, timeliness, and appeal. The American Library Association recommends that 5% of a collection be weeded annually.

Weeding is an ongoing part of the collection development process. Consider it *de-selection*, a process of evaluating and sometimes withdrawing materials that are rarely used, contain inaccurate or dated information, are in poor physical condition, or are no longer relevant to curriculum or student or faculty needs. The flipside of selection, weeding is a process of equal importance. But because weeding is often subject to community controversy, your policy should be a part of your library's/district's collection development policy.

Remember: something is **not** always better than nothing!

THE RATIONALE . . .

Weeding allows a school library to

- Present a more appealing, inviting, easier to use collection
- More effectively utilize limited space
- Ensure that library users access current, accurate information
- Correct past mistakes in the selection process
- Dispel the illusion of a sizable collection when critical need exists for new resources (Numbers can mislead!)
- Identify materials in need of repair or replacement
- Eliminate outdated material or material that has been superseded



HOW TO WEED

Weeding is both a formal and informal process. It occurs informally as you and your staff check books in and out, as you shelve, and as you look for materials on the shelves. Keep an area or a book truck aside for books you may want to discard, repair, or replace.

Plan for formal weeding times during periods you are not likely to be interrupted. It is not necessary to weed the whole collection at one time. Select a focus area, perhaps one in most serious need of weeding, either because of the age of the collection or because you just cannot fit another book in the section. Don't overwhelm yourself!

Make sure your administrator understands the importance of weeding in maintaining a strong library. Let your administrator and your custodian know when you begin to weed in earnest. Your administrator will advise you about how and when to best discard materials. He or she might appreciate the heads-up in the event that *trash scavengers* question your policies.

Rely on the expertise of faculty partners in areas where your knowledge is lacking. A physics teacher might offer significant insight if science is not your bag. This activity may serve to inspire new faculty interest in the collection and involvement in your program. Hint: avoid asking pack-rats to help!

If you are new to a building, it is wise to avoid weeding until you have been through one cycle of the curriculum, in other words, probably a year. Assignments in any given school may be quirky, unique, or unpredictable. If you don't observe the cycle, you may dispose of a treasure your history teacher relies on.

WEEDING TOOLS

When you are weeding, have on hand:

- Book truck for possible weeds
- Book truck for items to be bound or repaired
- Boxes for definite discards
- Post-it notes to identify individual issues. (Should we check circulations, out-of-print status, etc?)
- Appropriate school reading lists
- Appropriate collection development tools
 - H. W. Wilson's *Children's Catalog, Middle and Junior High School Catalog, Senior High School Library Catalog*
 - Brodart's *Elementary School Library Collection*
 - Libraries Unlimited's *Recommended Reference Books for Small and Medium-Sized Libraries and Media Centers*
 - Scarecrow's *Reference Books for Children*
 - Bowker-Greenwood's *Best Books for Children, Best Books for Young Teen Readers* (John T. Gillespie)
 - Neal-Schuman's *Core Collection for Young Adults* (Patrick Jones et al.)
- Printed collection reports from your automated system for the section of books you are examining, listing latest checkout dates/circulation history
- Access to Mackin.com (to check on and note out-of-print status, replacement availabilities, alternate purchases, etc.)
- Access to state library catalogs (If many libraries own the title, there might be good reason to keep it.)
- Place marker to note where you left off on the shelves
- Note pad to list materials that need to be replaced

REMEMBER TO

Delete holdings from the automated circ/cat system and update any inventory records.

Mark or stamp the item as WEEDDED or DISCARDED. Remove pockets and cards and other identifying markings.

Avoid distributing weeded items.

Dispose of items with as little publicity as possible. If it's too old and unattractive for your collection, it is not likely to be useful elsewhere.

Avoid donating items to garage sales or other organizations.

If you are weeding because you have unneeded multiple copies, you might consider distributing extra copies to teachers who could use them.

EIGHT CRITICAL Cs TO CONSIDER IN WEEDING

Condition: Is the material too beat-up, worn out, or simply too icky or ugly to borrow? Would anyone really want to borrow it? Is it worth repairing? Is it repairable?

Copyright: Is it too old to be relevant? Remember, the relevance of copyright will vary in different areas of the collection. History and folktales have far longer shelf lives than technology and health materials! Pay special note before weeding books that are out-of-print. (Amazon.com might help you determine this.)

Curriculum and Content: Does this material support your curriculum or student or faculty interests? Is it on current reading lists? Is it a primary source?

Circulation: Has the material *moved*? How recently was it borrowed, referred to, or assigned? Use your circulation statistics to seriously evaluate books that have not circulated in the past five years.

Classics: Is the book a classic, award winner, or of historic or literary significance? Does the author have unique authority? Is the illustrator noted? Is it included in standard collection development tools (*Children's Catalog, Senior High School Catalog, etc.*)? Nonfiction books can be classics too! Be careful about avoiding such titles as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* if they are in good condition and relevant to curriculum and research.

Confusing: Is the item culturally or factually "dated," inaccurate, or obsolete? Does it contain gender or ethnic stereotyping?

Community: Does the item have special relevance to the community? Does it deal with local history? Is it a memorial gift?

Copies: Do you have far too many copies of an item no longer in great demand, perhaps no longer required reading? Is it redundant?

COPYRIGHT SUGGESTIONS TO CONSIDER

(Remember to examine each item individually, applying multiple criteria! Every library has different needs. Understand your curriculum and students interest before attempting any major weed!)

Dewey Class or Type	Number of years	Special Considerations
000	2–10	Books on technology age quickly! Books on computers, unless historical, date after three years. Circulating encyclopedia should be no older than eight years.
100	10–15	Look for and avoid weeding classics and famous names in the areas of philosophy and psychology, which may have long shelf lives! The history of witchcraft is likely to be both in demand and on assignment lists. Popular psychology may date quickly.
200	5–10	Titles on the history of religion and mythology may have long shelf lives. Check to ensure your collection represents the religious diversity of the community.
300	3–10	Titles relating to social and controversial issues and careers will date quickly. Keep these very current and balanced! Materials on education, government, holidays, folklore, fashion history, and the law may have lasting value. Weed old versions of test prep books when new versions of tests are in place. Circulating almanacs should be no older than three years, unless the curriculum includes work in historic statistics.
400	10	Your ESL materials should be appealing. Weed frequently. English and foreign language dictionaries and thesauri may be valuable for ten years.
500	5–10	Examine all science books for currency after five years. Natural history, botany, science history, and classic works may have longer lives. Make sure all science works reflect current discoveries. Engage science faculty in helping you with these decisions.
600	5–10	Look carefully at books on health and diseases. Information here is in constant flux. Weed books on popular culture, home-making, and crafts no longer in style.

700	Flexible: Use judgment	Art, music, film, theater, and sports history have permanent value. Weed current musical artists and athletes no longer popular. Evaluate sports for local interest.
800	Flexible: Use judgment	Literary classics and literary criticism may have permanent value. Keep poetry collections in good condition.
900	5–15	Historical resources will have longer shelf lives. (Middle Ages, Renaissance, Civil War, etc.) Carefully examine materials on travel, regions, countries, and current events for changes, especially in volatile geographic areas. Consider bookmarking or linking to web travel guides rather than holding on to guides more than five years old.
Biography	Flexible: use judgment	Keep materials on important historical and popular individuals. Keep titles of individuals of local interest. Eliminate “one-hit wonders” and biographies and memoirs of popular individuals your students have never heard of. Keep works of literary and historic value (<i>Death Be Not Proud</i> , <i>Diary of Ann Frank</i>).
Reference	Evaluate titles on individual basis, applying Dewey criteria when appropriate	Print encyclopedias—replace at least one set every five years and consider replacing with continually updated online editions. Weed last year’s almanacs and yearbooks after new ones arrive. Be aware of any need for historical statistical research. Standard references, like <i>Facts About the Presidents</i> , should be weeded when new editions arrive. You may want to keep one or two years in the circulating collection. Evaluate atlases after five years. If space is tight and funding is regular, weed materials duplicated by subscription databases (<i>Wilson Biographies Online replaces Current Biography</i>). Dictionaries, especially unabridged versions, may have long shelf lives.
Fiction	Flexible: use judgment	Avoid weeding classics in good condition and award-winning titles. Replace if worn. Weed duplicates after titles are no longer popular. Unless it’s a classic or popular, weed young adult fiction older than ten years. Consider weeding abridged and poorly bound materials. Replace shabby paperbacks with new copies.
Periodicals	3–5	Is this material available through your online databases? If it isn’t, even if it is old, should you keep it for research in current history? (Woodstock, Challenger Disaster, etc.) Unindexed periodicals have little value after two years.
Multimedia materials		Use criteria listed above according to class. Weed materials in obsolete formats (phonograph albums?). Begin to migrate to emerging formats when (or before) equipment reaches <i>critical mass</i> (VHS to DVD).

MORE RESOURCES ON WEEDING

Weed It! For an Attractive and Useful Collection (Prepared by Karen Klopfer, formerly Western Massachusetts Regional Library System) http://www.wmrls.org/services/colldev/weed_it.html

Sunlink Weed of the Month <http://www.sunlink.ucf.edu/weed>

Introduction to Weeding, Sally Livingston Jefferson County Schools
http://www.pld.fayette.k12.ky.us/lms/weed_int.htm

Weeding (Arizona Public Libraries) <http://www.lib.az.us/cdt/weeding.htm>

The CREW Manual