

Process for Weeding

Basic understandings

Weeding is part of library service, in the same way that buying materials is part of library service.

Weeding is essential. If we don't weed, there is no room for new materials.

Weeding is a process. Weeding decisions are based on information. It is not arbitrary.

How weeding is done

Ongoing

Pros:

Systematic review of collection is the most effective.

Cons:

Need to devote human and space resources to weeding on a permanent basis

Easy to lose motivation and let other things take precedence

Blitz

Pros:

May be easier to motivate staff to help with a discrete project

Cons:

Easy to get overwhelmed by numbers of materials being weeded and stop

May be more visible to community, and thus invite controversy

Goal-oriented (combination)

Pros:

Gets the job done, allowing for choosing the best time for the project and without too much hubbub

Cons:

Temptation to leave it to the last minute and thus not complete it

Setting up a structure

To set up a structure, choose goal-oriented or ongoing:

Ongoing: your plan is to review the entire collection every X years.

Goal: this year you will weed the X sections.

Getting statistics

To get statistics, go to the UHLS website. Under services, choose Reports. Login is intranet and password is 28essex. Then choose AdHoc Reports. (You'll have to enter login and password again.)

Choose Collection Weeding Report. Enter your four-letter library code. Then choose which collection code you wish to weed.

Within the collection code, you will see materials listed in call number order and with these categories:

Call number
Title
Publication date
Months owned
Number of CKOs
Last CKO

How to use the statistics

There are four main statistics of value in weeding:

1. Publication date (how old is this item?)
2. Months owned (how long have we had it?)
3. Number of checkouts (how many times has it been out?)
4. Last checkout (when is the last time it left the library?)

You consider these statistics differently depending on what you're weeding.

The first thing to look at when weeding is the condition of the item. We are often too willing to let books with badly frayed bindings, stained covers and ripped pages remain in our collections. Suggestion: using examples, train your desk staff to your sensibilities and have them pull books in poor condition as they are returned to the library.

After condition, use these guidelines:

Weeding picture books and early readers

Months owned, number of checkouts, last checkout – important. How well is it circulating?
Publication date – unimportant

Weeding fiction

Months owned, number of checkouts, last checkout – important. How well is it circulating?
Publication date – of consideration, but only in relation to above factors.

Weeding nonfiction

Publication date – very important. Use CREW guidelines for dewey ranges to evaluate when books are too old. If it is not too old, then look at months owned, number of checkouts, and last checkout.

If you are weeding the only book or a lot of books on a topic, consider whether you need replacements and if so, make yourself a note.

Weeding nonprint

Months owned, number of checkouts, last checkout – important. How well is it circulating?

Publication date – of consideration, but only in relation to above factors.

If you are weeding items in old formats, consider whether you need to replace with the same titles in new formats.

A note on the statistics you get from UHLS: cataloging problems are revealed when statistics are printed out by call number, and within particular collections or I-Types. If you see something odd, it's likely a cataloging problem. If you see a lot of odd and inexplicable things, ask!

Departing from statistics

There are materials that some libraries keep on the basis of their perceived inherent value, even if they have not been circulating. Examples:

Award-winning books or media, like the Newbery and Caldecott winners or National Book Award winners

Materials considered to be classics, like Huckleberry Finn, Moby Dick, Beloved

Materials of local value, such as by local authors or about local history

Materials supporting local school curriculum

You must make your own decisions about these items, based on your library's mission, the space required for these materials, and their condition . Some points to ponder:

What is your mission? To be a popular materials center, to support research, to have a deeper but overall older collection, to have a shallower but overall newer collection? To support kids' reading and elementary curriculum with all the newest stuff as well as award winners going far back?

What is "local" history?

How much school curriculum support is the library willing to pay for? Deliberately supporting the curriculum brings higher circulation and traffic, and also leads to certain expectations from parents. How does the board see the public library's role here?

Non-statistical weeding considerations

In implementing a weeding project, general guidelines must be adjusted to the climate in which you're weeding. Ask yourself:

When was the collection (or this part of it) last weeded? What tolerance will the board, staff, and public have for empty shelves?

If the collection has been neglected for a long time, weeding to the extent dictated by professional guidelines may lead to practically bare shelves. In this case, you may want to weed in stages: do a first pass through, allow some time to pass while you also purchase some replacements, then do another weeding.

Policies

It's a good idea to include weeding in your collection management policies. Doing so gives you something credible to point to when explaining to community members why you're getting rid of books.