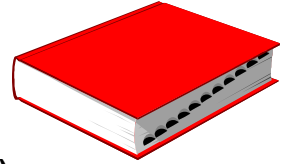


## **EVALUATING THE REFERENCE COLLECTION**



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### **WHAT IS A REFERENCE BOOK??**

#### **Three Criteria:**

1. Used to locate facts and citations (not intended to be read from cover to cover)
2. Usually arranged in one of three ways:
  - Alphabetically
  - Chronologically
  - Topically
3. The title gives detailed information about the work

### **CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING REFERENCE MATERIALS**

(Source: *The CREW Method: Expanded Guidelines for Collection Evaluation and Weeding for Small and Medium-Sized Libraries*, Texas State Library, 1995, pp. 23-24)

#### **Guidelines for Reference Materials:**

- Subject relevance
- Other materials on the topic
- Weed older editions when superseded
- Evaluate periodically
- Maintain a reference collection development policy

#### **Other Criteria:**

- Age
- Currency
- Timeliness
- Use
- Newer edition available
- Suitability for circulating collection
- Historical significance
- Availability of newer or better title
- Budget constraints
- Standing order dispositions (older editions sent to branches)
- Appropriateness for collection
- Incomplete sets
- Judgments based on subject area expertise
- Current listings in standards tools (e.g., Sheehy, BIP)

**Print vs. Online:**

- How many reference resources are available online?
- “Free” vs. fee
- Cost of maintaining two formats
- Other issues (usability, available computers, patron skill level)

**Do NOT Weed:**

- Local history
- Volumes of sets and series with special merit
- Older reference works augmented by (*not superseded by*) later editions

**Types of Resources:**

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**Almanacs**

- Rarely useful after two years
- Older editions may be retained for historic research (depending on the needs of the community)
- Should be updated annually
- Older editions can be transferred to the circulating collection, then discarded each year

Examples: *World Almanac and Book of Facts*, *Information Please Almanac*

**Dictionaries**

- Unabridged dictionaries may be retained indefinitely (unless worn from use and replaceable with the same edition)
- Specialized dictionaries (e.g., abbreviations, slang, acronyms) should be updated regularly
- Older editions can be retained and added to the circulating collection

Examples: *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, *Dictionary of Synonyms* (special), *Dictionary of Native American Art* (subject)

**Encyclopedias**

- Considered outdated after five years
- May be added on a rotating schedule (e.g., purchase *World Book* in year 1 and *Britannica* in year 3 or 4)
- Should be supplemented with online and CD-ROM formats when possible (e.g. [www.worldbookonline.com](http://www.worldbookonline.com) offers full text access to editions dating back to 1922 for \$49.95/year per workstation)

## Directories

- Normally discarded when newer editions arrive
- Several years' worth may be retained if space permits and usage warrants
- Exceptions to this rule are city directories and local telephone books—these may be useful for genealogical research and can be kept indefinitely (Note: they should be housed separately from the current editions)

Examples: telephone books, *Official Congressional Directory*,  
<http://thomas.loc.gov>

## Atlases

- Geographical atlases should be replaced when updated (usu. revised every 5 years)
- Older editions may still be useful to historians, **but** these should be housed separately (most patrons will not check the copyright date, assuming that the library has provided the most current information)
- Relatively inexpensive road atlases can be replaced annually

## Handbooks

- Subjects in the humanities (music, art, literature) may be retained indefinitely and supplemented with newer texts
- Social science reference tools are considered outdated after ten years (outmoded theories and practices are usually revised in this period)
- Notable exceptions containing significant historical data are *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* and *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*
- Science resources are generally outdated in five years
- Exception: texts on botany and natural history can be retained for longer periods

Examples: *Peterson's Guide to Birds of North America*, *Oxford Companion to...*, Bible and Shakespeare concordances

## Indexes

- Most print indexes have been replaced by online databases (e.g., EBSCO's *Masterfile Index*)
- Print indexes may still be useful for locating citations in older periodicals
- Older editions of *Granger's Index to Poetry* can be kept if they contain out of print volumes retained by the library

## Quotation Sources

- Sources such as *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* can be kept indefinitely, since newer editions delete some items while adding others
- Note: most online quotation sources do not provide citations
- One exception is [www.bartleby.com](http://www.bartleby.com), which provide access to the 1919 edition of *Bartlett's*

### Biographical Sources

- Keep biographical sets (e.g. *Something About the Author*) unless space is at a premium
- Do not discard older volumes unless the information can be obtained elsewhere, such as an online database
- Biographical dictionaries are never discarded unless superseded by a newer edition (e.g., *Webster's New Biographical Dictionary*)

### Bibliographic Sources

- Replace when superseded by new editions
- Note: some titles are “one time only” publications (e.g., *Best Books for Public Libraries*)

### “RIGHT-SIZING” THE COLLECTION

(Source: Frase, Rose M., and Barbara Salit-Mischel. "Right-Sizing the Reference Collection." *Public Libraries* 46.1 (2007): 40-4.)

1. Designate a project team and team leader
2. Print out a shelf list of the reference collection
3. Perform an inventory
  - Eliminate titles not found on the shelves
  - Add titles not included on shelflist printout
4. Gather usage data about the collection
  - Determine the busiest 2- or 3-month period (e.g., February through May, Monday through Sunday, every other week)
  - Post signs advising users not to reshelve reference materials
  - Provide labeled carts for used materials
  - Provide empty shelves for perusing materials in the stacks
  - Designate a “roving librarian” to check carts and tables every hour and enter data
  - Make a hashmark by each title used
  - Highlight titles used
5. Review the data and evaluate materials based on usage (e.g., 0 usage, 1 usage, etc.)
  - Note: “little use” items may be retained if they provide depth not found elsewhere in print or electronic format
6. Weed the collection to determine which items will be:
  - Retained
  - Discarded
  - Moved to the circulating collection