

How to

Shelf

read

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Definition

Shelf reading is the systematic control of library material to ensure that it is in the correct filing order. But it can be used to do more than that.

Order in a library ensures accessibility of all material so that the library can be used effectively.

Organisation

- A shelf reading programme has to be planned by the librarian-in-charge. Categories should be allocated to staff and rotated every six months or every year depending on the size of the library. The outcome of the rotation is that the staff get to know the library stock and this ensures better handling of stock-related questions from the public.
- Depending on the size of a library, staff should shelf read through their categories at least once a month.
- Shelf reading should be done on a daily basis, little by little, and not for hours on end, which can be very discouraging. Half

an hour or an hour should be set aside every day before the opening of the library in the mornings or during away-from-counter sessions.

- During staff meetings problems like broken shelves, damp, insects, et cetera, could be reported and discussed. Smaller libraries should keep the library manager posted on problems so that it can be resolved.

How is it done?

- Shelf reading is a routine daily task.
- It is done like filing: from left to right and from top to bottom.
- Books should stand level with the shelf edge and not unevenly pushed back against the back of the shelf. This looks neat and professional. When staff notice a user pushing books to the back, they should tactfully explain why this should not be done. Explaining helps people understand and remember the rule. If this is regularly done with all the culprits, the problem will eventually stop occurring.
- Make sure that shelves hold about the same volume of books. This makes a good impression and the shelves look neat.
- Be on the lookout for block loans and special requests that were filed by accident.
- Remove books that are filed in the incorrect order from the shelf and correct the filing order.
- If a library has enough books in a certain category or genre like Teenage books, Westerns or Romance, they may be filed separately to make the library more user-friendly. But stick to that way of filing and remove those titles that have been wrongly filed elsewhere.
- Remove books that look tatty and bleached. The person who is responsible for the final weeding in the library should sort these for mending or for returning to the region. It is a good idea to add a note to the book with the reason for weeding.
- If your library is not large enough to justify multiple copies of the same title, remove it and put a note on the book to remind yourself or the person who does the final weeding, especially in the case of popular titles.
- Books should be filed according to Dewey for NF, JNF and Reference and alphabetically by author in the case of fiction.
- In the case of more titles by the same author, books should be filed according to title. Remember to follow the filing rules by ignoring the definite/indefinite articles like 'the', 'a' and 'an'.
- Keep the JE (6-8 years); JEJ (7-9 years);

and J (9-12 years) books apart. This helps children and parents in finding reading material for their specific reading level. JT is for 11-13 years but could be filed with the Js in the juvenile fiction. Put an explanatory notice up for parents and others to be able to accurately choose material for the correct reading levels.

- Take note of the titles on the shelf. If there is something you have never seen before, remove it from the shelf to peruse later; scan through the summary on the back and the content page, or quickly page through the book. (This does not give you the right to read during shelf reading, though!)
- Be on the lookout for books that were 'hidden' or were pushed behind others on the shelf.
- Keep requests from users in mind and follow it up with them next time they return. If you know that a specific subject is the general interest of a person, you may bring

the relevant material that you found on the shelves during shelf reading to his/her attention. That is good client service.

- When shelf reading is done, keep an eye out for material on the missing list after stocktakes or for the normal popular project books. This applies especially to libraries without security gates.
- Shelf reading is the ideal way of identifying 'new' sources for school projects. You may remove the titles and list them with others on the subject with the call numbers or page numbers in the case of one-volume books.
- If the library filed mass market EFs separately from the others, keep to that way of filing.
- During shelf reading you can separate large print books filed with the normal prints. The users will love you for the effort.
- Be aware of problem cards on the counter by keeping an eye out for the material.

Computerised libraries do not have this problem.

- Every shelf should have a book end.
- Use markers to indicate start-and-stops during the shelf reading process and between sessions.
- Shelf reading is a very handy tool to find items that are 'lost' on the annual and stocktake accounts list. Many 'lost' items are normally found to be on shelves during stocktakes.
- With regular execution of this task, it becomes easier and it can be done faster, though it is important not to rush it but to take note of what you see.

In conclusion

Though this is a routine task, your knowledge of the stock is enhanced, your library will be neat and you will solve problems that would otherwise go unnoticed until a book is requested.

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DID YOU KNOW?

The Central Reference Section (SN: Sentrale Naslaan) of the Western Cape Library Service provides an information service to all public libraries in the Western Cape. Library users, librarians, library workers and members of the public may borrow library material via their public libraries for a specific loan period. Central Reference has a comprehensive collection of library material, which includes reference works, art, film, audiovisual material and music.

Central Reference's extensive information databank includes library material in the following formats: books, DVDs, CDs, videos, 16mm and 35mm films, language cassettes, foreign fiction, audiobooks and Africana.

A Ready Reference service is also available and is very popular amongst scholars and students. Items may be requested via SLIMS/ Brocade, fax, e-mail, telephone and post.

CONTACT DETAILS

Reference Librarian: Vacant

Responsible for collection development. Also responsible for all title and subject requests from public libraries and regional libraries.

Telephone: 021 483-2324
Fax: 021 419-7541
E-mail: Not available

Chief Library Assistant: Gerda Theron

Responsible for all ready reference requests (delivery within 24 hours), SABINET requests and the compilation of the statistics of the section.

Telephone: 021 483-2258
Fax: 021 419-7541
E-mail: Gerda.Theron@pgwc.gov.za

Senior Library Assistant: Sandra Kingswell

Responsible for all lending tasks via PALS/ BROCADE library system: issuing (books, CDs, audio books, language courses) reminders and renewals, as well as the current awareness service of professional journals to public libraries and Library Service staff.

Telephone: 021 483-2276
Fax: 021 419-7541
E-mail: Sandra.Kingswell@pgwc.gov.za

Senior Library Assistant: Hoeda Salaam

Responsible for the issuing of all audiovisual library material requests (DVDs, Art prints, videos and 16mm and 35mm films).

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