

Weeding

When your shelves fill up and there is no room for new books, you have no choice: it's time to remove some books. This process is known as deselection, or *weeding*, and is just as important to your library as collection development!

Put simply, weeding is the systematic removal of resources from a library based on certain criteria, such as the condition of the book, accuracy of information, and circulation/usage statistics. Different libraries may have different criteria for weeding, depending on the information needs of patrons, the size of their collection, or their ongoing goals for the collection (e.g., wishing to increase the number of children's books available). You will be responsible for deciding what your weeding goals are and putting them into practise.

Why Weed?

The obvious answer is, of course, to make room for new books. But there are many good reasons to weed, even before you start to run out of space!

- Your library will look better when the shelves are less crowded.
- It's easier for patrons to browse through books that aren't tightly packed in together- and it's easier for you to find items on the hold list, too!
- Some books just won't belong in your collection anymore. Maybe the content is out of date, maybe the book is too damaged to enjoy, or maybe your community just isn't interested in it any longer.

How to Weed

The most commonly-referred to method for this element of collection management is the **CREW method**, which stands for Continuous Review, Evaluation, and Weeding.

Essentially, following CREW ensures that weeding is not a one-time-only event, but an ongoing process. This does not mean you should be pulling every book in your collection off the shelves every month to make sure it is "still good"; rather, it is good practise to regularly choose sections of your library for evaluation. Doing a shelf here or there will help keep the process minimally stressful and cause the least amount of disruption to both you and your patrons.

When you are weeding, you should choose -- and stick to -- a specific set of criteria to help you decide whether an item should be kept in your collection or discarded. According to CREW, some general criteria for determining whether an item still has a place in the collection include:

- **Publication date:** This matters more for informational works concerning science, health, finances, or travel (topics where information can quickly become outdated and incorrect) than it does for works of fiction, poetry, hobby guides, or self-help materials.

- **Author:** If it is a work by a well-known/well-regarded author, this could be cause for keeping it. That said, you probably don't need to keep a copy of every book James Patterson has ever published; these items are generally widely available and can be acquired from elsewhere, if necessary.
- **Publisher**
- Physical condition: is the book in poor condition? Can it be refreshed/repaired?
- Availability of additional copies: Do you have more than one copy of this book in circulation? Do other libraries in system have copies as well?
- Circulation rates: is the item borrowed with some regularity, or does it spend most of its life on the shelf? As a reminder, you can request circulation reports for your collection by contacting the Manager, Systems and Technical Services.
- Relevance to the community
- Availability of other resources

A commonly used acronym for guiding the weeding process is MUSTIE:

M - Misleading. The information contained in the item is inaccurate or out of date. Financial guides, books on medical conditions, and old travel guidebooks all contain information that grows outdated very quickly, and should be regularly replaced with the most current, accurate information available.

U - Ugly. The material is worn, tattered, or mildewed. If you don't want to touch it, is anyone else going to want to either?

S - Superseded. The material has been replaced by a newer edition, newer format, or newer title.

T - Trivial. The material is not well-written or researched, and adds little to the general conversation. This is often the case with materials that are published immediately after major news events (for instance, books published in the wakes of elections or massive scandals).

I - Irrelevant. The material does not meet the needs of the library's community of users. Something that might be highly useful in one place (e.g. a guide to cattle breeding in a farming community) might be of little or no value in a different place. Even the newest, shiniest item will languish on the shelf if it is of no interest to anyone in the community.

E - Available Elsewhere. The same information can be found in another item in your collection. This also applies if multiple copies of the same title can be found at other Shortgrass libraries, or if the item is readily available via interlibrary loan.

For a full guide to the CREW Method for weeding, please review the PDF of *CREW: A Weeding Manual for Modern Libraries*, included in this handbook.

What Not to Weed

As difficult as it can be to decide what to remove from your collection, it can sometimes seem harder to decide what to keep. While your guidelines for this will shift depending on various criteria, there are some things that should potentially be kept in the collection as long as they can be maintained, regardless of age or condition.

Local History. Items in this category include materials such as community histories, historical newspapers, and genealogical records. Of high interest to the local community, genealogical researchers, and historians, they are also often either unique or only one of a few copies in existence.

Local Authors/Local Settings. Items by local authors or set locally will generally be of high interest to the community and are often kept as a matter of local pride, even if they are low-circulating items. If nothing else, you do not want to be the person who discards the mayor's wife's proudly self-published novel...

Gifts/Memorials. This is a more difficult category to navigate, as mishandling the removal of these items from the collection could cause upset or grief from the donor or memorialized person's family if the removal is noticed. A potential solution, if the book is to be weeded: contact the donor (or memorialized person's family) and offer it to them as a memento, telling them that the item has been "loved to death". Offer them the opportunity to choose a new item in the collection as a memorial. These steps will potentially save a significant amount of awkwardness and hurt.

Note: these items are not necessarily untouchable. There may be situations where it makes sense to weed these items. Just ensure that you are taking care with these collections!

What To Do With Weeded Materials

Upon completion of a weeding project, you may have a large amount of items that need to be removed from your library collection. Please first ensure that these items have been correctly discarded in Workflows (refer to page 16 of the procedures manual for information on how to do this), and complete other necessary weeding steps such as removing book barcodes or applying a "weeded" stamp (and whatever other tasks are applicable at your library).

When discarded items have been removed from the catalogue, you must then decide what to do with them. First: do not be afraid to simply dispose of those that are in too poor condition to be used any longer. If *you* think an item is too gross to touch, your patrons definitely do too.

If possible, hold onto one or two books that were removed for being outdated, or damaged (though avoid keeping anything dirty!). These are handy resources that you can show to stakeholders who question the purpose of weeding.

If books are in excellent quality and you are weeding them due to low circulation, you could attempt a “Last Chance” book display and give patrons a final chance to bump their stats up.

Having a library book sale is an excellent option for removing old books from your library -- and as a bonus, you will be able to raise money! If you have adequate storage space, you may wish to save your discards until you can have a large sale -- many libraries have annual or semiannual book sales. If you do not have room to store many boxes of books, you may also wish to have a sale shelf or table in your library space. This is a great option for selling books as you weed them, as your shelf can continually be replenished. In all cases, you can set a price -- generally between \$0.25-\$1.00 per item -- or accept donations.

Any items that do not sell may also be recycled.

How do I learn more about weeding?

Shortgrass' PD collection includes some information on weeding. Contact the Client Services Librarian if you have any questions about this.

You can also access some excellent webinars and online courses on weeding. Visit WebJunction at learn.webjunction.org, and search “Weeding”.