

# Factors in Selecting Library Materials

## Content

**Purpose, Scope, and Audience:** Does the purpose of the book match the interests and needs of your community?

**Authority, Honesty, and Credibility of the Author:** Certain authors are more credible for certain topics than others. Reviews can help you establish which authors are credible and which are not.

**Subject Matter:** Can you foresee a need for a book (or more books) on a particular subject?

**Timeliness:** New books are used far more than old books so think twice before you purchase books that are a few years old. Also consider the durability of the subject: avoid purchasing too many fad diet books, for example (a good nutrition book will have far more stamina in your collection). Materials for teens also date quickly. Local history materials may be an exception to this criterion.

**Accuracy:** Accuracy is often difficult for non-specialists to determine so it's important that patrons can rely on librarians to provide accurate information. Atlases should show national boundaries as they are and census numbers should be accurate. Reviews might help you establish the accuracy of a particular work.

**Impartiality:** It's better to have a gap in your collection than to support only one side of a contentious issue. For example, if you have a pro-choice book about abortion, you must also have a pro-life one.

**Literary Merit:** Use reviews and awards lists to determine if the book is well-written as well as relevant and appealing to your readers. It is important to broaden fiction collections by collecting works by international writers (beyond United States and Western Europe!).

**Uniqueness:** Does every library in TRAC already have this title? Would you be the only library to hold this title? There is great value for everyone in your having unique items in your collection!

**Arrangement and Organization:** Do chapters follow each other logically? Is there an index (history and science books are difficult to use without an index!)? Are illustrations in appropriate places?

**School Assignments:** Public libraries usually don't collect materials to directly support the school curriculum. Is the book you're considering likely to be used by other people out of general interest or will it only be used by a class to write a report? In a school-housed public library, of course, you need to be careful to avoid spending your public library budget on school materials and vice versa.

**Demand:** Even if books don't qualify for literary merit, local demand may dictate that you purchase them anyhow. Danielle Steel and Nora Roberts rarely receive good reviews or win awards, but your patrons will miss these authors if you don't collect their books.

**Canadian and Local Content:** Libraries should strive to find good quality Canadian material. Library users of all ages have a right to expect good representation of Canadian and local authors in public libraries.

## Physical Form

**Format:** language? Talking books? VHS or DVD? The easiest way to decide on appropriate format is to use your community needs assessment and local statistics to divide your book allocation budget at the outset.

**Binding:** hard-covers last longer than paperbacks but not all books need to last forever. Consider spending the extra money on library-bound materials for classic children's' books (Dr. Seuss and Robert Munsch books, for example). In general, try to buy paperbacks instead of cloth when (a) the cloth is noticeably more expensive; (b) the paperback is high quality w/ high quality paper; and (c) the book is not expected to see heavy use.

**Appearance:** Books that look nice circulate more than books that don't.

**Illustrations:** are most important for children's' books and appropriate non-fiction titles. Ensure the illustrations are accurate and of good quality.

**Size:** Young children often adore small books while teens generally won't read anything that looks like a picture book (unless it's a graphic novel). Over-size books may be tricky to handle if your shelves are small or if the spines of the books are weak.

**Price:** sometimes good and important information comes in pricey packages. If you think the book is important to your collection and to your patrons, consider buying it even if it means you might not be able to buy something else. Although they tend to be the cheapest books available, it is important to keep purchases of mass-market paperbacks low because they meet few of the content requirements for collection development (limited literary merit, little Canadian content, etc.).

**Series:** If a series is a fairly short one, consider purchasing all the books in it. For longer or more expensive series, make patrons aware that the other books are available through interlibrary loan.

**\* NLLS does not purchase for its member libraries text books or material deemed illegal by the federal government.\***

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