



# General Weeding Philosophy & Methods

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## Why Weed?

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**Save and make space.** Unfortunately, you can't ever keep everything. Shelves get full and you need to make room for new books. Materials get old and are no longer useful. Sometimes your purchases will be duds and they won't circulate for years. It's okay. We can't always predict what our patrons find interesting so we sometimes have to weed non-circulating items even though they look new. It's best to make room for new purchases and experiments.

**Appearance is important.** Patrons will appreciate a tidy, up-to-date, attractive collection. Attractive collections are patron magnets!

**Liability.** No library worker wants to be responsible for providing false information. Consequences in the legal and medical domains can be particularly onerous.

**Funding: build up your reputation.** The tidier your library shelves are, the more people in your community (including board members) will hear about the good job you're doing. It's hard to convince funders to give more money when library shelves are stuffed full, loaded with brown paperbacks, irrelevant non-fiction, and children's books with pages missing!

**Help your statistics.** Good collections circulate more. There's no point in keeping materials that no one will take out. Those materials will also deter patrons – it's easy to grab a gem from a library shelf when that shelf contains nothing but gems!

**Help break down stereotypes.** Materials that perpetuate racist, gender, and other stereotypes should be weeded. Some may be kept for historical purposes, but every effort should be made to balance whatever is left with contemporary materials that present other perspectives.

**Find out what you have.** There's no better way to learn about your library's contents than to go through them one-by-one. If you know your collection well, you'll be best able to help your patrons find what they're looking for. Shelf-reading & inventory are two other practices which, if done regularly, ensure you are familiar with your collection and what your patrons are borrowing.

**Find out what you need.** The process of weeding helps you find the gaps in your collection and the books that need to be replaced based on condition, date, accuracy, etc.

**Make your job easier.** The less crowded your shelves are, the easier it is to find materials and put them back again.

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## How Often Should I Weed?

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If you're stretched for staff-time and can't weed your whole collection every year, you may want to set up a 4-year rotating schedule:

- Year 1: Adult Non-fiction, Reference
- Year 2: Adult Fiction, Large Print
- Year 3: Juvenile Non-fiction, Juvenile Fiction, YA
- Year 4: Children's Books, Audio, Video, DVD

You may want to make another schedule for each year, beginning at a time when you're not too busy:

- Week 1: 000's
- Week 2: 100's
- Week 3: 200's, etc.

Do whatever you can to make the weeding a manageable project. Remember, however, that some areas need to be weeded more often (travel guides, legal information if it changes, etc.) so make sure you work those things into your annual plan!

You may find it easiest to do a bit of front-line work by weeding damaged materials as they go through the circulation desk. If you (or other staff/volunteers) come across damaged or inappropriate materials, set them aside for weeding. Don't waste your time re-shelving damaged goods.

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## How do I Weed?

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1. Determine a reasonable weeding schedule.
2. Arm yourself with a book cart.
3. Read over your library's mission statement and collection development policy and put them on the top shelf of the cart in case you need a reminder.
4. Get your community profile from Statistics Canada ([www.statcan.ca](http://www.statcan.ca)) and make sure you know who lives in your community and surrounding area. Print the profile and add it to the mission statement and collection development policy on the top shelf of the cart.
5. Set some rules (and work them into your library's collection development policy):
  - a. **Out with the untouched.** Many libraries weed books that have not been checked out for two years (we recommend 2 years if your library is one of the larger ones, 3 if it's smaller). Set your own limits. Keep what's sacred.
  - b. **Know what's sacred.** Keep local histories, local writers, materials about your community, "classics" in good condition, and special collections your library has developed. Not all old books are worth keeping, especially not those that are falling apart. Avoid keeping donations just because they're donations: if you don't have a clear way to deal with them, help your board make a policy.
  - c. **What about Talking Books?** Talking books are produced by the CNIB for print-disabled readers. According to CNIB, "Public libraries that purchase restricted materials through the CNIB Public Library Sales Program are required to discard works in a way

that prevents misuse. Total destruction is not necessary; it is acceptable to remove the tapes or CDs from their packaging and tossing them randomly into a garbage bin. The intent is to prevent whole works from being easily retrieved and used by people who do not have a perceptual disability as defined in the Canadian Copyright Act." Please contact the Public Services department if you have any questions.

6. First run the *Polaris Collection and Weeding Report* to deal with the materials your patrons ARE NOT using.
  - a) Go to the Utilities portion of the tool bar. From the dropdown, select Reports and Notices.
  - b) Double click on the Custom folder.
  - c) Select the *Collection and Weeding Report* and double click to open the parameter options.
  - d) In the Start Date field, enter a very early date, such as 1990, then enter the End Date for circulation (e.g. 5 years before 1 Jan 2011 would be 1 Jan 2006). You can determine this cut-off date yourself. We recommend 5 years as a good place to start; and then 3-4 years for smaller libraries; 2-3 years for larger ones.
  - e) In the Organization field, select Northern Lights. In the Branch field, select your library. If you are weeding one collection at a time, please select this from the next drop down, or select all if you wish to weed the entire library at once. Note that the next field allows you to limit by Material Type as well. In most instances, you may wish to leave the Starting Call Number and End Call Number as the default 0 and ZZZZZ, unless you are weeding a very specific portion of your collection. You may also wish to leave the default of (!All) for item Status. Define your circulation parameters next, inserting a number in the Minimum Circ Count and Maximum Circ Count (such as 0 for Minimum and 1 for Maximum). Finally, you may wish to define your sort field by Call Number. This will make it easiest to locate the items on the shelf. Submit, and the report will be generated in a PDF document that you can print.
  - f) The books on these lists ought to be weeded even if they're shiny and damage-free. As mentioned earlier, we can't always predict our patrons' interests so we may have to weed purchased or donated books which are otherwise in good condition. It's okay to keep some sacred materials, but double-check that those materials are worth keeping in your collection and that better ones aren't available.
  - g) If the list is too long and daunting, start with an earlier date: you can begin by weeding the materials that haven't been checked out since you joined NLLS. It may be easiest to work your way up through circulation dates, generating small lists instead of long ones.

7. Now deal with the materials your patrons ARE using. Use the **NLLS Weeding Guidelines** with the **MUSTIE** acronym to determine what should be removed from your library's shelves. According to MUSTIE, you should remove materials that are:
  - Misleading** or factually inaccurate.
  - Ugly** (or damaged beyond repair). Highlighter or pen on the pages? Yellow, brittle pages? Broken spines? Small print or cramped margins? Unexplained stains? Dirty, damaged, dog-eared? Don't want to touch (let alone read) it? Dump it.
  - Superseded** by a newer edition or better source.
  - Trivial**: no discernable literary, scientific, or historical merit.
  - Irrelevant** to your community's needs and interests.
  - Elsewhere**: may be borrowed easily from another library.

Also check for **multiple copies**: get rid of duplicates of former bestsellers, or trade them with another library for something you don't have. Check the books for damage and keep the copy in the best condition.

8. Decide what you're going to replace. **Misleading**, **Superseded**, **Trivial**, **Irrelevant**, and **Elsewhere** books do not need to be replaced. If the book is **Ugly** but perhaps a popular one, look up the total number of check-outs, as well as the most recent check-out, then replace the book or find a newer edition **but only** if you think it's worthwhile to do so. If the book hasn't been checked out for 2 years, there's probably no point in getting a fresh copy.
9. Withdraw the items from TRAC
  - a. Create a record set by going to the File portion of the tool bar,
  - b. Select "New" and scroll to Record set, double click.
  - c. Select Item from the dropdown and click OK.
  - d. Name the record set with your library code and "withdrawn" in the title
  - e. Click the icon with the barcode and + sign.
  - f. Scan the barcodes of the withdrawn items in and let NLLS know by submitting a help desk ticket. NLLS staff can bulk change the items into the status of Withdrawn for you.
  - g. The items will get deleted on a periodic basis, but the statistics will remain and be accessible to you for board reports and annual report.
10. Make the barcode unusable by crossing it out with a black permanent marker.
11. Dispose of weeded books discretely. Moldy books should be thrown away, not put in a book sale or donated elsewhere. If you need to put books in a dumpster, make sure you do it at night, and out of sight of patrons wondering why you're throwing away "perfectly-good books". For some, weeding a book is akin to burning it. Be prepared to answer questions (you may use the front page of this handout as a guide if you like).
12. Two last points: first, weeding should leave your shelves about 1/3 empty. "White space" makes the shelves look tidy and leaves room for expansion and displaying hardcover books. Second, keep the books at the front of the shelf. You may want to use a 2x4 or empty VHS case to keep the books from sliding to the back. Show the books, don't hide them!

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## References & More Information

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SUNLINK Weed of the Month Archive  
<http://www.sunlink.ucf.edu/weed>

Weeding: Arizona Public Libraries Collection Development Training  
<http://www.lib.az.us/cdt/weeding.htm>

The CREW Method: Expanded Guidelines for Collection Evaluation and Weeding for Small and Medium-Sized Public Libraries  
<http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/ld/pubs/crew>  
Also in NLLS Professional Collection: 025.216 BOO

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