BY DEBORAH B. FORD

To Weed or Not to Weed?

Criteria to ensure that your nonfiction collection remains up to date

With a growing emphasis on nonfiction in the curriculum, it's time to examine what's sitting on school library shelves. Collection development is more than buying new books. Continuous pruning, updating, and evaluation is required if our libraries are to remain viable resources.

Discarding obsolete or damaged material—aka weeding—helps ensure that our collections remain appealing and current. The process also highlights areas where there is room for growth. An up-to-date collection, even if small, is better than one filled with outdated or worn material.

CREW Method

Devised by the Texas State Library and Archive Commission, the CREW (Continuous Review, Evaluation, & Weeding) Method* involves evaluating books by year of copyright, last use, and condition. All are factors that you should consider when weeding your collection.

In addition, MUSTIE is a list of criteria that may help you determine whether a particular title should stay or go.

M=misleading: factually inaccurate
U=ugly: beyond mending or rebinding
S=superseded by a new edition or a better book on the subject
T=trivial: of no discernible literary or scientific merit or entertainment value
I=irrelevant to the needs and interests of the library's community
E=elsewhere: nonessential material easily obtainable from another resource

- **Begin with collection analysis.** Most circulation systems and many vendors offer an analysis component. Evaluate the results by identifying your collection's weakest areas.
- **Target key Dewey ranges.** Areas such as technology, social problems, and the sciences (especially health and astronomy) become quickly outdated.
- **Weed the worst.** Start by discarding the oldest nonfiction material. Make room on your shelves by tossing books with outdated covers and yellow pages.
- **Use your senses.** Follow your nose. Books that smell musty or are moldy must be discarded to maintain the health of the entire collection. Look at a book's condition. Are the pages falling out? Time to toss.
- **Enlist your colleagues.** Host a weeding party and assign partners to sections that need attention. Give them bottom-line criteria: "books more than 20 years old must go," for example. Teams can discuss individual titles and put them aside for your final say.
- **Fill the gaps.** If you target key areas for weeding, be sure to create wish lists for those sections. Deleting a book about Pluto? Add a new one to your list.
- **Ask the experts.** National organizations—beyond the American Library Association—choose the best nonfiction titles in their subject areas. The National Council of Social Studies and the National Science Teachers Association, for example, both create annual Notable Trade Book lists for K–12. You might also ask your subject area specialists to help you weed and shop for replacement titles.
- **Judge for yourself.** The latest award-winning nonfiction titles incorporate many features that support the Common Core State Standards. Look for the same features in the books on your shelves. Is there a bibliography? A glossary? What are the writer's qualifications? What websites support the text? Are the graphics appealing and informative?

The same criteria applies to gifts. Ask yourself: Is this material shelf worthy? If not, discard, recycle, or add it to your book sale box.

In short, no matter the size of your budget, it's better to have no information than misinformation. Discard books that are no longer accurate. Delete worn materials. Free up space in your media collection for fresh, current resources. As the "guardian" of your library's collection, it's your responsibility to ensure that what you own is worth protecting.

*CREW: A Weeding Manual for Modern Libraries, copyright 2012 Texas State Library and Archives Commission, revised and updated by Jeanette Larson to include ebooks and other media, is licensed under Creative Commons (http://bit.ly/1RV2Myz).

Deborah B. Ford is director of library outreach for Junior Library Guild, which is owned by School Library Journal's *parent company, Media Source, Inc.*