
PUBLIC LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO DYNAMIC SHELVING

Dynamic Shelving is an innovative approach that transforms the way libraries organize and present their collections. This system of organization refers to a flexible and adaptive system where books and resources are organized based on their usage patterns, relevance, and user preferences rather than a fixed alphabetical or Dewey Decimal order. This dynamic approach recognizes the evolving nature of information needs and the various learning styles of library patrons. The benefits of Dynamic Shelving are vast, ranging from enhanced discoverability of resources to increased patron engagement and a more responsive library environment. This guide takes a look at the principles and strategies of Dynamic Shelving and also provides practical tips that will empower you to create a vibrant and user-centric library space.

What Is Dynamic Shelving?

Dynamic shelving means:

- Periodically replacing or refreshing shelf order, grouping, and visual cues (not just sticking to one fixed classification layout forever).
- Allowing temporary thematic clusters, genre blends, or “hot shelves” for trending topics or seasonal themes.
- Using face-outs, spotlight displays embedded in shelves, color coding, and flexible shelf markers within the stack.
- Letting circ data, patron feedback, and usage patterns influence shelf arrangement.

In short: your shelves become a living space, not just static rows of books.

Why Implement Dynamic Shelving?

Dynamic shelving can:

- **Boost discovery:** patrons find titles they wouldn't otherwise see
- **Increase circulation:** fresh groupings pique curiosity
- **Reflect local interest:** rearrange based on trends, community events, or staff picks

- **Make better use of space:** spotlight underused collections in high traffic zones
- **Empower staff creativity:** librarians can experiment with small, low-risk changes

Plus, it signals to patrons that the library is attentive, evolving, and responsive.

Benefits

Benefit	What It Means in Practice
Enhanced browsing	Patrons linger more when shelves feel inviting and varied
Faster discovery	Related items or new items physically near each other
Flexibility	Seasonal or topical groupings can rotate without upending full reclassification
Responsive layout	Use circulation data to nudge items toward visibility
Staff agency	Staff can propose micro-projects (e.g. “mystery picks”, “local voices shelf”)

How to Get Started: A Step-by-Step Approach

1. Assess your baseline

- Map current shelf layout/flow (“where do people walk, what shelves are visible?”).
- Collect circulation and hold data by segment (genres, subjects, formats).
- Survey staff and patrons: ask what’s hard to find or what they wish was highlighted.

2. Choose a pilot zone

- Pick one manageable area (like new nonfiction, local authors, YA).
- Use it as a lab: changes won’t be overwhelming.

3. Design a dynamic scheme

- Introduce “feature blocks” - small clusters of titles on a related topic.
- Use faceouts/front-facing covers to attract attention.
- Color or icon coding, e.g. colored shelf labels or dots for trending topics.
- Move related genres close (crossover shelves).
- Leave buffer space for rotating items.

4. **Rotate intentionally**

- Set a schedule (monthly, quarterly) for refreshing feature blocks.
- Use circulation and hold stats to decide what moves, stays, or gets retired.

5. **Document and communicate**

- Create internal maps or shelf plans so staff can follow the layout.
- Label shelves clearly (headers, short signs).
- Let patrons know (“Check our rotating picks here!”).

6. **Evaluate and adapt**

- Measure changes in circulation, patron feedback, and time spent in zone.
- Collect anecdotes from staff (“I saw someone pick up X because it was in the feature block”).
- Adjust. What works stays, what doesn’t goes.

Overcoming Common Challenges

- **Staff resistance:** Start small; involve staff in planning; highlight wins.
- **Disorientation for patrons:** Keep stable shelf anchors (classification order behind the feature zones).
- **Shelf chaos:** Use strong signage, defined blocks, and regular maintenance.
- **Data limitations:** Even basic circulation stats or anecdotal reports help. You don’t need perfect analytics to begin.
- **Physical infrastructure constraints:** Use mobile shelving units, tiered displays, or extra endcaps to expand flexibility.

Sample Ideas & Applications

- **“Hot Topic Corner”:** seasonal or current events titles in one shelf block
- **Staff Picks Rotation:** staff-curated books displayed within the stacks
- **Local Voices Table:** titles by local authors integrated into nearby subject shelves
- **Genre Mashups:** combine “mystery + sci-fi” or “history + biography” in a rotating block
- **Hidden Gems/Underread:** lesser circulated titles spotlighted for a month