
PUBLIC LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO WEEDING

Making Room for Collections That Serve Your Community

A strong library collection is a useful, current, attractive, and well-maintained collection that reflects the needs of the community. Weeding, which is the systematic process of removing materials that no longer belong in the collection, is an essential part of collection management. It creates space for new materials, improves the usefulness of the collection, and makes it easier for patrons to find what they need.

The Texas State Library and Archives Commission's CREW: A Weeding Manual for Libraries has long been a helpful resource for developing an ongoing weeding program. While TSLAC archived the manual in 2025 and no longer plans to update it, its basic approach remains useful: evaluate materials regularly rather than waiting until the collection becomes overcrowded or outdated.

Where to Start

Instead of trying to tackle the entire collection at once, choose one section or area and work through it systematically.

1. Start with Condition

Damaged materials are often the easiest place to begin. Consider removing items that are:

- Torn, stained, moldy, or otherwise damaged beyond repair
- Missing pages or important pieces
- Worn enough that they no longer look inviting
- Items that have already been repaired multiple times

Ask yourself: Would I be comfortable handing this item to a patron today?

2. Look at Use

Circulation can tell you a lot about your collection. If your system provides them, reports such as a Collection Age Report or Holdings Summary can help you identify sections that may need attention. You don't need a report to begin weeding, but circulation data can help you make informed decisions. An old book that circulates regularly may be more valuable to your community than a newer book that has never circulated.

3. Consider Age (but don't use it alone)

CREW provides suggested age ranges for evaluating different subject areas. These are review points, not automatic discard dates.

Collection Area	Suggested Review Range
000 - Computer science & Information	2-10 years
100 - Philosophy & Psychology	10 years
200 - Religion	2-10 years
300 - Social sciences	5-10 years
400 - Language	10 years
500 - Science	5-10 years
600 - Technology & Applied Sciences	5-10 years
700 - Arts & Recreation	5-15 years
800 - Literature	Flexible
900 - History & Geography	5-10 years
Biographies	Flexible; about 10 years for contemporary
Encyclopedias	About 5 years
Almanacs	About 3 years
Audiovisual materials	Review regularly

Some subjects become outdated much faster than others. Computer technology, medicine, science, geography, travel, and other rapidly changing topics deserve particularly close attention.

Before You Weed, Look Closer

Not every old or unused book should automatically leave the collection. Consider keeping materials that have:

- Strong local or community interest
- Lasting historical or cultural value
- Continued circulation
- Enduring literary or informational value
- Limited availability elsewhere
- Significance as an award winner, classic, or important work
- Value as a biographical or primary source
- A place in a specialized or unique collection

What About Rare or Valuable Books?

Before discarding an older book, take a moment to consider its edition, binding, condition, scarcity, provenance, and illustrations or other unique features. Be especially cautious with:

- First or early editions
- Signed copies, particularly verified signatures
- Books with notable previous ownership or provenance
- Fine or unusual bindings
- Complete sets
- Early children's books
- Elaborately illustrated or pop-up books
- Fine press or handmade books
- Older atlases, folios, maps, or color-plate books
- Materials with significant local or historical connections

A book that looks ordinary may have unusual value. If you're unsure, pause before discarding it and consult a qualified bookseller, archivist, special collections librarian, or other knowledgeable source. And remember: a book does not have to be monetarily valuable to deserve a place in your collection. Historical, cultural, local, or community significance can be just as important.

A Simple Weeding Test

CREW's well-known approach uses MUSTY as a weeding acronym; the specific criteria below are a simplified way to apply the same kind of thinking during a quick collection review.

As you evaluate an item, consider:

M: Misleading or inaccurate? Is the information outdated, incorrect, or potentially harmful?

U: Unused? Has it circulated recently? Does it still meet a demonstrated community need?

S: Superseded? Has a newer or better resource replaced it?

T: Trivial or unnecessary? Does it still contribute something meaningful to the collection?

Y: Your community? Does it have local, historical, cultural, or community significance?

Make Weeding Ongoing

Weeding works best when it becomes a regular part of collection management rather than an overwhelming annual project. Choose a section. Review it. Weed it. Record what you removed. Then move on. As you weed, pay attention to patterns. Are certain subjects consistently outdated? Are there gaps where new materials are needed? Are patrons repeatedly looking for materials you don't have?

Weeding and collection development work together. Every item you remove tells you something about what your collection needs next.

The goal is to build the best collection possible with the space and resources you have.