



Weeding Your Collection

by Ramona Kerby

Common excuses for not weeding:

- Books are sacred objects.
- I don't have enough time to weed.
- I can't decide when fiction is outdated.
- Someone may need this in the future.
- I hate to admit that I made a mistake.
- This is a good book. I remember when I bought it back in the twentieth century.

While these excuses sound a little silly, there isn't a library media specialist around who hasn't used one of them and believed that it was the truth.

If you have a collection of approximately 10,000 books, you can expect to delete some 100 titles yearly. These weeding decisions are made at the circulation desk and are easy to make. The books are worn out—bindings are broken, the books have been forgotten on the playground during a thunderstorm, or pups have chewed on the covers.

But what do you do with the books that have been sitting on your shelves for the last twenty years? If you're a pack rat, you let them sit there and collect dust. If you're a neat freak, you go through the shelves like a whirlwind and delete anything that looks dull. But you're probably somewhere in the middle. You know weeding is necessary, but you'd like some guidelines.

Weeding is an essential component to collection development. At least once a year, you must schedule time to weed your collection systematically.

Weeding Policy

First things first—your district needs a weeding policy that's been approved by the board. It doesn't need to be long; it just needs to be clear.

For example, it might say: "As school library materials become dated, damaged, or lost, the school library media specialist along with other appropriate staff members will determine: (a) if the item is still available and can be replaced, (b) if a newer item might be a better choice, (c) if the item is still needed by the community, or (d) if the Internet or interlibrary loan can provide a superior selection."

Already, this brief statement helps clarify your own thinking. You're not throwing books away; you're improving your collection. The principal supports it be-

cause it is board policy. And, by using the CREW method, you are following established guidelines.

The CREW Method: Continuous Review Evaluation and Weeding

In 1987, J. P. Segal described the CREW Method in a book published by ALA. In 1995, Belinda Boon expanded the guidelines. In nearly any article on weeding, you'll see these guidelines along with the author's slant. I add my own here. The sources are at the end of this article.

Why Should You CREW?

- You save space. Avoid cramming a shelf completely full. It not only makes things harder to find, but it's also tough on book bindings.

- You save time. Your students and teachers will be able to find materials easier.

- You make the collection more appealing. You'll find that your circulation increases after you remove unattractive books.

- You enhance your reputation. If your books are neat, in order, and attractive, students and teachers will sense that you are working hard to make your collection up-to-date and accurate.

- The CREW method provides a continuous check on what items need to be repaired or replaced.

- The CREW method provides constant feedback on the collection's strengths and weaknesses.

Who CREWs?

You do. Don't ask parent volunteers or student helpers to weed. Weeding is your responsibility. After all, you are the one who selects the materials. You know every student and teacher in the building; you know the curriculum; and since you read selection sources you know what kinds of materials are available. And you will be thinking of all these factors while you make your CREW decisions.

If possible, try to weed in groups of three—you and two other library media specialists from nearby schools. This way, you see other collections, and you may find titles that you want to purchase. Also, they'll tease you if you stubbornly want to hang on to an outdated title.

How to CREW

- Schedule weeding on your yearly calendar—but don't close the library media center or cancel classes!

- Print out circulation statistics for each section of

Ramona Kerby, Ph.D., is Coordinator of the School Library Media Graduate Program at Western Maryland College in Westminster, MD.

the library media center so that you can see what is a shelf-sitter.

- Gather these materials: a rolling chair so that you can sit at the shelves; a cart; a work apron; pencils; and slips of paper with the headings "bindery," "mend," "discard," and "replace." You'll put these slips inside the books you pull from the shelves.

- As you examine the shelves, pull some high-quality books that aren't circulating and prepare an attractive display to see if the students will check them out.

Whatever you do, don't keep the discarded books in plain sight. Box them immediately and don't keep them longer than a few days. Teachers have a way of discovering these piles and you'll have to do more explaining than you want. Have an assistant do the mending and check to see if replacement items are still in print.

Your library supervisor should have established the procedures on what to do with discards. The books may be recycled in some way, but this is not your responsibility at the local level.

Except for rare circumstances, do not give discarded books to teachers or students. The board has not given you the authority to give away or sell items purchased with school funds. And, these materials have a surprising way of reappearing in the library media center.

What to CREW

- Outdated and incorrect information, especially in these subjects: computers, community helpers, law, science, space, health, technology, geography, travel, and transportation;
- Materials not found in professional retrospective selection sources;
- Trivial subject matter;
- Mediocre writing style;
- Unneeded duplicates;
- Biased or sexist terminology;
- Materials not circulated in the last three to five years; and
- Materials of poor appearance—dirty, shabby, brittle or missing pages, poorly bound, ugly green or orange rebind covers, poor-quality pictures, small print.

Guidelines for Fiction

Picture Books—Retain books with outstanding stories and illustrations. Discard Golden books and current trends. While popular and cheap, they do not stand up to library use.

Juvenile Fiction—Replace worn editions of classics and award winners. Select books with library bindings and attractive covers. Avoid heavy bindings and dull covers—kids won't check them out. Multiple copies of formerly popular titles may no longer be needed.

Young Adult Fiction—Teens won't check out books that are ten years old or older. Replace classics with newer hardbacks or paperbacks with updated covers.

General Guidelines for Nonfiction

General Reference—Weed almanacs every year; only keep the current year. Weed all encyclopedia sets that are five

years or older. Older sets may go to classrooms, but remove them from the building after eight years. Rotate the purchase of different encyclopedias so that one set is always new and no set is older than five years.

000s—Computer books change rapidly, and are usually outdated in three years. Consider buying only paperback titles.

100s—Check for dated illustrations.

200s—Make sure you've got all viewpoints. Something up-to-date is needed on every religion of the community and the six major international religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Taoism.

300s—As long as custom and folklore look okay, there is no need to weed them. Discard all career materials after five years. See that controversial issues are represented fairly.

400s—Discard old dictionaries that don't have new terms in them.

500s—Evaluate all science books older than five years. Pay particular attention to physics, astronomy, environmental issues, dinosaurs, and astronomy. Check books on atoms every two years. Botany doesn't change too often. Keep basic books of significant historical or literary value, such as Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

600s—Medicine, television, space exploration, and cars date rapidly. Popular subjects, such as pets and crafts, may need replacing because of their condition.

700s—Some may be irreplaceable so hang on to them. Consider replacing hobbies. Football books wear out and get dated. Quantity, not quality, is the key criteria for this section.

800s—These don't get dated. They just wear out.

900s—Aim to purchase books on countries on a rotating basis so that no title is older than five years.

CREW Guidelines for Weeding Nonfiction: The MUSTIE Formula

The MUSTIE formula is: X/Y/MUSTIE

X = the book's last copyright date

Y = the maximum time without usage. You decide this. Should the item have last been checked out three years ago, five years ago, eight years ago?

M = Misleading (inaccurate) information

U = Ugly

S = Superseded

T = Trivial

I = Irrelevant

E = Elsewhere the material may be obtained expeditiously

As an example, the formula 10/5/MUSTIE reads this way: Consider this item for discard when its latest copyright is more than ten years old; and/or when its last circulation was more than five years ago; and/or when it possesses one or more of the MUSTIE factors.

Generally speaking, the average age of your entire

—Continued

collection should not be older than twelve years. But remember, this is an average. Certain items must be extremely current, while other items can be older and still be accurate.

The chart below gives you some additional insight on how to judge materials in specific Dewey numbers. Professional judgment is always paramount to formulas, but the following MUSTIE formulas should help you with your decisions.

The MUSTIE Formula for Specific Dewey Numbers
(based on Belinda Boon's work)

| Dewey# | Formula | Explanation |
|---------|-------------|--|
| 133 | 15/3/MUSTIE | PARANORMAL—Keep until worn. Replace lost titles from this section frequently. |
| 150 | 10/3/MUSTIE | PSYCHOLOGY—Purchase new and popular topics, especially self-help. |
| 510 | 10/3/MUSTIE | MATHEMATICS—Replace older materials on algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and calculus with revised editions. Discard most titles covering slide rules and the “new math” of the 1960s. |
| 550 | X/3/MUSTIE | EARTH SCIENCE—Keep geology books indefinitely. Keep field guides on fossils, gems, and rocks up to twenty years if in good condition. Replace materials when new theories occur, e.g., new items on continental drift and tectonics. |
| 570 | 10/3/MUSTIE | LIFE SCIENCES |
| 580 | 10/3/MUSTIE | BOTANICAL SCIENCES |
| 610 | X/3/MUSTIE | ANATOMY and PHYSIOLOGY do not change rapidly. |
| 610 | 2/X/MUSTIE | MEDICINE—Materials on fast changing fields of research such as AIDS, genetics, cancer, and infertility. |
| 635 | 10/3/MUSTIE | GARDENING—General gardening books can be useful up to twenty years. |
| 635 | 5/3/MUSTIE | PLANTS—Book about propagation of plants and flowers are outdated after ten years. |
| 640 | 5/3/MUSTIE | HOME ECONOMICS—Be strict with old sewing and grooming as styles change rapidly. Keep cookbooks. |
| 790 | 10/3/MUSTIE | RECREATION—Discard and replace as rules and interests change. |
| 910 | 5/3/MUSTIE | GEOGRAPHY and TRAVEL |
| B or 92 | X/3/MUSTIE | BIOGRAPHY—Replace books of poor quality with better ones. Discard biographies of stars no longer popular. |

How Many Items Should You Weed Every Year?

If you inherit a twenty-year-old collection, steel yourself and do some heavy weeding over a course of two to three years. Expect to discard several thousand books.

The most I ever discarded in one year was 700 titles. On the average, I delete 300-400 books yearly.

When Should You Weed What?

Once your library media center is in good shape—meaning that the average collection age is no older than twelve years—here's a good weeding schedule to follow for the next decade.

| Year Ending in: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 0 |
|-----------------|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Class | Interval | | | | | | | | | |
| 000 | 5 years | | | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| 100 | 5 years | | | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| 200 | 5 years | | | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| 300 | 3 years | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| 400 | 5 years | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 500 | 2 years | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 600 | 2 years | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 700 | 5 years | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | |
| 800 | 5 years | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | |
| 900 | 3 years | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| 92 | 3 years | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | |
| E, F, & SC | 5 years | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | |

One Last Thing to Think about as You CREW

As you sit in front of your shelves deciding what to discard, replace, or keep, you might be wondering how many books should be in each section.

Here's one more chart. This isn't a CREW guideline—it's from Betty Morris in her text on school library administration and has been around a long time.

Percent of Book Collection Per Dewey Classification

| | K-6 | 7-12 |
|---------------------|-------|-------|
| 000s Generalities | 2-5 | 6-8 |
| 100s Philosophy | .5 | 1-2 |
| 200s Religion | 1-2 | 1-2 |
| 300s Social Science | 5-10 | 10-15 |
| 400s Language | .5 | 2-5 |
| 500s Science | 10 | 5-10 |
| 600s Technology | 10 | 5-10 |
| 700s Fine Arts | 5 | 5-10 |
| 800s Technology | 5 | 5-10 |
| 900s History | 20 | 20 |
| F Fiction | 20 | 20-25 |
| E Easy Fiction | 20-25 | — |

In Closing

By focusing on what CREW stands for—Continuous Review Evaluation and Weeding, You'll be able to keep things in perspective. You're not throwing away books; you're evaluating, trying to keep the collection as accurate as possible.

—Continued on page 31

Weeding... —From page 24

Young students have trouble discriminating between correct and misleading information. It's important to keep old materials in museums, archives, and university libraries, but not in school library media centers, which should never be historical collections.

Sources:

Books

Morris, Betty. *Administering the School Library Media Center*. 3rd ed. New Providence, NJ: Bowker, 1992.

Van Orden, Phyllis J. *The Collection Program in Schools*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1995.

Internet

Collection Development Training (CDT) for Arizona Public Libraries Arizona State Library. <http://www.dlapr.lib.az.us/cdt/index.htm>

Designed for small and rural librarians new to collection development, this site clearly defines all aspects, including a section on weeding. Last updated in 1996, some links no longer work.

The CREW Method: Expanded Guidelines for Collection Evaluation and Weeding for Small and Medium-Sized Public Libraries. Belinda Boon, Texas State Library, 1995. http://www.shsu.edu/%7EElis_fwh/crew.html

State of Iowa: Department of Education: Weeding the Library Media Center Collection, 1994. <http://www.iema-ia.org/IEMA209.html>

Offers advice and provides a list of resources on weeding.

Sunlink: The Weed of the Mouth Website. <http://www.sunlink.ucf.edu/weed/>

Maintained by the librarians at Florida's K-12 Library Union Database, the site's purpose is to help school library media specialists weed their collections a little at a time. SUNLINK provides guidelines and suggestions on: (a) how to get started; (b) the rationale for weeding a topic area, criteria to consider, and titles to consider for weeding; and (c) titles to consider when replacing outdated materials.