

**Cobb County Public Library
Selection Policy**

Approved: June 2011, November 2016, November 2018, February 22, 2021

PURPOSE OF POLICY

Apply the Library's Goals to Collection Development

Due to space and budget limitations, hard decisions must be made daily on what materials to put into and retain in the collection. Staff working closely with the process need guidance to assist them in developing a collection that meets the goals of the Library Board and the community.

Guide the Expenditure of Resources

There are many worthy materials and resources competing for library funding, far more than the library is able to add. Collection development policy will assist staff in determining the best use of funding to procure quality materials and resources to meet the Library's goals and fulfill the wants and needs of our patrons.

Delegate Responsibility for Selection and Maintenance

Collection development is one of the most important shared responsibilities of library staff. This policy delegates collection development activities to professional librarians and to informed front-line staff that regularly interact with the public. Organized through the management of the Library Director and the Division Director of Technical Operations, this team effort results in a diverse and comprehensive library collection that remains responsive to our patrons and the wider community.

SELECTION CONSIDERATIONS

Selection Philosophy

The Cobb County Public Library follows a policy of selectivity based on the goals of the library system, the roles of the individual libraries, the scopes of their collections, and knowledge of community needs and interests as demonstrated in library use. The Library cannot acquire, accept, or retain unlimited book and non-book materials. The importance of wise selection has grown in proportion to the increase in the volume of available materials and the cost of acquiring, cataloging, housing and maintaining them. The Library's funding level necessitates a basic test for selection: is the material of proven or potential interest to the people served. Emphasis is placed on those items likely to be utilized by the greatest number of people, rather than on very specialized items or those made redundant by other resources. Books have always been, and will continue to be, essential to library services. But as more information becomes available in other formats, the Library must also allocate funds to integrate these into its services.

The Library collects materials for use by people of varying age groups, educational levels, ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, and lifestyles. The Library strives to meet demand for high interest materials in a variety of formats and attempts to provide a wide range of subjects. The primary collection is of English language materials; however, there is a growing need for other languages as well. Collections of materials in other languages are acquired when feasible. The Library recognizes its responsibility in promoting literacy, and as such places a high priority on the development of current and attractive collections of high quality content for children and young adults. English-as-another-Language and literacy collections designed for individual use are maintained.

We strive to balance selection based on material quality and customer demand in order to provide a collection that is diverse and responsive to the needs of our whole community. Emphasis is placed on bestsellers and popular reading, as influenced by popular culture, with requests from library users given high priority. The Library strives to collect the best of current literature recommended by professional sources for public library collections.

The Library recognizes and adheres to the principle of Intellectual Freedom as embodied in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. The collection of materials is designed to fulfill the ideal of a marketplace of ideas. Librarians are responsible for selecting materials that ensure a wide variety of viewpoints are represented and that materials are not added or removed from the collection for partisan or doctrinal reasons. Items are not excluded from the Library because of the race, nationality or social, political or religious views, or personal affiliations of the author. Items are not excluded because they contain language, illustrations, or ideas offensive to some persons. The Library does not affix prejudicial labels to items or segregate materials some people might find objectionable. Institutional self-censorship diminishes the credibility of the library in the community and restricts access for all library users.

The selection and development of library resources should not be diluted because of minors having access to all library resources. The responsibility for choosing materials lies with the individual adult or the parent or guardian of minors. Librarians may offer guidance to minors in selecting materials; nevertheless, it is the sole responsibility of parents or legal guardians to monitor children's use of all library resources. The sole exception is that according to the Federal Children's Internet Protection Act, minors under 17 have only filtered access to the Internet. Materials one chooses for reading, listening or viewing is a private matter and the *Official Code of Georgia Annotated* 24-9-46 (Appendix II) protects the confidentiality of all circulation records.

The Library subscribes to the *Library Bill of Rights* (Appendix III) and the *Freedom to Read* statements (Appendix IV.)

Public feedback regarding collections and suggestions for new materials are welcome, as these help staff to gauge the effectiveness of their selections and to identify community interests. The staff considers all requests for purchase, evaluating them according to selection criteria, usefulness to the collection and the community, and budget considerations.

Floating Collection

Materials 'float' freely among system libraries rather than being 'owned' by a specific location. When a patron returns a circulating item, it is shelved at the location where it was returned instead of being sent back to the location from which it was checked out. Upon check-in, the location is automatically updated

in the library catalog to show where it now resides. Only materials patrons have on request will pass through the delivery and be forwarded appropriately.

To libraries, floating has many benefits. They will be able to respond faster to public demand, provide more equitable access to materials, stretch the materials budget, reduce ergonomic strain on staff, and dramatically cut the volume of delivery among libraries.

Responsibility for Selection

The Board of Trustees of the Cobb County Library System determines the Collection Development Policy for the Library system. The responsibility for administering this policy rests with the Director of the Library and the Division Director of Technical Operations and Collection Development Services.

Under the Division Director, the Collection Development Librarian Coordinates Selection Teams of adult and youth services librarians who specialize in particular subject or genre areas of the collection. The Selection Teams are responsible for coordinating selection activities within their Dewey/Genre Ranges and promoting consistency in the development and maintenance of all collections. Using information such as popular trends, input from public service librarians and circulation statistics, the Selection Teams evaluate use of collections and identify areas needing development. They review selection recommendations from the staff and the public, monitor demand for materials in order to provide for timely acquisition, and make recommendations regarding retention and replacement of materials. The authority and responsibilities of the Head of Technical Operations/Collection Development Librarian/Head of Youth and Media Services consists of the following:

- Authority to approve or disapprove selection recommendations from the selection librarians, other staff, and the public.
- Authority to make final decisions on the withdrawal of circulating materials, the rebinding of books, repackaging of audiovisual materials, replacement orders, and the addition of gifts to the cataloged circulating collection.
- Authority to review various collections in the Library, evaluate the contents, and submit written reports to the Library Director.
- Authority to initiate any weeding (removing of materials) projects as a result of collection evaluations.

Selection Criteria

Selection is a discerning and interpretive process, involving a general knowledge of the subject and its important literature, a familiarity with the materials in the collection, an awareness of the bibliographies of the subject, and recognition of the needs of the community. Librarians apply their judgment and experience in selecting materials according to specific criteria. Not all criteria apply to each item:

- Works of imagination are judged by different standards than are works of information and opinion.

- Works that present an aspect of life honestly are not necessarily excluded because of frankness of expression.
- Materials are judged as whole rather than on isolated passages.
- Accuracy and currency of information is a primary criterion for selection of nonfiction materials, thus emphasis is placed on collecting recent titles and editions.
- Positive reviews and professional recommendations for collections of medium to large public libraries are important factors.
- In order to manage resources in a responsible and cost effective manner, price, durability of format, extent of coverage of subject matter, redundancy, and licensing or copyright restrictions are important considerations.

Selectors should choose materials that will build a well-rounded collection which includes all viewpoints and opinions and which will meet patron needs.

Minors

Cobb County Public Library recognizes the role of the parent or legal guardian in supervising the borrowing choices made by a minor child. The selection and development of library resources should not be restricted by the possibility of minors having access to all library resources. The responsibility for choosing materials lies with the individual adult or the parent or guardian of minors. Librarians may offer guidance to minors in selecting materials; nevertheless, it is the sole responsibility of parents or legal guardians to monitor their children's use of all library resources. The sole exception is that according to the Federal Children's Internet Protection Act, minors under 17 have only filtered access to the Internet. Materials one chooses for reading, listening or viewing is a private matter and the Official Code of Georgia Annotated 24-9-46 protects the confidentiality of all circulation records.

Selection Tools

Selection tools are objective sources of information that provide an assessment of the material in question regarding quality, authority, timeliness, format, reading level and other criteria that determine suitability for public library collections. These tools include but are not limited to library professional review sources, including Library Journal, School Library Journal, Booklist, Choice, Voya, Horn Book and Publisher's Weekly. Frequently, nationally recognized newspapers, periodicals, and other recognized media sources are consulted. Some vendors have a reputation of providing quality lists of titles suitable for public libraries. Recommended reading lists from professional or educational organizations may be consulted. Catalogs of publishers recognized for producing high quality materials in specialty areas may also be utilized.

More specialized review sources may be mentioned in their respective collection development profiles.

Scope

The scope of the Cobb County Public Library collection refers to the formats offered, the treatment, and the level of difficulty. Materials selected for the Library collection are intended to meet the cultural, informational, educational, and recreational needs of the residents of Cobb County.

The collection is intended to provide only supplemental materials for individuals pursuing educational programs and to provide a beginning for those involved in independent study or research. Materials are primarily evaluated for their interest and value to the community as a whole, and only secondarily for

their usefulness in meeting demand from area students. The Library does not attempt to acquire materials that duplicate holdings in school media centers or college, technical school or special libraries in the community. Textbooks are included when they are the best source available on a subject, when useful to those doing independent study, or when they give a valuable overview of a subject, but they are not added in support of a specific curriculum.

The collection is intended to offer a choice of format, treatment, and level of difficulty so that most individual library needs can be met and service given to individuals of all ages, within current budget parameters and constraints. Materials intended for professionals in a field may be bought when general introductory and intermediate level materials already exist in the collection and when demand warrants, providing continuity in development of a popular subject. Highly specialized materials are not generally purchased.

The collection is not archival, and is reviewed and revised on an on-going basis to meet contemporary needs. Except for the Georgia Room, the Library does not maintain items for historical purposes. As a rule, rare books are not purchased or accepted, and little effort is made to obtain out-of-print titles. Self-published works are not collected, except in rare cases of local or genealogical interest. Newsletters, school yearbooks, and minutes or scrapbooks of civic or cultural groups cannot be accommodated. Documents legally required to be available for public viewing are accepted.

The Library does not purchase abridgements, adaptations, or condensations, except in the case of certain quality abridgements prepared by the authors of the original works, adaptations that have a high literary reputation and those condensations prepared by writers of scholarly or literary note. Exceptions are also made in the case of recorded books. Teachers' editions and students' editions of works are not collected.

Formats

Materials are purchased in the most appropriate format for Library use. Books are generally purchased in hardcover editions because of their durability. Paperbacks may be purchased as added copies of popular titles to meet patron demand or if it is the only available edition of a high demand title. Library editions are purchased for heavily used titles in the Youth Services Department because of their durability.

The Library recognizes the value of non-print formats in the collection as legitimate educational and recreational resources for the community it serves. Print, electronic, and audiovisual materials are collected. The Library monitors the development of new formats, and within budgetary and technical limitations, adds these to the collection.

All new formats, electronic or otherwise, will be evaluated based on appropriateness to the Library's goals and appropriateness for a library collection. This includes but is not limited to:

- Licensing for multiple users
- Physical durability
- Ease of use
- Ease of access
- Cost of starting and maintaining a collection
- Long range outlook for the format
- Support required to maintain the format

DESCRIPTION OF COLLECTIONS

Adult Fiction

This collection consists of classics of literature, popular best sellers, critically acclaimed first time authors' works and general fiction, including genres (mysteries, romances, westerns, etc.) The primary purpose of the Adult Fiction is to meet the heavy demand of adult recreational readers for popular, new titles. Current bestsellers will be purchased in multiple copies to meet demand as funds allow. This collection is designed for ages 17 and above. Selected fiction is added to meet the needs of those patrons with scholarly interest. Classic and popular authors from other countries are included in English translation when demand dictates. In addition to recreational reading, the needs of the student population in area public, private, and adult educational institutions influence selection.

Adult Nonfiction

The library acquires materials of both permanent and current interest in a wide variety of subjects, based upon the merits of a work in relation to the needs, interests, and demands of the community. Each item is evaluated in its entirety and not on the basis of a particular section. The Adult Nonfiction consists of materials meant to meet the needs of the community's diverse informational, educational, and recreational pursuits. This collection is designed for ages 17 and above. Works in nonfiction are selected in a variety of formats as funds allow. Textbooks in general are not selected unless they provide the best overall introduction to a subject or are the only available print source on a subject.

An effort is made to meet as much of the demand of local school curriculum as possible. The library is not able and does not attempt to purchase copies of all titles from students' reading lists.

Adult Reference

Reference materials, whether in print or computer-based formats, are those designed by the arrangement and treatment of their subject matter to be consulted for definite items of information rather than to be read consecutively. General works or works that broadly cover a subject area are collected. Books in the reference area are designed to be used in the library.

Materials suitable for use by upper elementary students through undergraduate college level are purchased for the general subject areas such as history, language, science, sociology, psychology and literature. Some titles found in the reference collection are duplicated in the circulating collection where demand warrants and funds allow.

The reference collection may also serve as a depository of government or public documents when so requested by a government agency. Ephemeral notices for public meetings or actions and their supporting documentation will be maintained at the Switzer Library until the meeting has occurred or the comment period for the action has passed.

Periodicals

Periodicals are publications issued and received on a regular basis in print, microfilm, or electronic format. The periodical collection is a well-balanced collection of magazines, newspapers, and newsletters covering a broad range of subjects to serve the informational, educational, and recreational needs of the

community. Foreign language and culture-based periodicals are included to serve the Library's diverse population.

The retention of periodicals is determined by demand, availability of indexing, physical durability of the magazine or newspaper, space, and the continuing usefulness of the content. Availability of a full-text in a subscription database will influence retention decisions.

Juvenile and Young Adult Collections

The Juvenile Collection includes materials appropriate for children birth through sixth grade and their adult caregivers.

The Young Adult Collection consists of fiction and non-fiction materials for seventh grade through twelfth grade.

Because of the varying backgrounds and abilities of children and young adults, a wide range of sophistication and reading levels must be covered. In hopes of encouraging the young person's critical ability through reading, and in support of the child's exploration of the world of ideas and information, a wide variation in themes, perspective, viewpoints, and formats is offered. Items in these collections will attempt to achieve a reasonable balance between current popular fiction, classics and award winning, critically acclaimed material. Titles in the collections will be selected based on their probable appeal to young people, on their literary merit as indicated in reviews, and on appropriateness of their content for this age group. Generally, only titles receiving favorable reviews are considered, however, books may be added because of popular demand. While the public library collection is not designed to support the school curriculum, care is taken to add materials that are in high demand. However, not all titles on reading lists can be supplied. A limited number of duplicate copies of titles that are often required reading for students can be purchased. Final responsibility for a young person's selection of library materials shall rest with the parent or guardian, as the Library cannot serve *in loco parentis*.

Professional Collection

The Professional Collection of the Cobb county Library System was established many years ago to assist library staff to keep abreast of developments in their fields. Materials for the collection are chosen in a variety of formats in the subject areas of Library and Information Science and related areas. Cobb County Public Library System facilitates access to information which enables CCPLS employees to enhance their knowledge and skills to deliver quality library services.

Media Collections

The Cobb County Public Library system collects materials in multiple media formats for patrons of all ages. The same breakdown in levels used for print materials (Adult, Young Adult, and Juvenile) is also used for media. Selection of media follows the same criteria for print, with an emphasis on the recreational needs of Cobb County. The Library System actively collects the following media formats:

- Audiobooks on Compact Disc
- Downloadable Audiobooks
- Audiobooks on Playaways
- DVD videos

Music CDs
Downloadable eBooks and eAudiobooks

Discontinued or low interest media formats will be maintained by the Library System as long as it is deemed appropriate. New media formats will be considered within current budget parameters and constraints.

Electronic Resources

The availability of online electronic resources greatly enhances the Cobb County Public Library System's ability to meet the needs of the residents of Cobb County. Staff evaluation will be a primary part of the selection process for electronic resources. Availability of access for patrons is also important with a preference for unlimited remote access. When cost effective, electronic resources will be used to replace existing print reference collections. Digital formats will be purchased to mainly meet the recreational needs of Cobb County residents. Downloadable materials will be purchased in industry standard formats. New formats will be considered within current budget constraints.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

GEORGIA ROOM

Responsibility for Selection

Under the Switzer Library Manager, the Georgia Room Head Librarian is responsible for selecting materials for the Georgia Room collection.

Scope

The Georgia Room, located at the Switzer Library, is a genealogical and historical collection. The purpose of the Georgia Room is to develop and maintain an in-depth collection of materials having lasting historical and genealogical value to support the informational, educational and research needs of its users which consist of students, historians, genealogists and Cobb citizens as well as visitors.

The Georgia Room collection serves the needs of a broad spectrum of users with diverse informational and educational pursuits. The collection is a reference collection and does not circulate.

Books by local authors, about subjects other than local history will be added to the collection selectively to preserve a copy of their work. The greatest consideration is given to Cobb County authors. As a practical definition, Cobb County or Georgia authors are those who have lived in the county or state for a significant period of time. No attempt will be made to form a collection of works by southeastern authors as such. The collection will contain some materials of current usefulness such as Georgia travel guides, Georgia customs and family life, as well as books about native plants or animals.

Criteria

Material concerning Cobb County and Georgia will be of primary importance, with an emphasis on genealogical and historical materials relating to the southeastern United States. Geographic and subject coverage of these materials reflect and support the migration patterns of movement to and from Georgia. The collection also includes national genealogical and historical resources including selected Northern sources. Historical materials selected reflect diverse points of view. These materials include church histories, state and county histories, personal narratives, diaries and letters or any other accounts of events which have affected the history of the United States including records documenting United States military involvement since the Revolutionary War with a concentration on the Civil War.

Materials requested by patrons and that relate to the collection are considered for possible purchase. The Georgia Room does not purchase individual family histories, but does accept them as donations.

Formats

Most of the materials in the Georgia Room collection are in book form. Other formats include maps, photographs, microforms, clippings, unbound papers and documents. The collection does not include realia (three-dimensional, real life objects such as textiles, specimens, badges, emblems, insignia, etc.)

FOREIGN LANGUAGE

The Library System currently maintains collections in languages such as Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, and Korean. The collections include juvenile and adult materials. Other languages may be considered if interest, budget, and space warrant and when acquisition and cataloging support are available.

LITERACY

The Library recognizes its role in promoting literacy in the community. Frequently, in partnership with community literacy agencies, the Library targets services to people learning English through outreach programming in an attempt to connect people with resources and develop familiarity with library use. ESOL and literacy collections are maintained by the Library System. Branches may house small collections based on the needs of the community they serve.

GIFTS AND DONATIONS

Donations of Materials

The Library welcomes all gifts and donations with the understanding that they will be considered for addition to the collection in accordance with the Materials Selection Policy. All gifts and donations become the property of Cobb County Public Library and will not be returned to the donor. The Library reserves the right to sell or otherwise dispose of gift materials not added to the collection. The Library also reserves the right to withdraw donated materials from the collection when they are no longer appropriate under the collection policy.

Donations are used as additional copies when demand warrants the cost of processing and housing them. Rarely is a single copy of any title added to the collection. The Library cannot give appraisals of gifts and donations for tax purposes.

Monetary Donations

Monetary donations to the library are greatly appreciated. The Library will use monetary gifts for the purpose for which they were given in accordance with the Materials Selection Policy. The Collection Development Librarian will select appropriate materials when no specific purpose is stated. If a donation is made by an individual, group, foundation or business, the library will keep account of that donation and make every effort to expend the money as indicated by the donor. Cash donations to the library can be made at any library branch.

WEEDING POLICY

Weeding (also known as deselection) is an essential element of collection development that ensures the library's materials are useful and accessible. Every library's collection is limited by the space available to house it, and collections should change over time to reflect changes in the community, society-at-large, and the library's goals. Weeding is a periodic or continual evaluation of resources intended to remove items that are no longer useful from the collection. It is the policy of the Cobb County Public Library System that weeding is done on a continuous basis throughout the year.

INTERLIBRARY LOAN

Interlibrary Loan (ILL) is not a substitute for collection development but is meant to expand the range of materials available to library users without needlessly duplicating the resources of other libraries. ILL may not be used for any title that is ~~on order~~ already available in the Cobb County Public Library or for any title that is currently on order for purchase.

ILL requests for titles that have been requested at least three times in a year are considered for purchase. Extra consideration is given to requests for titles published within the last six months, because CCPLS ILL policy prohibits requests for materials published within 12 months of the request.

Titles requested by patrons and considered for purchase but which do not fit the scope of the collection, are too old, out-of-date, or out-of-print are sent back to the patron with a recommendation to try ILL.

MULTIPLE COPIES

CCPLS will buy multiple copies of titles that have high patron demand. In subject areas where patron demand is extremely high, the Library will also buy additional copies. Number of copies purchased is based on patron demand, anticipated demand, and circulation of similar titles already in the system.

STANDING ORDERS

Titles on standing order can include reference books, travel books, college guides, test review books, large print, and other annual series. Keeping the latest edition of materials on standing order in the collection is essential. Selected juvenile series and adult bestsellers are also on standing order.

The standing order and automatic continuation titles will be evaluated annually by the Division Director of Branch Services, Head of Reference, and Collection Development Librarian. Titles may be cancelled, new titles added, or the number of copies adjusted to accommodate patron interest and demand.

RECONSIDERATION OF LIBRARY MATERIALS

The Library recognizes and adheres to the principle of Intellectual Freedom as embodied in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. The collection of materials is designed to fulfill the ideal of a marketplace of ideas. Although librarians need not endorse every idea or presentation contained in the materials they make available, they have responsibility for selecting materials to ensure that a wide variety of viewpoints are represented and that materials are not added or removed from the collection for partisan or doctrinal reasons. Items are not excluded from the Library because of the race, nationality or social, political or religious views, or personal affiliations of the author. Items are not excluded because they contain language, illustrations, or ideas offensive to some persons. The Library does not affix prejudicial labels to items or segregate materials some people might find objectionable, nor are materials sequestered except to protect them from theft. Institutional self-censorship diminishes the credibility of the library in the community, and restricts access for all library users.

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Public feedback regarding collections and suggestions for new materials are welcome, as these help staff to gauge the effectiveness of their selections and to identify community interests. The Library welcomes patron feedback on specific materials but will be governed by this Materials Selection Policy in making additions to or deleting materials from the collection.

Please complete and sign the Request to Reconsider Library Materials (Appendix I).

Upon receipt, the request will be forwarded to the Collection Development Librarian who will share it and the item in question to the appropriate Selection Team Leader as well as other materials selectors. The Team Leader will review the request and the material in question. He/she will respond to the Collection Development Librarian within a given time frame. Their recommendations will be forwarded to the Library Director who will make a decision to remove or retain the material. The Director's decision will then be communicated to you in writing at the earliest possible date.

If you are dissatisfied with this decision, you may appeal for a hearing before the Board of Trustees by making a written request to the President of the Board. The Board of Trustees reserves the right to limit

the length of presentation and number of speakers at the hearing. The Board will determine whether the request for reconsideration has been handled in accordance with stated policies and procedures of the Cobb County Public Library. On the basis of this determination, the Board may vote to uphold or override the decision of the Director.

Appendix I
Cobb County Public Library
Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials

Request initiated by (your name): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Title: _____

Author: _____ Publisher: _____

This is a: ___ book ___ magazine ___ recording ___ video ___ other: _____

Do you represent:

___ yourself

___ an organization (name): _____

___ other group (name): _____

1. To what in the work do you object (please be specific; cite page numbers):

2. Did you read/view/listen to the entire work? ___ yes ___ no

If not, which parts have you read/viewed/listened to?

3. What do you feel might be the result of reading/viewing/listening to this work?

4. For what age group would you recommend this work?

5. What do you believe is the theme of this work?

6. Have you read any reviews of this work?

7. What would you like the Library to do about this work?

8. What work would you recommend in place of this material?

Signature _____ Date _____

Branch: _____ Staff: _____

Please return to nearest Cobb County Public Library branch.

O.C.G.A. § 24-9-46

GEORGIA CODE
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*** Current Through the 2010 Regular Session ***
*** Annotations Current Through March 14, 2011 ***

TITLE 24. EVIDENCE
CHAPTER 9. WITNESSES GENERALLY
ARTICLE 2. PRIVILEGE
PART 2. MEDICAL INFORMATION

O.C.G.A. § 24-9-46 (2011)

§ 24-9-46. Confidential nature of certain library records

(a) Circulation and similar records of a library which identify the user of library materials shall not be public records but shall be confidential and may not be disclosed except:

- (1) To members of the library staff in the ordinary course of business;
- (2) Upon written consent of the user of the library materials or the user's parents or guardian if the user is a minor or ward; or
- (3) Upon appropriate court order or subpoena.

THE LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

- “ I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
- II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
- III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
- IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
- V. A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
- VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

Adopted June 19, 1939.

Amended October 14, 1944; June 18, 1948; February 2, 1961; June 27, 1967; and January 23, 1980; inclusion of “age” reaffirmed January 23, 1996 by the ALA Council.

THE FREEDOM TO READ STATEMENT

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continuously under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove or limit access to reading materials, to censor content in schools, to label "controversial" views, to distribute lists of "objectionable" books or authors, and to purge libraries. These actions apparently rise from a view that our national tradition of free expression is no longer valid; that censorship and suppression are needed to avoid the subversion of politics and the corruption of morals. We, as citizens devoted to reading and as librarians and publishers responsible for disseminating ideas, wish to assert the public interest in the preservation of the freedom to read.

Most attempts at suppression rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of democracy: that the ordinary citizen, by exercising critical judgment, will accept the good and reject the bad. The censors, public and private, assume that they should determine what is good and what is bad for their fellow citizens.

We trust Americans to recognize propaganda and misinformation, and to make their own decisions about what they read and believe. We do not believe they need the help of censors to assist them in this task. We do not believe they are prepared to sacrifice their heritage of a free press in order to be "protected" against what others think may be bad for them. We believe they still favor free enterprise in ideas and expression.

These efforts at suppression are related to a larger pattern of pressures being brought against education, the press, art and images, films, broadcast media, and the Internet. The problem is not only one of actual censorship. The shadow of fear cast by these pressures leads, we suspect, to an even larger voluntary curtailment of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy. Such pressure toward conformity is perhaps natural to a time of accelerated change. And yet suppression is never more dangerous than in such a time of social tension. Freedom has given the United States the elasticity to endure strain. Freedom keeps open the path of novel and creative solutions, and enables change to come by choice. Every silencing of a heresy, every enforcement of an orthodoxy, diminishes the toughness and resilience of our society and leaves it the less able to deal with controversy and difference. Now as always in our history, reading is among our greatest freedoms. The freedom to read and write is almost the only means for making generally available ideas or manners of expression that can initially command only a small audience. The written word is the natural medium for the new idea and the untried voice from which come the original contributions to social growth. It is essential to the extended discussion that serious thought requires, and to the accumulation of knowledge and ideas into organized collections. We believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. We believe that these pressures toward conformity present the danger of limiting the range and variety of inquiry and expression on which our democracy and our culture depend. We believe that every American community must jealously guard the freedom to publish and to circulate, in order to preserve its own freedom to read. We believe that publishers and librarians have a profound responsibility to give validity to that freedom to read by making it possible for the readers to choose freely from a variety of offerings. The freedom to read is guaranteed by the Constitution. Those with faith in free people will stand firm on

these constitutional guarantees of essential rights and will exercise the responsibilities that accompany these rights.

We therefore affirm these propositions:

1. It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those that are unorthodox or unpopular with the majority.

Creative thought is by definition new, and what is new is different. The bearer of every new thought is a rebel until that idea is refined and tested. Totalitarian systems attempt to maintain themselves in power by the ruthless suppression of any concept that challenges the established orthodoxy. The power of a democratic system to adapt to change is vastly strengthened by the freedom of its citizens to choose widely from among conflicting opinions offered freely to them. To stifle every nonconformist idea at birth would mark the end of the democratic process. Furthermore, only through the constant activity of weighing and selecting can the democratic mind attain the strength demanded by times like these. We need to know not only what we believe but why we believe it.

2. Publishers, librarians, and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral, or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what should be published or circulated.

Publishers and librarians serve the educational process by helping to make available knowledge and ideas required for the growth of the mind and the increase of learning. They do not foster education by imposing as mentors the patterns of their own thought. The people should have the freedom to read and consider a broader range of ideas than those that may be held by any single librarian or publisher or government or church. It is wrong that what one can read should be confined to what another thinks proper.

3. It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to bar access to writings on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author.

No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political views or private lives of its creators. No society of free people can flourish that draws up lists of writers to whom it will not listen, whatever they may have to say.

4. There is no place in our society for efforts to coerce the taste of others, to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents, or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expression.

To some, much of modern expression is shocking. But is not much of life itself shocking? We cut off literature at the source if we prevent writers from dealing with the stuff of life. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to prepare the young to meet the diversity of experiences in life to which they will be exposed, as they have a responsibility to help them learn to think critically for themselves. These are affirmative responsibilities, not to be discharged simply by preventing them from reading works for which they are not yet prepared. In these matters values differ, and values cannot be legislated; nor can machinery be devised that will suit the demands of one group without limiting the freedom of others.

5. It is not in the public interest to force a reader to accept with any expression the prejudgment of a label characterizing it or its author as subversive or dangerous.

The ideal of labeling presupposes the existence of individuals or groups with wisdom to determine by authority what is good or bad for the citizen. It presupposes that individuals must be directed in making up their minds about the ideas they examine. But Americans do not need others to do their thinking for them.

6. It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large.

It is inevitable in the give and take of the democratic process that the political, the moral, or the aesthetic concepts of an individual or group will occasionally collide with those of another individual or group. In a free society individuals are free to determine for themselves what they wish to read and each group is free to determine what it will recommend to its freely associated members. But no group has the right to take the law into its own hands, and to impose its own concept of politics or morality upon other members of a democratic society. Freedom is no freedom if it is accorded only to the accepted and the inoffensive.

7. It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of this affirmative responsibility, they can demonstrate that the answer to a "bad" book is a good one, the answer to a "bad" idea is a good one.

The freedom to read is of little consequence when the reader cannot obtain matter fit for that reader's purpose. What is needed is not only the absence of restraint, but the positive provision of opportunity for the people to read the best that has been thought and said. Books are the major channel by which the intellectual inheritance is handed down, and the principal means of its testing and growth. The defense of the freedom to read requires of all publishers and librarians the utmost of their faculties, and deserves of all citizens the fullest of their support.

We state these propositions neither lightly nor as easy generalizations. We here stake out a lofty claim for the value of the written word. We do so because we believe that it is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.

This statement was originally issued in May of 1953 by the Westchester Conference of the American Library Association and the American Book Publishers Council, which in 1970 consolidated with the American Educational Publishers Institute to become the Association of American Publishers.

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A Joint Statement by:

The [American Library Association](#) and the [Association of American Publishers](#) Subsequently Endorsed by:

- American Association of University Professors
- American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression
- American Society of Journalists and Authors
- American Society of Newspaper Editors
- Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith
- Association of American University Presses
- Center for Democracy & Technology
- The Children's Book Council
- The Electronic Frontier Foundation
- Feminists for Free Expression
- Freedom to Read Foundation
- International Reading Association
- The Media Institute
- National Coalition Against Censorship
- National PTA
- Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
- PEN American Center
- People for the American Way
- Student Press Law Center
- The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression