

Weeding: Responding to Questions

Try to see questions from people concerned about what you're doing as teachable moments instead of responding with fear or anger. On the positive side, these are people who use and care about the quality of your library. If you can educate them about library services and allay their concerns, you will have strengthened your relationship with a supporter potentially valuable to you down the road.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What are you doing with those books?

I'm evaluating them to see if they can be taken out of the collection to make room for new books.

Isn't that censoring?

I'm using professional guidelines and statistics on things like how when they came into the collection and how they are used to make my decisions.

Professional guidelines – like what?

There is a manual on how to evaluate different sections of a library's collections. For example, the information in a book about sea lions that is five years old is likely still factual. But a five-year-old book on breast cancer treatment is possibly not. So we look at those books differently.

But aren't there some books that should always be in the collection because they're classics?

There are books that remain popular for years and years, and we keep those in our collection.

That's a lot of books you're taking off. Surely the library doesn't have money to replace all those?

The library buys new materials regularly so that we have the materials that our community wants and needs. Buying new materials and removing old materials is an ongoing process, and part of good library service. After all, if we didn't remove materials from the collection, we would have to keep building wings onto the library! 😊

What do you do with the books after you have taken them out of the collection?

There's a process to withdraw them from the library collection that has to happen, including taking the book out of the catalog. After that, it depends on the books. [Explain your process here.]

But I loved _____ [title]. How can you get rid of that?

It can be hard to let go of books we love. We librarians struggle with that, too! But our goal is to have a library with materials that the people of _____ [your town] want and need. So sometimes we have to say goodbye to books that are no longer in the same demand as they were when we read and loved them.

What if I come in tomorrow asking for a book you've thrown away?

Then, because of our great interlibrary loan system, we can get it for you from another library.

But what if I want it now?

It's the same as if you came in for a book we own that someone else has checked out. Often we can get you the item you want immediately, though not always.

Do the trustees know that you're doing this?

The trustees understand that good library service means adding books and also removing books. They know that withdrawing books from our collections is an ongoing part of library service.