

ORGANIZING TECHNICAL SERVICES - A GUIDE

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Just taking care of the routine tasks of physically managing a library collection seems to consume a large portion of any librarian's time. For the librarian who runs a one-person show, or who has only a very few staff members and volunteers to help, acquisition, processing, and keeping track of materials can occupy nearly all ones time. For those in this situation, the organization of a practical routine is essential. And practical is the key word.

If your technical services department consists of a table in the corner of the library with a typewriter and a recipe file box of order cards, or an actual workroom with a paid staff member to do typing, filing and book covering, a practical routine still must be established so that as little time as possible is wasted on the mechanics of processing. This, of course, means that more valuable staff time will be available for direct patron service.

WHAT ARE TECHNICAL SERVICES?

These are the general steps in technical management of the collection: acquisition, including selection and ordering; processing, including cataloging, classification, and filing of cards as well as physical preparation of the book; circulation, including keeping records of circulation and overdues; and periodic inventory and weeding of the collection. How involved each of

these steps becomes in the library depends on the size of the staff and collection.

If your library belongs to a cooperative system, some of these tasks may be done on a system-wide basis which will reduce the amount of time spent on them. If processing of new books is done in one location for the system, more space within your library will also be freed for public service. However, for the purposes of this paper the assumption is that you are on your own for the entire sequence. Following are suggested routines that will enable the staff in a rural or small library to organize both its time and its collection most efficiently.

ACQUISITION

The first step in acquisition of materials is selection. Selection policies and tools will not be discussed here, since that is a topic in itself. The following steps suggest any easy routine for the acquisition of materials:

1. Selection. Once you have selected a book, for instance, on the basis of reviews or recommendations, prepare a 3 x 5 file card with all pertinent bibliographic information--author, title, publisher, date or projected date of publication, and price. It is also helpful to note the source of the review or recommendation in case it is needed for future reference. Place these cards in a "Consideration" file in alphabetical order so that you can refer to them quickly when necessary.

2. Ordering. When it is time to send an order to the jobber, go through the consideration file and select the books you wish to order. This, of course, will depend on your budget, publication dates of books, and personal judgement or priorities for the collection. Once the order to the jobber is typed, place the cards, which have been marked with the date of the order, in another file of items on order. Thus, patron questions about certain titles can be answered by noting if the card is still in the consideration step or has actually been ordered, and if so, when. An order file should also contain cards for all books ordered through book clubs.

3. Receiving. When the book is received from the jobber, the card for that book is pulled from the file. The invoice should also be compared with the original order to determine if all books ordered have been received. Since publication dates do change, sometimes a book will not be available at the original time indicated, so books from more than one order may arrive at the same time, depending on the frequency of your orders.

PROCESSING

Processing is the step that moves a newly arrived book to the shelves for public use. One thing to consider if there are several staff members, or a number of volunteers, is the division of labor in processing. Since much of this step involves routine work, the tasks could be performed by someone with a minimum of training or one who does not relate well to the patrons. Vol-

unteers, who are not familiar with the collection, can just as easily be employed in stamping the library name in books or in covering them, or in typing additional catalog cards from one prepared by the cataloger as they can in meeting the public and trying to answer questions with insufficient background in reference service. These are the basic steps in processing:

1. Accessioning. Most libraries no longer keep accession records. However, if you choose to accession materials, this is the first step in processing. The accession number is assigned and noted in the books and the author, title, price, date received and source (purchase or gift, for instance) are recorded in the accession record.
2. Classifying. The collection is probably divided into three to half a dozen sections, such as fiction, nonfiction (which is subdivided into categories by subject), reference, children's or juvenile, with some libraries adding additional sections for young adults, mysteries, westerns, or large print materials. Paperbacks are frequently stored on revolving paperback racks like those found in bookstores. The first decision will be to determine in which section of the library to place the book. Most libraries use some kind of symbol to indicate the various sections of the collection, such as "F" for fiction, "j" for juvenile followed by other appropriate symbols (jF), "B" for biographies, "R" or "Ret" for reference, and generally the numbers of the Dewey Decimal Classification system for non-fiction.

After deciding to classify a book as nonfiction, the correct Dewey number must be assigned. Most books published in the past few years contain what is known as CIP or Cataloging in Publication (CIP) information on the reverse of the title page. This is cataloging information that has been assigned by the Library of Congress and is a great aid in classifying books for the librarian with little or no formal training. If there is no CIP information, some selection tools such as "Booklist" or "Library Journal," provide help with classification. Another useful aid is Sears List of Subject Headings;" in addition to supplying uniform subject headings for your catalog cards, the latest edition also includes corresponding Dewey numbers. But, there are a certain number of books that must be classified by the individual librarian. No matter how the eventual classification number is arrived at, check to be sure that in the collection the book will be shelved with others on the same subject. Classification need not be a rigid matter; the thing to keep in mind is that the purpose of any classification scheme is to enable the patron to find the book that he or she wants.

3. Cataloging. The next step is preparing the catalog cards. While printed catalog cards are available from many sources, most small libraries still find them too expensive to purchase for all their books. Therefore, catalog cards must be typed for each book. Handwritten cards should be avoided at all

times. The number of cards per book will depend on the number of subject headings assigned to a nonfiction book, whether or not the book has an individual author, if the book belongs to a series, etc. (If the cataloger has had no experience at all in preparing catalog cards, it might be wise to contact a state library agency or library consultant for more detailed help.) Most books will require an author card, a title card, the appropriate number of subject cards, and a shelf list card. The author card, or if there is no designated author, the title card, is called the main entry card. This provides the pattern for all the rest of the cards for a given book. If a volunteer or other staff member does most of the typing, the cataloger need only type the main entry card, and the typist can then prepare the remainder of the cards from this sample.

The format of the catalog cards should be standardized within the library. The librarian should establish a format based on International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD) and Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR). Again, your library consultant or state library can help with this. A set of sample cards will be included in the appendix; a standardized format used by all libraries is a help to patrons, but it can be modified slightly for your own purposes.

4. Physical Processing. Physical processing of the book is the next step. The name of the library can be stamped on each item or a book plate placed in the front. The spine of the book

should be labeled with the classification number or letter (for example, F for fiction, j for juvenile, Ref. for reference) and whatever symbols used to indicate the author. If your library uses the Dewey Decimal System, letter symbols for various sections of the collection, and the first three letters of the author's last name, spine labels might look like this:

Reference Book	Nonfiction	Adult Fiction	Juvenile Fiction
REF	616.1	F	jF
978.4	Ful	Dol	Vav
Sib			

The purpose of spine labels is to enable the patron to locate a book on the shelf more easily, since it is often difficult to read the title and author printed on the spine by the publisher. Finally, the card pocket is glued in; a cellophane wrap is used to cover the dust jacket and this in turn protects the book.

5. Filing. Once the catalog cards have been typed and the book prepared for circulation, the cards must be placed in the catalog for public use. There are generally two catalogs in the library, the main one for patron use and the shelf list for library use. In the public catalog, the cards are filed alphabetically, and in the shelf list they are filed as the books appear on the shelves. This means that in the shelf list every section of the collection will be filed separately, and that nonfiction will be filed in numerical order rather than alphabetically by main entry.

The card catalog is one of the most important tools in the library, for it leads the patron to the books he or she wants by title, author, or subject. There are two types of card catalog, the combined dictionary catalog and the divided catalog. In the combined catalog, all cards are filed in one alphabetical arrangement. In the divided catalog, one set of cards, usually the subject cards, are filed separately, with the author and title cards being interfiled in the second catalog. Perhaps all three types will be filed separately. There are logical reasons for the use of both of these types of catalogs; the type you decide to use should be based on your knowledge of your patron needs.

Whatever type of catalog you decide to use, filing must be consistent throughout. ALA Filing Rules provide guidelines for alphabetic filing of catalog cards. While filing can be done by volunteers, it is important that they receive some training in ALA filing techniques so that cards are not "lost" in the catalog. A common practice when volunteers or untrained staff members are filing is to have them file above the rod in the drawer and then to have a trained person check the placement before the rod is inserted through the hole in the bottom of the card. Another thing to bear in mind when deciding who is to file cards in the catalog is that this person will be in an area where patrons will ask for assistance. If the volunteer is not familiar with the library, or is not comfortable working with patrons, it is better for him to be assigned to another task, even if it means that the librarian will have to do the filing. Public relations should not be jeopardized even if the volunteer is a whiz at filing.

CIRCULATION

The main purpose of a circulation system is to know where a book is if not on the shelf, when it will be available again if checked out, and who has it if it is overdue. This is the very heart of the "keeping track" part of technical services. Circulation statistics are an important part of recording an increase in use of the library, so accurate records are essential. Most states require circulation statistics as part of the mandatory annual report from public libraries, so setting up a practical routine for collecting and maintaining circulation statistics is very important.

1. Daily circulation. The number of library materials loaned out should be counted each day the library is open. Circulation figures for whatever categories one decides to record, or that are required by the system or state where your library is located should be tabulated. For instance, you might want to count fiction, nonfiction, children's materials, and nonbook materials such as records and magazines. These categories should be added together for the total daily count, then cumulated for longer periods, weeks or months, for instance. Forms are available from most library supply houses for the recording of circulation statistics.
2. Overdues. Overdue books are a fact of life in any library, and distressing as the situation is, a certain amount of time, effort and money must be expended in trying to retrieve materials from patrons who have lost or forgotten them. The library board and the librarian should decide on a policy and

procedure for notifying patrons with overdue books. Once the procedure is established, it should be carefully adhered to and a regular time set aside each week to attend to the problem.

After a specified length of time, whether or not the patron has been induced to pay for replacing a book that has disappeared, the librarian should decide if that item is important enough to be replaced. If the book is in high demand or is essential to the balance of the collection, it should be replaced. If replacement is not deemed necessary, or if the book is out of print and unavailable otherwise, the catalog cards should be removed from the catalog so that patrons will not think it is still available. A file of overdue books should not be maintained indefinitely. It is better to reenter a book in the catalog and records if it should surface after an absence of several years than to hang on to the cards in the often vain hope that it will eventually be returned. It is a fact that the longer a book has been overdue, the more difficult it becomes to retrieve it; meanwhile the catalog and other records do not accurately reflect the collection. If you have 200 books in an overdue file reaching back over the past five years, and your collection supposedly numbers 20,000 items, your records are inaccurate by 200 books.

MENDING AND CLEANING

Every book that is used eventually begins to show signs of wear with torn pages, broken spines, or dirty covers. There are two ideal times to check books for needed repairs--when a circulating book is returned and during inventory. As each book is returned and the card replaced in the pocket, the person working at the circulation desk should examine the book for damage and set aside those that need attention. The same can be done during inventory; when each book is checked on the shelf, those needing repairs should be pulled and taken to the work area. Damaged or dirty books should not be allowed to accumulate over long periods of time but should be returned to circulation as soon as possible.

The first step is to separate the books by nature of damage. Those which are falling apart should be set aside for rebinding; binding, of course, depends on the budget and these books will perforce be out of circulation a longer time. The actual process of repairing the others depends on the type of products used; library supply houses offer a tremendous variety of materials for book mending at an equally wide variety of costs. Many mending tapes are expensive, and it is a temptation to use the cheapest product available, but this is not always economical in the long run. A cheap tape that dries out and discolors the pages or leaves a sticky residue is not a saving of money if it causes further damage to the book and has to be replaced from time to time. If the book is in high demand and will be of permanent value to your collection, the best mending materials available should be used.

There are also products available for cleaning books, both pages and covers; manufacturer's directions should be followed carefully with these.

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH REALITY

Inventory and weeding are often dreaded library tasks that are nonetheless essential in collection management. The prospect of taking inventory in a library that cannot be shut down for the duration of the count does present some problems, but they are not insurmountable. Inventories and weeding are important steps in maintaining an up-to-date collection and records.

1. Inventory. First, select a time when library use tends to be slow, perhaps during summer vacation or around Christmas. This depends on the individual library. Schedule no programs or public projects for the time of the inventory so that staff members will have no more than basic routines to distract them. If possible, corral volunteers to take over desk duty during the inventory period. In an inventory has never been done, staff preparation is essential so that everyone involved knows exactly what the purpose of the inventory is and how it will be done.

Here is a suggested procedure: have staff members work in pairs, or if the staff numbers two, draft two of the best volunteers, one to work with each staff member. Take one section--fiction, nonfiction, reference, juvenile, etc.-- at a time, after the shelves are put in order, have one person read the title of the book in the order they appear on the shelf. The other person will check each card in the shelf list,

marking each with a prearranged notation, such as the year, or a checkmark in a different color for each inventory, if the book is on the shelf. If the book is not on the shelf, either turn the card on its side or flag it with a paper clip or plastic flag to indicate that it is missing. If the book is located later out of place on the shelf, the card is returned to its normal position or the flag removed and the proper notation made.

When each section is finished, or at the end of each day in the inventory period, before any returned books are shelved, check for missing items among those waiting to be shelved. No books should be shelved during the inventory period until they have been checked against the shelf lists already inventoried. When all the shelves in each section have been covered, items still not accounted for should be searched for among the circulation and overdue files.

Once this has been done, there will probably be a certain number of books that cannot be located anywhere on the shelves or among the records. Mark shelf list cards for these items to indicate that they were missing at the time of inventory. If a book is missing two inventories in a row, consider that it is gone for good and evaluate it for replacement. Book cards for those items circulating at the time of the inventory should also be flagged in some way to indicate that when returned they must be checked off in the shelf list.

When the inventory is completed, count the number of books determined as missing and subtract them from the running total of the collection.

2. Weeding. It is a fact of library life that periodically outdated and unused books must be removed from the collection to make room for more current materials, or to maintain accurate information. A good time to weed is following the inventory since at that point one knows what is missing in the collection and what is still available. If no one has used a book for several year, as indicated by a layer of dust, quite possibly the library can do without it, even if it was highly recommended. In a field such as science where new developments are constantly being written about, it is important that material with disproved theories be removed from the shelves. Books dealing with legal questions should also be evaluated carefully so that patrons can rely on the information as being representative of current thinking and legal interpretation. While historical events do not change, perspective on them does. Social attitudes are also reflective of this kind of change.
3. Counting the Collection. Records should be kept of the number of books in the collection. If accurate records have been kept in the library since its founding, the librarian should know how many books have been added to and subtracted from the collection each year, giving some idea of the total number on the

shelves. If such a count has never been kept, begin by estimating the number of items after the inventory. Actually counting the number of shelf list cards is one method, but this is time consuming and very boring. A better method is to measure the card file. A good rule of thumb is that one inch of closely compressed catalog cards equals one hundred books. You should also be aware, when using this method, of any multi-volume sets of books for which there is only one shelf list card. For a total number of volumes, estimate the additional number represented by these individual cards. This gives you a fairly good estimate of the actual number of books in the collection. As new books are prepared for circulation, add these to the basic total. Likewise, subtract those that are lost or discarded. An up-to-date running total will be available for state reports as well as for local funding bodies that want to know what tangible results they are getting for their financial support. For the library's own information, records can be kept of the number of books added in the various categories present in the collection, such as adult fiction, nonfiction, reference, children's books, etc.

DISCARDING BOOKS

What does one do with discarded books? This is a problem for many librarians. Some government agencies have laws concerning the disposal of items bought with public money, and in some communities, library books fall

into this category. Regardless of the laws, there are books for which the library has no use. Many libraries who have a free hand in book disposal have a shelf of books for sale either as an ongoing project or a periodic attraction. Many library patrons thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to purchase books in this way, and have the pleasure of occasionally finding a real treasure. Sometimes there are hospitals, nursing homes, day care centers, or other public institutions which do not have libraries but do like to have a few books available for visitors and clients; they will often happily take books that no one wants to purchase. Inevitably there are some left that absolutely no one wants, they must be disposed of. It is best to do this on a dark moonless night, since some civic-minded patron is bound to find a 1930 physics textbook in the trash and spread the rumor that the library is throwing away perfectly good books, and is that any way to treat the public property? Ask the local sanitation department to pick up the books right away, or haul them to the sanitary landfill yourself. The best idea is to have a written policy adopted by the board of trustees that deals not only with books removed from the library shelves but also with books that are donated to the library with the best of intentions. Such gifts are often unsuitable for library purposes; donors should be informed that the librarian reserves the right to evaluate every donation for suitability and to dispose of any or all donations as she sees fit. If such a policy is a matter of record, patrons who make donations will then know what procedure is followed.