

Questions and Answers

How many items are in the library's collection?

More than 2.3 million items are available for check out from library branches. Close to 34,000 digital items are available for download including eBooks, eAudiobooks and eVideos.

Why do you have to remove items from the collection?

Space is at a premium in library branches. Unless books are removed from the collection, there is no room for the 20,000 new items we receive **each month**.

What does the library do with its out-of-date or damaged books? How is the collection kept fresh and up-to-date?

Libraries always have to evaluate and refresh their collections. This is done by removing items in poor condition or that contain outdated and inaccurate information – using the library's weeding guidelines. An average book can be checked out between 30 and 100 times (though 50 is about average) before it's no longer usable. Fairfax County Public Library removes about 20,000 books per month using these criteria. We also add about 20,000 new items every month. That means one percent of our entire collection is being refreshed every month.

The library usually discards about 20,000 items per month. Discarding was centralized in October 2012. Fewer items are being discarded now that the library is using a Floating system of circulation. Floating allows us to transfer low demand items to other branches so they have another chance to circulate and be of use to Fairfax County residents.

Low demand items (have not been checked out in the past two years) are also examined by staff. Our collections department gives usable discards (low demand, accurate, good condition material) to the library's Friends groups for sale at their book sales. About 3,000 discards have been given to various Friends groups since Floating started in May 2013.

What types of books and material are not given to Friends groups to sell and what happens to that material?

- Items in bad, soiled, damaged or moldy condition.
- Computer books that are more than a few years old. Medical, financial and law books more than two years old.
- Reference subscription services withdrawn from the collection (Contractual agreements with publisher preclude this).

The above items are not useable and are disposed of.

What is Floating?

Effective May 2013 the library's collection – with the exception of periodicals – is now a "Floating" collection. Floating materials are not owned by a specific branch and become a part of the collection at the branch to which they are returned. These items spend less time in delivery, are available to customers sooner, and allow us to refresh collections at different branches.

Continued on reverse

What is the criteria for removing books or material from the collection?

Materials are regularly withdrawn from the library's collection. They are withdrawn and discarded because:

1. They are out-of-date, that is, no longer timely or accurate.
2. They are badly worn or damaged.
3. It is cheaper to replace them.
4. They are once-popular materials no longer used.
5. Space considerations. (In this case, materials may be transferred from one Branch Library to another Branch Library.)

How do you select books and material for the library collection?

The following criteria are used to select books and materials:

1. Availability and suitability of format.
2. Suitability of subject, style and level for the intended audience.
3. Critics' and staff's reviews.
4. Reputation of the publisher or producer; authority and significance of the author, composer, film maker, etc.
5. Timeliness or permanence of the material.
6. Quality of writing, design, illustrations or production.
7. Relevance to community needs.
8. Potential and/or known demand for the material.
9. Relative importance in comparison with existing materials in the collection on the same subject.
10. Availability and accessibility of the same material in the metropolitan area.
11. Price.

How do you decide how many copies you need of a title? What happens after a popular book (50 Shades of Gray or the Twilight Saga for example), recedes in popularity?

The number of copies we purchase initially for a title depends on the reputation and popularity of an author, need for (and historical circulation) of a subject, reviews (especially locally), price and how it fits into the overall budget, and our projection of potential future demand for the title.

We lease copies of best sellers whenever possible so that we can meet demand (6:1 holds ratio) for a title when it is most popular, and then extra copies of those titles can be returned to the leasing company when the demand dies down. We then would be able to lease additional copies of newer best sellers to meet demand for the new titles.

When demand for non-leased materials goes down, those items are eventually withdrawn from the collection.

How can I suggest a title be added to the library's collection?

You can suggest a title to add to the collection using our online [form](#). We welcome suggestions for books and other materials; however, our ability to purchase has been greatly reduced due to budget constraints.