

Saint Xavier University Library

Criteria for managing the Print Reference Collection in the Digital Age

In the interest of freeing up much-needed space, I suggest the following criteria for managing print reference, criteria that reflect the collection's present, supplementary role. They are listed, approximately, from the general to the specific.

- Apply to print reference the same criteria applied to every other collection in the Library—currency, authoritativeness, and use (actual or potential). Although currency doesn't demand that each title have a recent copyright date, it does demand that each title be current enough to serve its purpose.
- In general, and when the budget allows, prefer the electronic to the print, and send to storage any titles whose contents are available to our patrons online. Good candidates for removal, for example, are biographical and governmental sources and directories, which were once heavily used but are today seldom touched. Exceptions to the rule would include desk dictionaries, thesauri, and style manuals—tools that students like to have within arm's reach when writing papers.
- End the Library's long-standing practice of automatically sending reference books to the reference collection. Traditionally, books have been defined as reference if they have a file structure—that is, if they are designed to be consulted rather than read cover to cover (*ALA Glossary*; Nolan, 83). And since certain title words—almanac, dictionary, encyclopedia, handbook—reflect such a structure, titles bearing those words have traditionally found their way into

reference. But as Nolan argued even in the early 1990s, the main question for deciding what goes into reference is not how titles are structured but how they are used (85).

- House in reference those titles considered essential. Essential titles are those whose absence from reference would inconvenience campus-based patrons. Such titles tend to be general, often multivolume, works, works that can potentially answer a wide range of questions within their scope. By this definition, the *Anchor Bible* is essential, since its absence would inconvenience students completing class assignments. A student needing the volume on John 13–21, for example, should be able to find it in reference, or at least on a cart waiting to be reshelved: it should not be out on loan. In contrast, *Historical Dictionary of the Korean War*—a specific, single-volume work—is nonessential (for reference), since its absence from reference would inconvenience no one; if anything, its presence in the circulating collection would be a convenience to a student writing a paper on the Korean War.
- For each primary subject area (music, for example), retain one general, multivolume set and keep it current. A second may be needed if it provides unique coverage. Weed earlier editions and send redundant or specialized multivolume titles to storage. If in doubt whether to retain a title in reference, ask whether the Library is committed to keeping it current. If the answer is yes, the title is essential.

- For each secondary subject area (American art, architecture, opera), retain one multivolume set if it supports the curriculum. Sets that don't support the curriculum should go to storage.
- Retain general, *single*-volume titles if they are essential. Again, ask about the Library's budgetary commitment. If a title is worth updating, it's worth keeping in reference. Send nonessential titles to storage.
- Send specialized, single-volume titles to the circulating collection if they have been published within the last 10 years. Send older titles to storage.
- Send canceled periodical indexes to storage.
- If in doubt whether to keep a title in reference or to send it to the circulating collection, choose the latter.

Works Cited

Nolan, Christopher W. "The Lean Reference Collection: Improving Functionality Through Selection and Weeding," *College & Research Libraries* 52, no. 1 (January 1991): 80–91.

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