

Library Policies of the Mercer Public Library

VIII. Materials Selection/Collection Development Policy

A. *Objectives*

The purpose of the Mercer Public Library is to provide all of its customers with carefully selected books, audiovisual materials, and other items to aid the customer in the pursuit of education, information, research, pleasure, and the creative use of leisure time.

Because of the volume of publishing and the limitations of budget and space, the library must have a selection policy to meet community interests and needs. The materials selection/collection development policy is used by the library staff in the selection of materials and also serves to acquaint the general public with the principles of selection.

The *Library Bill of Rights* and *The Freedom to Read Statement* (see Appendix) have been endorsed by the Mercer Public Library Board of Trustees and are integral parts of the policy.

B. *Responsibility for Selection*

The ultimate responsibility for selection of library materials rests with the library director, who operates within the framework of the policies determined by the Mercer Public Library Board of Trustees. This responsibility may be shared with other members of the library staff. However, because the director must be available to answer to the library board and the general public for actual selections made, the director has the authority to reject or select any item contrary to the recommendations of the staff.

C. *Criteria for Selection*

The Mercer Public Library serves all residents of and visitors to the Mercer community, regardless of age, political or social views, gender (including gender expression), sexuality, race, ethnicity, or country of origin. The Library further recognizes its patrons may have diverse backgrounds, cultural heritages, interests, political views, and social values. The Mercer Public Library works to build a collection to meet the needs of all members of this community. The main points considered in the selection of materials, in no order of importance, include:

- a) insight into human and social conditions
- b) suitability of subject and style for the intended audience
- c) present and potential relevance to community needs and interest
- d) ability to stimulate intellectual and social development
- e) timeliness or permanent value
- f) relation to existing collection
- g) attention by critics and reviewers in standard bibliographies
- h) scarcity of information in the subject area
- i) availability of material elsewhere in the community or library network

Specific criteria for works of non-fiction:

- a) authority
- b) comprehensiveness and depth of treatment
- c) clarity, accuracy, and logic of presentation
- d) statement of challenging or original point of view

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Specific criteria for works of fiction:

- a) presentation of significant literary or social trends
- b) vitality and originality
- c) artistic presentation
- d) authenticity of historical, regional, or social setting
- e) sustained interest and entertainment

Specific criteria for audiovisual works:

- a) quality of cinematography
- b) clarity and audio quality
- c) quality of graphics in videogames

Specific criteria for electronic information sources:

- a) Ease of use of the product
- b) Technical support and training
- c) Equipment needed to access the information
- d) Availability of content in the digital resource
- e) Restrictions on simultaneous use or limited use policies

The director and staff use bibliographies, periodicals, and reviews as sources of information about new materials. Consideration is also given to items requested by library patrons and books discussed on public media. Materials are judged on the basis of the work as a whole, not on a part taken out of context.

D. Materials for Children and Young People:

Criteria applied to the selection of material for children and young people will be the same as applied to materials for adults. Children and young people are recognized as creative, inquiring individuals with unique capacities for intellectual and emotional growth. The resources of the entire library are accessible to them as the need arises.

Selection of library materials will not be inhibited by the possibility that materials may come into the possession of children. The library staff is always available to help guide all customers to appropriate library materials, but the ultimate responsibility for children's library choices rests solely with their parents and legal guardians.

E. Potential Problems or Challenges:

The Mercer Public Library recognizes that the selection of library materials can be controversial. Selection of materials will not be made on the basis of anticipated approval or disapproval, but solely on the basis of the principles stated in this policy.

Library materials will not be marked or identified to show approval or disapproval of their contents, and no library materials will be sequestered except to protect them from damage or theft.

The selection of any material should not be construed as an endorsement of any particular viewpoint by the library staff, the library board, or the Town of Mercer.

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F. Requests for Reconsideration of Materials:

Patrons desiring reconsideration of any material should first review the Materials Selection/Collection Development Policy and discuss their objection with the library director. If this does not result in a satisfactory resolution of the matter, the patron may fill out and submit a “**Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials**” form (see Appendix F).

Only one item/title may be challenged at a time using the Request for Reconsideration form, but a patron may submit multiple requests for reconsideration. If multiple requests are submitted, the library director and library board will determine which material will be reviewed first and will conduct only one review at a time. The director and the library board will consider a Request for Reconsideration in light of the material selection policy. Final determination will be made by a majority vote of the library board. The patron will be informed of the decision of the library board. No materials will be removed from the library without the full implementation of this process.

G. Gifts and Donations:

The library accepts gifts of books and other materials with the understanding that they will be added to the collection only if appropriate according to the materials selection policy stated above. Books and other materials that are not used in the library will be given to the Friends of the Mercer Public Library for library fundraising or may be disposed of as the librarian sees fit.

The library will not accept donated textbooks, Reader’s Digest Condensed books, or large quantities of magazines. The library may accept small numbers of used magazines to be placed in the free exchange box in the lobby or the library’s Little Free Library.

The Mercer Public Library encourages and appreciates gifts and donations. Those who wish to donate money for the purchase of materials in memory or honor of a loved one are encouraged to discuss their donation with the library director. If the donor wishes to make a request for the purchase of specific materials, the library will honor those requests if they meet the materials selection policy. If no specific items are requested by the donor, the librarian will make selections using the donated funds. Memorial and honor books will be kept for as long as they are relevant to the library’s collection and are subject to the same weeding policies as other library materials.

By law, the library is not allowed to appraise the value of donated materials. Library staff may provide a receipt on request indicating the number of materials donated.

H. Weeding:

An up-to-date, attractive, and useful collection is maintained through a continual withdrawal and replacement process. This ongoing process of weeding is the responsibility of the library director and is authorized by the Board of Trustees. Withdrawn materials will be handled in a similar manner and under the same authority as donated materials.

Any materials taking space that could otherwise be more effectively used are subject to re-evaluation and discard. This includes older non-fiction containing outdated information, once popular fiction no longer in demand, materials in outdated formats, and other items no longer in demand by library patrons. Among those attributes considered when evaluating an item for weeding will be physical condition, number of copies available, use, adequate coverage in the field, and availability of similar material.

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Books by local authors and local history materials will remain in the collection until the library director determines that the items are no longer useful to the community. Local history materials will generally be kept in the collection for as long as possible.

I. Library Bill of Rights:

In addition to the above policies, the Board adopts as a statement of policy the attached *Library Bill of Rights* as adopted by the American Library Association. (See Appendix)

Materials Selection/Collection Development policy reviewed and amended by the Library Board of Trustees, April 11, 2022, and again on October 9, 2023.

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B. Freedom to Read

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continually under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove books from sale, to censor textbooks, to label “controversial” books, to distribute lists of “objectionable” books or authors, and to purge libraries. The 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 the use of books and as librarians and publishers responsible for disseminating them, wish to assert the public interest in the preservation of the freedom to read.

We are deeply concerned about these attempts at suppression. Most of such attempts 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 to reject it. 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.

We are aware, of course, that books are not alone in being subjected to efforts at suppression. We are aware that these efforts are related to a larger pattern of pressures being brought against education, the press, films, radio and television. The problem is not only one of actual censorship. The shadow of fear cast by these pressures lead, 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 uneasy change and pervading fear. Especially when so many of our apprehensions are directed against an ideology, the expression of a dissident idea becomes a thing feared in itself, and we tend to move against it as against a hostile deed, with suppression.

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 stress.

Now as always in our history, books are among our greatest instruments of freedom. They are almost the only means for making generally available ideas or manners of expression that can initially command only a small audience. They are the natural medium for the new idea and the untried voice from which come the original contributions to social growth. They are essential to the extended discussion which serious thought requires, and to the accumulation of knowledge and ideas into organized collections.

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We believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. We believe that these pressures towards 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 which 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 which 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 contained in the books 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 books 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 determine the acceptability of a book on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author.

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A book should be judged as a book. No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political lives of its creators. No society of free people can flourish which 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 literature 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 tastes differ, and taste cannot be legislated; nor can machinery be devised which 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 book the prejudgment of a label characterizing the book or 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 expended on the trivial; it is frustrated when the reader cannot obtain matter fit for the 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

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handed down, and the principal means of its testing and growth. The defense of their freedom and integrity, and the enlargement of their service to society, 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 books. We do so because we believe that they are good, 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.

Adopted June 25, 1953;
revised January 28, 1972, January 16, 1991,
by the ALA Council and the AAP Freedom to Read Committee.

Reviewed and reaffirmed by the Mercer Public Library Board of Trustees, April 11, 2022.

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C. Intellectual Freedom

The board of this library, recognizing the pluralistic nature of this community and the varied backgrounds and needs of all citizens, regardless of race, creed, or political persuasion, declares as a matter of book selection policy that:

1. Books or library material selection is and shall be vested in the library director, and, under the librarian's direction, such members of the professional staff who are qualified by reason of education and training. Any book or library material so selected shall be held to be selected by the board.
2. Selection of books or other library material shall be made on the basis of their value of interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community. No book or library material shall be excluded because of race, nationality, or the political social views of the author.
3. This board believes that censorship is a purely individual matter and declares that while anyone is free to reject for oneself books which do not meet with the individual's approval, one cannot exercise this right of censorship to restrict the freedom to read of others.
4. This board defends the principles of the freedom to read and declares that whenever censorship is involved no book or library material shall be removed from the library save under the orders of a court of competent jurisdiction.
5. This board adopts and declares that it will adhere to and support:
 - a. The Library Bill of Rights, and
 - b. The Freedom to Read Statement.

Reviewed and reaffirmed by the Mercer Public Library Board of Trustees, April 11, 2022.

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D. Library Bill of Rights

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and the following basic policies should guide their services.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
4. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
5. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
6. 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.

By official action of the ALA Council on February 3, 1951, the Library Bill of Rights shall be interpreted to apply to all materials and media of communication used or collected by libraries.

Adopted June 18, 1948
Amended February 22, 1961, and January 23, 1980
by the ALA Council

Reviewed and reaffirmed by the Mercer Public Library Board of Trustees, April 11, 2022.

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F. Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials or Exhibits

Mercer Public Library, 2648W Margaret Street, Mercer, WI 54547

Title of Material/Name of Exhibit _____

Book Audio/visual item Periodical Exhibit Other _____

Author/Creator _____

Publisher _____

Request Initiated by (Your name) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

1. What brought this resource to your attention?

2. To what in the item or display do you object?

(Please be specific and cite page numbers for print materials if possible.

Attach additional pages if necessary.)

3. Did you review the entire item? Yes No

If not, which parts did you read/listen to/view?

4. Have you reviewed the Materials Selection/Collection Development Policy?

Yes No

How do you feel this resource fails to comply with that policy?

(Attach additional pages if necessary.)

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5. What would you like the Mercer Library to do about this item/display?

- Do not lend it to my child.
- Refer it to the librarian and/or Board of Directors for reevaluation.
- Other – explain: _____

I understand that this document will become a public record as soon as it is received by library staff. I certify that I am submitting this Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials or Exhibits on my own behalf and not as a representative of others.

Signature _____ **Date:** _____

Mercer Public Library – 2648W Margaret St., Mercer, WI 54547 – (715)476-2366

Form received by: _____ **Date:** _____

This *Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials or Exhibits* will be reviewed by the Mercer Public Library Board of Trustees. The library director and the library board will consider the request in light of the library’s material selection policy. Final determination will be made by a majority vote of the library board. The patron will be informed of the decision of the library board.

Form reviewed and amended by the Mercer Public Library Board of Trustees, 10/9/2023.