

*Book selection*

*Principles and practice*

Fifth edition

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## *Principles and practice*

Fifth edition

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With an introduction by Brian Baumfield



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'You may say that one doesn't really need to read every single book. My retort to that is -- in warfare, too, one doesn't need to kill every single soldier, and yet every single one is necessary. Now you will say every single book is necessary too. But there you are, you see, even *there* there's something wrong. For it isn't true. I asked the librarian!'

Robert Musil *The man without qualities*

## *Introduction*

An introduction to what has become the standard work on book selection seems almost superfluous – the fact that it is now in its fifth edition speaks for itself.

Unlike many new editions, there is no question of just a few minor changes but a substantial updating has been undertaken, which will guarantee the student accurate information and guidance in what is generally considered to be the most professional aspect of the practice of librarianship. The definition of what constitutes a profession is one where principles are applied to practice. This book amply demonstrates the validity of such a tenet, and whilst principles in the art of book selection do not change, the practice certainly does. Growth in bibliographical control expands every year through the use of new technology and the ubiquitous computer – it also throws a considerable burden on the selector to master the new tools at his or her disposal. Here then is a guide which will enable this to be achieved.

This new edition has been split into three parts – fundamentals, background and special materials. This will help readers to grasp the complexities and range of the subject more easily. The work is a little shorter in length than the last edition, in order to streamline it, and almost half the text has been rewritten – including the chapters on policy, users, book evaluation and fiction. There is a brief new section on biography, and inevitably more on automation. There are, too, more than one hundred references to new literature.

These are the bare bones of what is to be found in this new edition. To find more the book must be read and studied – as it surely will be. I wish it every success.

Brian Baumfield

## *Acknowledgement*

I would like warmly to thank Brian Baumfield for sharing with me his wide knowledge of the subject of book selection. He has been a mentor for all the editions of this book, and has also contributed a typically generous introduction to the present edition.

David Spiller

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# Part I

## *Fundamentals*



# 1 *Definitions*

Terminology in the subject under review is by no means generally agreed upon or consistently applied. The following notes describe how terms are used in this book, and give any alternative uses that have some currency.

**Book provision** An umbrella term covering a number of activities relating to library stock, including selection, revision, weeding, promotion and interlending.

**Collection development** A new term originating in the North American academic library sector. It refers to the systematic building up of library collections.

**Selection** Evaluating and choosing materials to add to library stock.

**Weeding** Removal of stock from library shelves, either for withdrawal, or for moving to reserve stock or remote storage (when it is known as 'relegation'). See Chapter 11 for other definitions in this area.

**Stock revision** In-depth revision of stock, taking one subject at a time. It involves examining and weeding existing stock on a subject and studying the pattern of use, then identifying and selecting the most appropriate works in print from the subject bibliography. Sometimes also referred to as **stock editing**.

**Stock logistics** The quantitative aspects of book provision. These include study of the number of readers and the distribution of their interests as expressed in use of the stock, and analysis

of the number of additions required in each subject to ensure sufficient choice of stock. Sometimes also described as **stock analysis** or **systematic bookstock management**.

**Acquisition** This term is used in two different ways. In this book 'acquisition' is treated simply as a technical process for obtaining materials, following the selection process. A list of duties which can be included in the job specification of an acquisitions department was given in Stephen Ford's excellent monograph *The acquisition of library materials* (2nd edition by R. M. Magrill)<sup>262</sup> as follows: 'maintain ordering tools (bibliographies, publishers' catalogues); maintain order files; perform pre-order bibliographical searching; select booksellers; receive packages of new books; approve invoices; accession new books; supervise subscriptions and standing orders; send booksellers' chasers; search for out-of-print materials.' These duties are markedly different from those involved in selecting, revising or weeding stock, and in most libraries are carried out by different (often non-professional) staff. In the sense just described acquisition procedures are not covered by this book, except in a few instances where 'selection' and 'acquisition' are hard to separate (for example, in the area of secondhand books).

However, some writers – particularly from the academic sector – use the term 'acquisition' in a much broader sense, to cover the whole area of book provision, in addition to the process of obtaining books described immediately above. There is some logic to this, for in a specialized field much of the meaningful work in obtaining books is related to tracing recondite materials, rather than making the selection decision, so that the lines between 'selection' and 'acquisition' become blurred. For the purposes of literature searching it means that the reader cannot on the face of it ignore literature referring to acquisition, since it may well relate also to the selection process.

## 2 *The need for effective book provision*

It is often said that library and information science is not a subject in itself but a collection of related subjects drawn from other disciplines. The profession's perception of that collection of subjects has changed dramatically in size and scope during the past 20 years, and now takes in developments from computer science, the social sciences, management and many other areas. Nevertheless there remains the valid concept of a core of professional activities which distinguish library and information work from other occupations, and with which most practitioners working from a library service point will be involved on a day-to-day basis.

Provision is one of these core activities. It is concerned with selecting and maintaining the library's resources (books, periodicals, audiovisual materials, electronic media, etc.). The other core activities are arranging the resources (classification and indexing) and using them (reference work, current awareness services, etc.). It may be seen that these three activities must take place in the sequence given above, with selection necessarily coming first, and to that extent it can be argued that provision is the most fundamental of all library activities, with the others depending upon its effective execution. A sophisticated system of information retrieval is of no use unless it affords access to the right documents. Highly trained information staff cannot be effective if they are not using the right resources. An elegant library building becomes a white elephant unless it houses material appropriate for its users. And so on.

This seems self-evident, and yet recent years have been characterized by an extraordinary lack of interest in researching and developing methods of book provision. The climate of apathy extends to library practice, library education, literature and research. To an extent this impression of neglect may be a matter

of perception. The provision of materials is in fact a recurring theme of most professional activity. But as noted above, library and information science is an amalgam of disparate disciplines. At present the profession seems loathe to examine those disciplines in terms of their end-products – of which book provision is a fundamental example. Ironically, supporting activities such as management or automation seem all too often to have been developed as end-products in themselves.

In library education, most courses on book provision – if they exist at all – are short, low-profile affairs. In haste to graft on to their syllabuses more prestigious-sounding peripheral subjects, many library schools have signally failed to clarify for their students the fundamental objectives of library service. But without a genuine understanding of fundamentals the student may fail to relate techniques to overall purpose. For all the emphasis on techniques, those relating to book provision – weeding, stock logistics, selection – are rarely taught in any detail.

In the literature, too, works written from a book provision viewpoint are unaccountably sparse, particularly in the key areas of selection and stock revision (whilst, curiously, the literature on weeding and relegation is quite substantial). Little research work is directed towards the needs of book provision, although a long list of worthwhile projects could be suggested. Even in automation areas, where research projects abound, and where there are obvious applications for book provision, few proposals are put forward.

The widespread neglect of such a key subject seems illogical when seen against the broader background – a period during which more books and other materials are being published, at increasing prices, whilst bookfunds in nearly all public and educational library sectors are being cut back. In such circumstances the need for a re-evaluation of provision policies and methods to make best use of limited funding is self-evident – particularly so where libraries have also suffered staffing cuts, and where users are therefore more reliant upon a self-service approach from stock on open shelves.

It is reasonable to ask whether book provision will remain a subject of major importance, in view of the rapid developments now taking place in computerized information systems. No one knows the extent to which traditional materials of communication

will be replaced by computerized systems, though everyone has fun guessing. At present, printed materials are by far the most common source of information in most types of library, and within the foreseeable future they are likely to remain so for certain purposes (recreational, cultural and educational reading, as well as for many forms of reading for information). The techniques required for the effective provision of printed material will therefore remain an essential part of the librarian's professional equipment – particularly so in the public library sector.

Nevertheless, in all kinds of library there will be considerable developments in the formats available to libraries for providing information, and in specialized research libraries – where book provision is already of limited importance – the kinds of material used for information provision will change radically. As use of computerized systems increases, the need for librarians to actually possess materials is likely to diminish – although the recent success of the CD-ROM medium shows that there can be no confident predictions in this area. But certainly, databases will continue to proliferate for the foreseeable future, and will become an important component of the services offered as a matter of course by a variety of different kinds of library.

However – and this is the key point – as the number of databases increases, so too will the need to evaluate their content and format in order to select between them (and to select between electronic and printed formats of the same product, since they very often run alongside each other). Already there are very necessary developments in the bibliographical control of databases, and the need for evaluation of content is an urgent one. (For some reason, users and librarians alike seem to have more implicit faith in the content of electronic media than in conventional print media – though of course in neither case is confidence necessarily justified.) Chapter 23 discusses the evaluation of databases in more detail. The general point to make at the outset is that the whole process of evaluating user needs and matching these to existing sources of information remains – whatever the format ultimately used to satisfy these needs.

### 3 *Policy*

No library can be effective without a *policy*, which sets out aims and objectives, identifies user groups and services, and indicates priorities amongst them. Since libraries are usually short of resources, prioritizing is an essential part of the process. The use of library budgets as a key instrument for prioritizing services is described in the next chapter.

Collection development is scarcely possible without a clear statement of library policy, though many librarians nevertheless try to manage without one. This chapter attempts to highlight some of the ways that policy considerations affect the provision of materials in academic and public libraries.

#### **Academic libraries**

##### *Size of collection*

An important policy matter which has been aired occasionally in recent years is the size of academic library collections, compared with the amount of use they receive. It is generally accepted in the 1990s that no academic library can be self-sufficient, and that academics must move around for materials (see Chapter 11 on 'weeding'). University libraries (particularly those in the United States, but also in the UK) tend to accumulate very large amounts of material indeed, as will be clear from reading the chapter on standards in this book. On the whole, these collections receive a low amount of use, particularly if the use of short loan collections is excluded from consideration. In fact, there is little doubt that a great many of the books and journals purchased by universities are not used at all. For instance, a study by Fussler and Simon<sup>151</sup> reported that over half the monographs accessioned by the University of Chicago Library during the years 1944 - 53 had

not been borrowed during the period 1953 – 8. A more recent research project by Kent<sup>55</sup> looked at monographs acquired by the University of Pittsburgh during the years 1969 – 75. Forty per cent (36,000 books) had not circulated, and any given book was reckoned to have a one in two chance of being borrowed. In another piece of research, Trueswell<sup>307</sup> formulated the theory that 80% of total circulation is normally propagated by 20% of a collection.

UK library studies are based on smaller collections, although the rate of use, where known, remains generally low. (Not surprisingly, many librarians are reluctant to put figures of this kind into print.) Use tends to be higher in UK polytechnics, where the emphasis is on teaching rather than research (see Castens<sup>5</sup>). A study in one polytechnic<sup>292</sup> found that 11% of the bookstock was in circulation, while in another<sup>40</sup> two samples taken from law and the humanities revealed that three issues per volume was the average use per annum, and that two-thirds of the items were loaned in a two-year period. It is perhaps a reflection of the overall picture in academic libraries that their rates of use were deemed to be quite good.

The development of massive and little used collections in universities has become a matter of custom – a practice scarcely requiring justification, unless taken to task. Articles by Gore<sup>17</sup> and by Cronin<sup>14</sup> are rare and eloquent examples of the critical approach. Heaney<sup>5</sup> puts a separate case for the defence. The most concerted attack upon the monolithic principle was the 1976 report of the UK University Grants Commission – *Capital provision for university libraries (the Atkinson report)*.<sup>28</sup> Atkinson demanded for universities a ‘self-renewing library of limited growth’ (or ‘steady state library’), which meant that beyond a certain point in size a library’s acquisitions would be largely offset by the discarding of obsolete material. The self-renewing concept arose because the UGC was unwilling to provide the capital funding to extend university library buildings during the 1980s. They also reasoned that the costs of maintaining access to very large collections would erode funds available for new acquisitions.

Atkinson further recommended that universities should not hold large stocks in remote storage. As much as 85% of the materials should be on open access, and stock relegated to store should remain there for a trial period of five years before being returned