

Shelving Reference and Periodicals in the Main Body of the Collection Comments from Libnet exchange, May 2004

These comments are from a May 2004 Libnet listserv exchange about the advantages and disadvantages of shelving reference materials and/or periodicals with the main body of a library's collection. The comments are quoted with the permission of the authors.

We are a public library of about 100,000 volumes. We have pulled out materials in several subject areas that encompass a variety of Dewey numbers - Health & Medical, Business, Home Repair, Parenting, Careers - in order to get all those books in one spot. We shelve the periodicals associated with these subjects in these areas. The rest of the periodicals are in our general magazine section.

Whether it works for our customers is debatable; I hear comments on both sides. I haven't looked closely at the use statistics to know whether these titles circ more or less than the average periodical. We would do that before we moved them back to the magazine section, though.

We intershelve all our nonfiction - adult, children's, video and reference, and the majority of people seem to appreciate having all the titles in one spot. The downside that worries us the most is that kids tend to browse nonfiction for things to pleasure reading, and this type of shelving discourages their nonfiction browsing. We are considering options for making the nonfiction collection more browsable, with more display units or by breaking out the collection into smaller sections.

Having everything intershelfed saves a lot of walking back and forth between collections when you're looking for an answer, and makes us look much more efficient.

Michele Seipp
Director
Lafayette Public Library

We intershelf juvenile and adult non-fiction and it is working great. We label J non-fiction in bright yellow labeling tape to distinguish the J stuff. I don't think I'll ever go back. We are a three story building and it was quite inconvenient for both patrons and staff when they were trying to research. Another benefit to us is that we can analyze the collection as a whole and we do a better job in weeding and adding materials. It also stretches our budget. We also interfile some single subject periodicals such as the Cobblestone pubs, and they get much more use in non-fiction than they did in the periodicals section.

We, too, are circulating more and more items that are "reference."

Susan Ooton
Canon City Public Library

I've been watching this dialog with interest and finally decided to jump in. Over the years, we have tried integrating parts of collection and separating parts of collection. There is always a downside and an upside to whichever you do. So, every library has to figure out what works best for their situation.

At this library, for most of my career, the reference books were integrated into the main collection. The upside was that patrons discovered books by browsing that they wouldn't have if they had been in a separate collection. The main downside, noted already, is that with a fair amount of

frequency patrons brought reference books to be checked out which put the onus on circulation to explain that they couldn't have the book.

About ten years ago, when we moved into a new and much larger facility, the decision was made to pull out the reference books and put them in a separate collection near the reference desk. While the downside is that patrons may not discover some titles if they are only looking in the main collection, there has been a very strong upside to having them separate. When the library was small, it wasn't that far away to fetch a reference book that the librarian was using to answer a reference question. Now, the floor space they have to cover is probably four times what it was previously. Running back and forth to stacks over such a large area wouldn't be efficient. So, my answer would be: how much floor space do your reference librarians have to cover? If the answer is not much, integrating is fine. If a lot, think about separating them. And, how much emphasis is given to reference service? If it's mainly a popular collection without a strong emphasis on reference, then integrate. If reference service is a key role of your library, then think about separating them out.

Edward A. (Tony) Brewer
Library Director
Longmont Public Library

We are a public library in the Arapahoe Library District and have shelved our reference collection in with the non-fiction for about a year and a half. The library is about 18,000 square feet and the collection size is about 75,000. Patrons have commented on how much they like this feature since all materials on a given subject matter are shelved together. The biggest drawback is some patrons may not notice the small "Reference" sticker on the spine of the book. They will bring it to the check-out desk, only to find it does not circulate. We made this decision following a major remodel and a redirection focusing the collection on popular materials. As part of that focus, we were downsizing our non-fiction and reference collections. Since the remodel and the opportunity to evaluate our collection and patron usage, we are currently changing many of our reference materials to circulating status. Hope this is helpful.

Laurie Christensen
Arapahoe Library District
Manager, Castlewood Branch

I shelve some periodicals with the books in our middle school library, especially periodicals that aren't generally high interest (science, social studies topics) and they get a lot more use. They go either flat on the shelf or in a Princeton file.

Sherry Baumgartner
La Junta Middle School

We tried it (shelving periodicals in the main body of the collection) a couple years ago, with just a couple titles, but found that we lost more than we could stand to theft, so we pulled them and put them back in the restricted balcony.

It did seem to rather "throw off" the student body when they asked to see back issues and we directed them to the stacks. I think most are used to periodicals having their own section.

Kendra Schwindt Swope