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Preservation Awareness for Student Workers: Adding a Quiz to the Agenda

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With binding costs up and budgets down, and with many titles going out of print permanently, the shelf life of books in academic libraries is a real concern. Since circulation staff handle materials more than anyone, poor handling and shelving habits on the part of desk attendants and reshelvers can cause damage in even a short time.

As stated in a current library science textbook, people are not born knowing how to use a library.¹ A corollary is that most student workers are not hired knowing how to shelve a book. Specific attention has to be paid to handling practice and preservation awareness in training student workers.

BACKGROUND

Over the last several years, preservation awareness has gradually been brought into the training of circulation student workers at Loyola Marymount University. It began with the inclusion of a short talk by a librarian at the fall general orientation. Allotted only 10 minutes because of the multiplicity of subjects to be covered at the meeting, the librarian gave a brief introduction to book structure, discussed the importance of good book-handling habits, showed examples of warped and knifed bindings, and demonstrated the correct way to use bookends and shelve oversized books. The librarian closed by emphasizing the importance of the work the students would perform to both their own and future generations of students.

In the years following, the short video *Murder in the Stacks*² was introduced as a follow-up to be viewed by the student workers sometime during their work schedule within the week. The video was also used by circulation staff as a substitute for the preservation talk for new hires during the course of the year. Progress was made as each year more of the student supervisors who trained new workers had themselves been exposed to the preservation training. With fewer and fewer exceptions, oversized books were shelved on their spines instead of fore-edges and were not wedged in where they did not fit. Eventually, most large books were identified by students and reclassified to the newly constituted shelf ranges for flat and oversize books.

However, in some years, no general circulation orientation took place. Personal observation showed a decline in the quality of book shelving without these sessions. Also, due to the closure of the periodicals service desk, circulation had to assume a new responsibility. Students were given much more territory to cover and reshelve, and the library had to absorb cutbacks in student hours. The neat geography of assigned responsibility for set ranges of shelving to specific students, which had worked very well to improve morale and efficiency, began to break down. More students were making mistakes, not straightening shelves, not replacing bookends, and so on. There was more cramped shelving as the shortage of labor resulted in inadequate stack shifting.

METHODOLOGY

With staffing cuts a permanent reality, something had to be done to improve the attention given to the condition of the stacks. A quiz was designed for newly hired circulation students to reinforce the information in the video showings of *Murder in the Stacks* and the 10-minute preservation talk when it could be given (see Figure 2.4). The quiz was created to be a learning tool and to improve awareness of the good work done by student workers for the library and its clientele. The quiz was tested on experienced and inexperienced student workers, as well as being given out at a meeting of the student supervisors before the general orientation for new hires.

At the fall 1992 general orientation, the preservation talk covered the usual territory:

- Basic book structure, including the weakness of the hinge in modern bindings.
- The correct way to remove books from the shelf without tugging on the headcap.
- The damage done to books by leaning or being stood on their fore-edges.
- The correct way to insert and weigh down a bookend, and the danger of *knifing* with either wire or thin bookends.
- How to support book structures when charging out or stamping due dates in both hardcover and softcover books.
- The expense and difficulty of replacing scholarly books.

- Why eating and drinking are forbidden in the building.
- The fact that student workers handle materials more than anyone else and the importance of their good shelving and checkout habits.
- The importance of the example set by library staff in general, and circulation desk workers in particular, in forming patron attitudes toward handling of library materials.

During the next week, the new hires took the mostly multiple-choice quiz during their work shifts. After completing the questions, they were given the answer sheet by their supervisor and told to go over the quiz. The answer sheet was designed to reinforce their learning by explaining the correct answers, to correct invalid assumptions, and to ensure that they understood the importance of the material presented.

The quiz was intended for student workers before they shelved for the first time; bad habits are harder to correct than good habits are to learn. It is also used for new hires who see *Murder in the Stacks*, although some information on the quiz is not covered there. It can also be used, along with the video, as a review for those students found to be performing below handling standards.

With a few changes, the quiz could be adapted for other student workers, whether in public or technical services. Attention to behavior such as excessive inking of identification stamps, high piling of books, stuffing thick sheaves of paper into bindings, careless handling of sound discs, and the like, could be added or substituted appropriately.

CONCLUSION

The quiz is hardly the most comprehensive presentation of preservation awareness and student training. As the years without training demonstrated, the success of any such endeavor had less to do with the instructor than with the attitude of both the permanent staff and student supervisors. Preservation awareness has to be a part of day-to-day supervision. Even if the introductory talk were extended in length and the quiz given more often, it would do little good without the acceptance of training goals by the staff and their reinforcement by the example set in their own handling of books and interaction with the public.

Here are some additional points to consider for your local situation:

- The size of the student worker population may work against the effectiveness of a large group orientation session; a small group or team approach may be better.
- Information on handling should be given at the very outset of training and be reinforced during the first few weeks of work. Bad shelving habits are harder to change.
- It is best to have experienced staff with a good attitude work closely with new student workers and to continue to monitor them from time to time. Modeling works!
- If students have had prior library experience, there may need to be some retraining and monitoring, since not all libraries embrace preservation as a conscious goal.

Figure 2.4

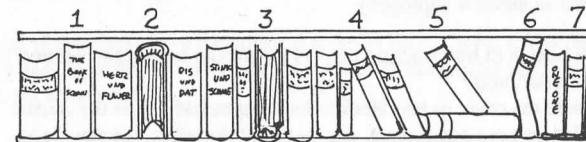
Preservation Awareness Quiz for Student Workers

Name: _____

A QUICK QUIZ TO TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF BOOK HANDLING

Please CIRCLE THE LETTER(S) representing the correct response(s).
NOTE: There may be more than one correct response for any question.

1. In the following illustration, which books are shelved correctly?



- a.#1 b.#2 c.#3 d.#4 e.#5 f.#6 g.#7 h. All i. None

2. Which of the following are **potentially** harmful to books?

- Abrasion (harsh rubbing against another surface)
- Pressure from sides (tight shelving) or from above (books or shelving on top)
- Leaning (tilted) books/ very loose shelving
- Spine-up shelving (hanging text block)
- Bookends, if not used correctly
- Piling books up too high
- Rubber bands (cutting or sticky deterioration)
- Inserts (paper clips, pens, pencils, thick or acidic bookmarks, stuffed-in paper, etc.)
- Food, food wrappers, crumbs
- Water or liquid refreshments
- Circulation workers at checkout
- Patrons, including students and faculty
- All of the above

3. Who teaches library patrons how to handle books?

- Librarians
- Library Assistants
- Student workers

4. Where is a book especially vulnerable to damage?

- At the headcap (top of the spine)
- At the hinges
- When it is open, face up
- When it is open, face down
- All of the above

5. Who handles library books the most?

- Librarians
- Patrons
- Shelvers and circulation desk attendants

- OVER, please -

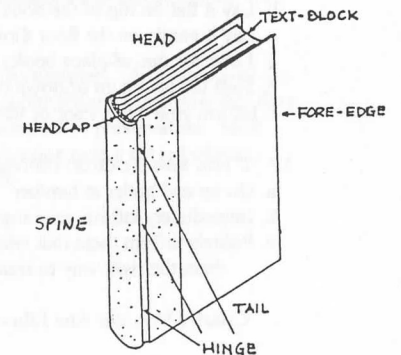


Figure 2.4 Continued

6. How many books can you safely carry without using a booktruck?
 - a. About 10
 - b. About 8
 - c. About 4
7. What kinds of loaded booktrucks are the most likely to turn over and spill?
 - a. Bottom-heavy
 - b. Middle-heavy
 - c. Top-heavy
 - d. One that is pushed too fast, especially on turns
 - e. One that is pushed into an elevator improperly
8. A patron presents 8 books to be checked out. How should books be readied for stamping and/or scanning?
 - a. Open one at a time, with the cover or text block to be stamped laid flat on the counter
 - b. With all the books piled up open and face up, one on top of the other, like they do in public libraries
 - c. With all the books neatly stacked up. You can do one book and just push it over onto the counter
 - d. However the book lies when it is open
9. The price on an LMU paperback book is \$7.95. How much did it cost the Library?
 - a. Between \$6-\$10
 - b. Between \$10-\$15
 - c. Between \$35-55
10. What is the best way to stamp a date when the date due slip is on a book's inside cover -- especially a paperback?
 - a. Hold the cover up with your hand and stamp it sideways
 - b. Just stretch it down until it lays on the counter and stamp it
 - c. Hold the text block vertically (up & down), with the cover at 90 degrees (flat on the counter) and stamp it
11. If a book won't fit where it belongs, you should
 - a. Squeeze or force it in
 - b. Lay it flat on top of the books on that shelf
 - c. Lay it gently on the floor directly in front of the exact vertical position where it belongs
 - d. Look for out-of-place books on that shelf and remove them to make room
 - e. Shift the books up or down to make room, keeping the exact order
 - f. Inform your supervisor or library assistant about the location of the needed shift
12. If you see a patron damaging library materials, you should
 - a. Go up and holler at him/her
 - b. Immediately inform your supervisor or the library assistant
 - c. Politely inform them that what they are doing may be destructive to the materials, and show them the right way to treat materials

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Figure 2.4 Continued

BOOK HANDLING QUIZ ANSWERS:

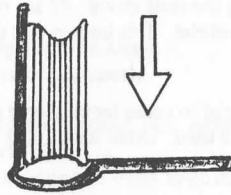
1. **a.#1, c.#3, and g.#7.** #1 sits vertically on the shelf. #2 (spine up) hangs the whole weight of the text block from the hinges, which will eventually tear off. #3 (spine down) is the proper way to shelve a non-Oversize book that won't fit vertically; the text block isn't being torn out by gravity. #4 is leaning, which means the hinges are being stretched and the spine warped. #5 is obviously wrong. Book #6 has been jammed in where it doesn't fit; no book should be forced, ever, and no books should be touching the shelf above. #7 are vertical and square with and in contact with the vertical part of the bookend. This insures that the weight of the book will keep the bookend from sliding.
2. **n. All of the above** have the potential to cause harm. Some things, like bookends, can be good or bad, depending on how they're used. Other things, like rough treatment or harmful inserts, are always bad.
3. All are correct. However, librarians and library assistants have few opportunities to teach handling. **c. Student workers**, in the way they handle materials and in the shape they leave the book stacks, have far and away the most influence in setting a good example -- observation is the most common teacher, and patrons do observe.
4. **e. All of the above.** Pulling a book off the shelf by the headcap instead of the "waist" produces the most common kind of tearing of the cover. Book hinges are weak, so lifting a book by one cover is very destructive. An open book, face up or especially face down, is vulnerable to anything that might happen. When open face down on a flat surface, a book is undergoing continuous weakening of the binding. That's why careful photocopying is so important.
5. **c. Student workers**, including shelvers, circulation and cataloging clerks, handle library materials more than anyone else, so a little habitual carelessness adds up to a lot of damage.
6. **c. About 4.** It is almost always better to use a booktruck.
7. **c. Top-heavy, d. Pushed too fast & e. Pushed into an elevator improperly.** Always center a single row of books; if you have only two rows of books, don't double-shelf: put the second row on the middle shelf to avoid top-heaviness. Single rows of oversize books are best. When pushing a cart into an elevator, line up the wheels perpendicular to an elevator door, then go around and pull the cart safely into the elevator.
8. **a. One at a time, with the surface to be stamped flat on the counter.** Any other way can damage hinges or loosen the text block. If you've worked in a public library, you know that they get rid of most books within a few years, so there is less attention paid to preservation. Most academic library books are selected for their continuing research value over a period of many years, and have to be treated with a lot more care. (*see also #10*)

- OVER, please -

Figure 2.4 Continued

9. **c. Between \$35-55.** The costs of acquiring, cataloging, marking and keeping track of a book in the Library catalog (*LINUS*) is quite high. The average purchase price of new academic titles is now close to \$50, so an academic hardback book averages close to \$100 to put on the shelf.

10. **c. Hold the text block vertically, with the cover at 90 degrees** -- like the letter L (cover flat on the counter).



11. If easy to do, **e. Shift a few books up or down to make room.**

If it will involve a lot of shifting, **f. Inform your supervisor or library assistant about the location of the needed shift.**

If a quick scan of the shelf shows misshelved books, then **d. remove them to a sorting or pickup shelf, or put them on the cart for later shelving.**

12. If what the patron is doing is a minor problem, such as putting books on the floor, piling books dangerously, or reshelving books, you can **c. politely inform them** that the library prefers that they do it another way.

But if the action is actually destructive, such as page-tearing, underlining/highlighting, or other mutilation, it is best to **b. Immediately inform a librarian, the library assistant or your supervisor.** Remember, book vandals are stealing YOUR potential knowledge -- and maybe stealing a better term paper grade from you or your fellow student.

Remember: if you develop good handling habits, and a good attitude, you won't even have to think about handling problems after a while; you'll just do it right the first time.

And, if you run in to a situation you're not sure about, just ASK! It's the best way to learn, and no one will think the less of you for it. In fact, asking is the sign of a good employee -- and a good student.

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Given a little information, both instruction librarians and those who train and supervise student workers have shown sincere interest in improving staff training and preservation awareness in the library. Postings to nonpreservation listservs such as BI-L and CIRCPLUS³ are indicative of the need for broader dissemination of this information.

Preservation awareness saves money, increases longevity of materials, and even makes the stacks look neat. Experienced library staff realize the importance of modeling for preservation awareness. The example set by those who work with and in view of the public, whether student worker, support staff, or professional librarian, does more to teach patrons good (or bad) habits and attitudes than all the signs, bookmarks, and corrective measures we can devise.

NOTES

1. "Library Instruction," in G. Edward Evans, Anthony J. Amodeo, and Thomas L. Carter, *Introduction to Library Public Services*, 5th ed. (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1992), p. 133.

2. Columbia University Libraries Preservation Committee, *Murder in the Stacks* (New York: Center for Biomedical Communications, College of Physicians & Surgeons, Columbia University, [1987]), 1 videocassette (15 min.): sd., col.; 1/2" VHS.

3. BI-L is a moderated listserv devoted to library instruction and draws membership from all types of institutions in several countries. The list is run from the State University of New York at Binghamton and is moderated by Martin Raish. Subscribe by sending the E-mail message: SUBSCRIBE BI-L *your name*. Address to: LISTSERV@bingvmb.cc.binghamton.edu.

CIRCPLUS is an electronic discussion group devoted to library circulation and access services such as collection maintenance. Subscribe by E-mail to: LISTSERV@idbsu.idbsu.edu.