

Adult Services General Materials Selection and Collection Development Policy

**Norwalk Public Library
Norwalk, Connecticut**

Revised Edition 2004

Collection Development Policy Committee

2004 Edition

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Mission Statement

The Norwalk Public Library is dedicated to free and equal access to information, knowledge, independent learning and the joys of reading for our diverse community in a clean, safe and welcoming environment.

GENERAL POLICIES

The Norwalk Public Library supports the “Library Bill of Rights” and the “Freedom to Read” statements adopted by the American Library Association. These documents are included as appendices.

1. The selection of library materials is the responsibility of the Library Director and, under his/her direction, members of the library’s professional staff in accordance with the selection policies as adopted by the Library Board of Directors.
2. Suggestions for purchase from the public are welcome and will be given serious consideration.
3. The library will attempt to maintain as balanced and varied a collection as possible. Specialization or duplication will be considered as local interest or current need dictates. Materials will be selected to cover a variety of tastes, interests, purposes and reading levels to fill the informational, recreational and educational needs of all residents of Norwalk. The library shall, from time to time, identify specific subject areas to be strengthened.
4. The library will collect materials in all formats appropriate to the purposes of the collection and the current technology.
5. Materials in languages other than English will be added based on community demographics and demand.
6. The library will not attempt to furnish textbooks and/or workbooks required for classroom or academic use. Materials for self-study or to supplement classroom study will be selected according to their appropriateness to the collection. Textbooks will be purchased only when they provide the best coverage of a subject and are useful to the general public. It is expected that each school will meet its own curriculum demands with adequate materials.
7. The professional staff will select materials according to the following criteria:
 - Suggestions from the public
 - Favorable reviews from reliable review media
 - Accuracy, quality and appropriateness of material
 - Reputation and authority of author or publication
 - Actual and potential user demand, appeal and need
 - Literary and artistic merit
 - Ability to enrich or add to collection as a whole

- Contribution the material makes to provide responsible viewpoints on controversial issues
 - Materials listed in appropriate bibliographies and sources
8. Objections to material owned by the library should be in writing, giving reason in detail, and signed. Forms are available for this purpose, and may be requested at the Reference Desk. Written objections to materials will be reviewed by the materials selection committee who will reply in writing. The decision may be appealed to the Library Board of Directors. Objections to the Board's decision may be appealed through legal remedies.
 9. The library will not label materials to indicate their political, religious or social point of view or indicate that an item is controversial. Parents or guardians are responsible for determining the suitability of content of materials used or borrowed by their minor children.
 10. The library welcomes gifts, but is not obligated to accept, or add to its collection any unsolicited gifts. The same principles of selection applied to library purchases will be applied to gifts. The library will not give a dollar valuation for gifts, but can provide the donor with a statement of the number of items and types of materials donated. Gifts not added to the collection will be given to the Friends of the Library for their book sales. Un-sellable items will be discarded.

WITHDRAWAL OF MATERIALS (Weeding)

The Norwalk Public Library strives to ensure its collection remains timely, relevant, interesting and attractive by continually withdrawing (weeding) unnecessary, outdated, worn or damaged materials. This process is accomplished within the context of our general selection criteria and consideration of adequate subject coverage, retrospective buying and budgetary guidelines. In addition to their responsibility for the general collection, the librarians are assigned specific subject areas for development and maintenance. They will determine appropriate weeding criteria for their respective areas in consultation with the other selectors.

000 Generalities, Bibliographies, Computer Science, Library Science, Publishing and Journalism

Bibliographies of particular subjects are purchased where there is a need for further references beyond our own resources.

Up-to-date books on popular or standard computer types, software programs, computer languages, or related topics are purchased to meet demand. Older materials are retained if it is felt that the public is still using the corresponding programs or computer equipment.

Materials in the field of library science are selected primarily to assist in the professional development of the staff.

Encyclopedias are chosen on the basis of their accuracy, convenience of use, readability, price and demand. [When possible, the collection is updated by revised editions, rather than by the purchase of yearbooks?]

100 Philosophy and Psychology

In the fields of philosophy, psychology, the occult and self-help, the library selects material for the general public representing all the major disciplines and interests.

200 Religion

As an educational institution, the library gives impartial recognition to diverse religious viewpoints. However, polemical works representing extreme sectarianism will be carefully evaluated. Inclusion, or exclusion of any item is based on the considerations described in the general selection criteria introducing this document, and not on the personal religious conviction of any one staff member, or group of staff members. The collection includes Bibles and other major sacred writings, as well as Biblical expositions and interpretations. General interest biographies of saints, popes, rabbis, reformers, theologians, etc. are acquired, as are the familiar writings of well-known theologians.

300 Social Sciences

The social sciences include the practical topics of interpersonal and inter-group relations in society, as well as the traditional areas of sociology, government, economics, commerce, finance, law, social issues, education and careers, customs and folklore.

The library purchases law materials written for the layperson. The library makes no attempt to acquire materials for the professional use of lawyers. The library maintains the current United States and Connecticut statutes and the City of Norwalk ordinances.

An extensive collection of up-to-date employment guides, career and vocational information, job seeking materials, and educational test study guides is maintained to meet the high need for employment resources.

Materials presenting various viewpoints on social problems or issues (abortion, substance abuse, gun control, crime, etc.) are purchased to meet the demand from students and to meet general public use.

400 Language

Materials classed in the 400's include works on language and linguistics. These materials provide coverage of the history, study and use of the English language, and include dictionaries and materials on grammar and punctuation.

Instructional materials in the major foreign languages and English as a second language are provided. Materials including bilingual dictionaries are selected based upon need and demand.

500 Natural Sciences and Mathematics

The library recognizes the need to acquire current and authoritative materials in the natural sciences and mathematics. Materials are selected to serve students and the general reader.

600 Applied Sciences and Technology

The applied sciences include the medical sciences, engineering, agriculture, home economics, business, technology, manufacturing and building.

Current and authoritative materials are selected in the fields of medical and mental health. Textbooks in these fields are purchased only when they are the best source for the information.

The library provides materials on sex education suitable for general readers of all ages, backgrounds and lifestyles. Materials selected may reflect different social and moral viewpoints. Clear, authoritative, contemporary and well-balanced treatment is chosen.

Reliable and objective material is selected on the existence, effects and treatment of drug, alcohol and other substance abuse. Materials containing information about dangerous or illegal activities are selected with caution.

Basic engineering, chemical technology texts and handbooks suitable for a public library are provided. Materials about electronics, appliance and automotive repair, carpentry, home repair and improvement are purchased based on public demand.

The library maintains a balanced business and technology collection to serve the area community.

700 Art, Music and Recreation

The library selects general works including surveys and histories in the visual arts covering a wide range of eras and styles, including but not limited to painting, drawing, sculpture, architecture, photography, landscape design, handicrafts and home decoration. Instructional titles in the above categories are purchased for the general reader. A wide range of titles on antiques and collectibles, including coins and postage stamps are acquired to meet public demand for valuation. Older encyclopedias and indexes of art and artists are retained to help in the identification of artworks.

The library selects general works including surveys and histories in the musical and performing arts covering a wide range of forms and genres. Musical scores and libretti are acquired where warranted to meet popular demand. Sheet music and full scores are not acquired except those included in songbooks. Instructional materials for voice and musical instruments, stage, film and broadcast production are purchased for the general reader. Encyclopedias, indexes and discographies are purchased for reference to meet public demand for sources of song and recorded music titles.

The library maintains materials on a wide variety of sports, games and outdoor activities. Card games, word and math puzzles, board games, billiards and magic tricks are among the games covered. No crossword puzzle books or other fill-in-the-blank puzzle books are collected.

The library collects heavily in the areas of team and individual sports that are popular in the Northeastern United States. Materials on local and regional sports teams are emphasized.

800 Literature

Essays, poetry, drama, short stories and selected works of criticism on all these forms are included in the collection. Works on techniques of communication such as professional writing and public speaking are also included.

Emphasis is given to English language literatures including award-winning authors. Representative works of world literature are included as well. Local authors are accorded special attention.

900 History, Geography, Archeology, Travel and Biography

These areas include geography, atlases, maps, travel, collective biography, genealogy, heraldry, ancient and modern history, world history and histories of

specific countries. The collection includes popular works for interested adult readers and also supports students through college age. Purchases will cover all the world's places, peoples and historical periods. Emphasis is on American and local history. Additional emphasis is placed on nations or areas figuring significantly in world events.

The library maintains an up-to-date collection of travel guides for the United State and foreign countries, including major cities.

Biographies and autobiographies of individuals that typify a wide background of social and ethnic origins are collected in addition to works by or about famous persons. Titles in popular demand, of local interest, and those that are useful to students are emphasized.

Reference Materials

General reference materials are selected to satisfy the research and information needs of adults with a variety of professions and interests, graduate and undergraduate students of local colleges and universities, and high school students. All materials must be timely, accurate, authoritative and factual. A core collection of standard sources such as encyclopedias, dictionaries and almanacs is maintained. Emphasis on special interests such as business, careers, and vocational guidance will be determined by community need and demand. Online sources are selected according to the general selection criteria. Within budgetary limits, the library will attempt to provide the greatest access possible to electronic subscriptions.

Ephemeral Materials

Because of the vast amount of current, useful and authoritative material available on the Internet through a variety of online sources including governmental websites, the library does not maintain a vertical file or general pamphlet collection. In general, the only printed materials of this type that are maintained are items that are difficult to acquire and that relate specifically to Norwalk's history, government, services and amenities.

Local History Collection

Books and other publications, including microfilm, pamphlets and news clippings of enduring value to persons seeking information on the history of Norwalk and its vicinity that constituted the larger colonial town are collected. Secondary consideration will be given to works of Connecticut and New England history. The collection includes genealogical works and family histories concerning Norwalk settlers and their descendants. Gifts of individual local families are welcomed. Local history material will not be automatically added to the collection, but will be

considered according to the general library collection criteria. The library does not collect manuscripts, original documents or unique materials. If offered, donors would be referred to the Norwalk Museum.

Norwalk File

Pamphlets, news clippings, documents and reports from local institutions and governmental bodies which might be difficult to find from other sources and that are useful for reference and of interest to the community will be collected. Local government documents will be kept for two years, after which patrons will be referred to municipal archives. Items of historical value will be retained or transferred to the Local History Collection at the discretion of the staff.

Corporation File

Annual reports and other information distributed by or solicited from local for-profit and non-profit corporations will be collected. Priority will be given to Norwalk institutions, followed by those of the immediate suburbs and Fairfield County.

Periodicals (Magazines and Newspapers)

The library provides a representative periodicals collection on a wide range of subjects with reference value and recreational interest. Emphasis is given to titles included in periodical indexes. Specialized titles are considered in relation to subject needs and their availability in area and regional libraries and in online sources. The library provides current issues of local newspapers, but does not maintain extensive back files of the titles offered, except for the Norwalk Hour. As the newspaper of record, The Hour is archived and indexed for historical and genealogical value. Archives of the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal are maintained for research value and regional interest.

Fiction (as taken from the 1994 edition)

In the selection process, the existence of a variety of types of novels and the need to satisfy readers of differing tastes, interests, purposes, and reading abilities are recognized. The library's collection, therefore, includes representative novels of the past and present, notable for literary quality and cultural value; historical and regional novels; novels related to the fields of art; industry, science, social problems, and the professions; satire, fantasy, and humor; mystery and suspense; science fiction, westerns, and adventure stories; romances; and short stories.

The library recognizes the importance of the novel in providing insight into the human situation, contributing to education, and affecting individual attitudes. A number of novels of serious purpose are purchased. Attention is paid to maintaining

a basic collection in attractive editions of standard novels, the classics, and the semi-classics of world literature.

Since each novel is ordinarily judged on its individual merits, there is no mandate to complete the holdings of a particular author's works.

Novels widely advertised or in continuing demand because of the popularity of the author's works, their conversion into film, appearance on television, or the timeliness of the theses are purchased if they are useful in answering the requests of readers, or if they will further efforts to serve a larger segment of the reading public. Representative works translated from foreign languages may be added.

Experimental novels, while often controversial, will be considered for purchase as they reflect new trends and styles of expression.

Titles written obviously and exclusively for sensational or pornographic purposes will not be chosen, but the library will not exclude a title because of objectionable language or vivid description of sex or violence if the author is dealing honestly and realistically with his/her theme. The library recognizes that any given title may offend some patrons. However, selections will not be made on the basis of any anticipated approval or disapproval, but solely on the merits, objectives, and the interests of the work in relation to the collection, the library's objectives, and the interests of the readers (see also Intellectual Freedom Statement).

Duplication *[Is this part of fiction section? Or should it be with general section?]*

The library attempts to duplicate classics and standard works in response to public demand.

Current popular books are duplicated to meet demand. The library provides some supplementary materials for school and college students, but keeps duplication of such materials to a minimum. Since it is expected that school and college libraries will assume chief responsibility for the needs of their students, generally no attempt is made to meet the demand for large class assignments. To do so would monopolize the services of the library to the detriment of their use by the general public. *[What about summer reading? Address in YA section?]*

Popular Paperbacks *[the 1994 edition treats these as a separate special collection. Should this be included with the general fiction section?]*

Gift paperbacks of recreational and popular reading will be added to our popular reading will be added to our paperback racks. *[Is the intent of the word "gift" to say that we will not purchase these types of materials? Gifts are addressed in the general criteria]* This can include romances, gothic tales, westerns, mysteries, historical novels, biography, or any book of popular reading interest.

Book Discussion Collection

The library promotes the joys of reading and supports book discussion groups within the guidelines of our general materials selection policy. Because the policy requires that we purchase multiple copies of popular titles to meet demand, it is presumed that the library will already own several copies of titles that are popular with many book discussion groups. The library sponsors its own reading group and maintains a special book discussion collection based on the selections of its members. Budgetary considerations and space limitations motivate us to encourage other groups to select from the many titles in our book discussion collection. Given that books purchased for reading groups will be absorbed into our own special collection, requests by other groups for multiple copies of titles not currently in our book discussion collection will be considered as follows:

- The titles requested should meet the criteria of our general materials selection policy.
- Priority will be given to Norwalk based groups and especially those that meet in the library.
- Only paperback editions will be purchased.
- Books with a general appeal will be emphasized over books with more limited audiences.
- Items in this collection will be withdrawn as required, based on the library's general weeding guidelines.
- The number of copies ordered will be based on the number of copies already in the library's general (not special) collection.
- Requests should be submitted on a "book group request form" at least 60 days before the book is to be discussed.
- Books will only be issued to individual members of the group.

Young Adult Materials

Young adult materials are those of special interest to people aged 11-17 and are especially selected for the informational, recreational, and educational concerns of this age group. Such materials may be found in both the adult and juvenile collections.

Young adult materials will be fluid, flexible, current and attractive, containing materials which:

1. are in demand and of high interest
2. are of special quality which will help young adults understand themselves and others
3. will broaden their viewpoints and knowledge of the world.
4. will stimulate their curiosity

5. will expand both their reading ability and reading enjoyment.

Selection will be based upon recommendations of standard reviewing sources for the young. Careful consideration is given to the wide variance within the age span of teenagers who range from the immature to the sophisticated. Selections will not be made on the basis of anticipated approval or disapproval. The library will not exclude a title because of objectionable language or vivid descriptions of sex or violence if the author is dealing honestly and realistically with his /her theme.

Non English Language Materials

Books, periodicals and non-print materials in languages other than English are selected from recommended library lists and other reliable sources. The languages emphasized are determined primarily by community demographics, need and demand. The same general selection criteria used for the larger collection is applied.

Large Print Materials

Large print materials are purchased to meet the need of the community. They are judged by our general selection criteria.

Audio Materials

Selection is by committee as with print materials. The general selection criteria are applied. A balanced collection of quality recordings including choral, orchestral, vocal, operatic, chamber and instrumental music is maintained. Also included are electronic, New Age, folk, jazz, rock, country western, bluegrass and popular music. A representative collection of ethnic and international interest, as well as musical comedy and motion picture soundtracks, prose, poetry, drama, humor, special effects and documentary recordings is sought.

Recorded books are selected according to the general selection criteria. Whenever possible, the library will purchase the unabridged editions of recorded books.

NON-PRINT MEDIA

Computer Software

The library will not purchase for circulation computer software that is specifically designed for home or personal use. Such software is usually licensed for use by an individual user or a limited number of users and often requires reinstallation of the software for continued use. Such applications typically include games, operating systems, word or data processing programs.

Audio Materials

Selection is by committee as with print materials. The general selection criteria are applied. A balanced collection of quality recordings including choral, orchestral, vocal, operatic, chamber and instrumental music is maintained. Also included are electronic, New Age [*is this term still used?*], folk, jazz, rock, country western, bluegrass and popular music. A representative collection of ethnic and international interest, as well as musical comedy and motion picture soundtracks, prose, poetry, drama, humor, special effects and documentary recordings is sought. Recorded books are selected according to the general selection criteria. Whenever possible, the library will purchase the unabridged editions of recorded books.

Visual Recordings

An attempt is made with the DVD and videocassette collections to strike a balance between popular, best selling theatrical titles, and more esoteric fare that is not readily available in retail outlets. For example, works produced for and by PBS, Shakespeare plays, travelogues, how-to titles, opera, concert tapes and the like are interspersed with selections for children, and with the aforementioned commercially popular films. Also, while the collection is ephemeral in nature, we try to develop and maintain a core collection of classic titles (e.g. Citizen Kane, Mutiny on the Bounty, Casablanca, etc.).

Our primary mission is to support reading. We will attempt, given budgetary limitations, to supply a representative collection of quality films. It is not our intent to duplicate the collections of the video and other retail outlets. In order to stretch the available funds we will purchase most items on the secondary market (used). As a result, they will become available between 30 and 90 days of their release into the marketplace. We will not accept requests / reserves for feature releases. However we will accept suggestions for consideration.

APPENDIX A

Library Bill of Rights

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

- I. 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.
- II. 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.
- III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
- IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
- V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
- VI. 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.

Adopted June 18, 1948.
Amended February 2, 1961, and January 23, 1980,
inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996,
by the ALA Council.

APPENDIX B

The Freedom to Read Statement

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continuously under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove or limit access to reading materials, to censor content in schools, to label “controversial” views, to distribute lists of “objectionable” books or authors, and to purge libraries. These 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 reading and as librarians and publishers responsible for disseminating ideas, wish to assert the public interest in the preservation of the freedom to read.

Most attempts at suppression 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 misinformation, and to make their own decisions about what they read and believe. 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.

These efforts at suppression are related to a larger pattern of pressures being brought against education, the press, art and images, films, broadcast media, and the Internet. The problem is not only one of actual censorship. The shadow of fear cast by these pressures leads, 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 accelerated change. 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 controversy and difference.

Now as always in our history, reading is among our greatest freedoms. The freedom to read and write is almost the only means for making generally available ideas or manners of expression that can initially command only a small audience. The written word is the natural medium for the new idea and the untried voice from which come the original contributions to social growth. It is essential to the extended discussion that serious

thought requires, and to the accumulation of knowledge and ideas into organized collections.

We believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. We believe that these pressures toward 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 that 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 that 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 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 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 bar access to writings on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author.*

No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political views or private lives of its creators. No society of free people can flourish that 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 expression 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 values differ, and values cannot be legislated; nor can machinery be devised that 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 expression the prejudgment of a label characterizing it or its 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 the reader cannot obtain matter fit for that 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 handed down, and the principal means of its testing and growth. The defense of the freedom to read 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 the written word. We do so because we believe that it is 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, July 12, 2000, by the ALA Council and the AAP Freedom to Read Committee.

A Joint Statement by:
[American Library Association](#) and
[Association of American Publishers](#)

Subsequently Endorsed by:

- [American Association of University Professors](#)
- [American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression](#)
- [American Society of Journalists and Authors](#)
- [American Society of Newspaper Editors](#)
- [Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith](#)
- [Association of American University Presses](#)
- [Center for Democracy & Technology](#)
- [The Children's Book Council](#)
- [The Electronic Frontier Foundation](#)
- [Feminists for Free Expression](#)
- [Freedom to Read Foundation](#)
- [International Reading Association](#)

- [The Media Institute](#)
- [National Coalition Against Censorship](#)
- [National PTA](#)
- [Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays](#)
- [PEN American Center](#)
- [People for the American Way](#)
- [Student Press Law Center](#)
- [The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression](#)