

Card Catalogue Maintenance and Accessibility of Materials

INTRODUCTION

The main function of libraries is to conserve and organize the world's resources of recorded information for current and future use. Therefore, the primary role of librarians is that of seeing that the literature in libraries is so well organized that these materials are readily accessible to library users. It has been known that the lack of good management of library records, for example, the library catalogues, has led to the frustration of many library users. Access to information consists of bibliographic identification and location of the record. The bibliographic information so received should reveal the location and format of the materials.

THE LIBRARY CATALOGUES

The library catalogue is the key to the library's resources for it gives an inventory of the library's holdings. In any library, the catalogue serves three main functions:-

- (a) It describes all items catalogued to a degree of precision thereby permitting positive identification.
- (b) It establishes and describes the relationships of all items catalogued in terms of authorship or sponsorship and the continuity of bibliographic history.
- (c) It serves as a finding list.

This last function of a catalogue as a finding list, is certainly the most important. Problems arising from the catalogues will depend on the type of catalogue and the classification system used by the library. The Catalogue of any library must be arranged according to some plan. There are three types of card catalogues and the particular type chosen will depend on the needs of a particular library. The three types of card catalogues are:-

- (i) A *dictionary catalogue*, in which all entries are filed in one alphabetical sequence.
- (ii) A *divided catalogue*, in which all subject are filed in one catalogue while all author, title, and added entry cards are filed in another.
- (iii) A *classified catalogue*, in which cards are arranged by their classification number.

Classification in libraries has three main functions of shelf arrangement, subject retrieval and linkage between the catalogues and the shelves. In a Divided Catalogue, the catalogue has three approaches to it namely:-

(a) Author Title Catalogue

Here cards are filed alphabetically by author, editor, title and series of the work. This approach is helpful to users who already know a book by its author, editor, title or series. The call mark on the catalogue card is important for retrieving the books from the shelves.

(b) Subject Catalogue

Here cards are filed alphabetically by the subject

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matter of the book. This approach is useful for finding out what materials the library has on a particular subject.

(c) Shelf List Catalogue

Here cards are filed by their classification numbers or call marks. The shelf list catalogue provides an indirect subject approach to the resources of the library. To consult it, a user must know the classmark of the subject he wishes to check.

Thus the catalogue is one of the most important instruments in the library. For the user, it provides an organized access route to the collection and for the library staff, it is a vital tool for the technical processing and readers' services functions of the library.

REASONS FOR INACCESSIBILITY OF MATERIALS

Catalogue growth creates a number of problems demanding managerial considerations. Some of these problems lead to inaccessibility of materials that are actually in the library. Failure by a user to obtain the item desired does not necessarily mean that he does not know how to look for the material but because of several other reasons that are not usually the readers fault but the fault of the Cataloguing Section of the library (since they are directly responsible for the upkeep of the catalogues). Some of the main causes of inaccessibility of materials to users are:-

- (1) The particular book sought is on loan.
- (2) The book sought is in the Bindery for repairs.
- (3) The reference given by lecturer is inaccurate. Misspelling of names of authors may lead to been found or replaced with a new one.
- (4) Not available in the library.

- (5) The book is in the library and has been processed but the cards have not yet been filed in the catalogue so there is no official record of the book in the catalogue.
- (6) Lack of cross-references.
- (7) Misfiling of cards.
- (8) Books are misshelved.
- (9) Information about the book is missing in the catalogue (cards torn, lost or removed but have not been replaced)
- (10) Book being browsed at by a reader at the time it is needed by author reader.

Accessibility of materials poses a big problem in large libraries for it is sometimes impossible to get a particular book for a reader at the time he needs it. Some of these problems of inaccessibility can be taken up by the management to minimise frustration caused to users.

WAYS OF SOLVING SOME OF THESE PROBLEMS

It is difficult to keep the card catalogue either accurate or fully up-to-date because of the reasons enumerated above. The catalogues are, therefore, frequently unreliable for the location of individual titles. Some of these problems have to be contended with but most of them can be solved by the library staff.

A sub-section called the Catalogue Maintenance should be created within the Cataloguing Section of the library whose primary function should be that of trying to keep the catalogues up-to-date. This sub-section should be responsible for the following:-

- (1) The professional in charge of this sub-section should revise and cross-check cards that have been interfiled by the library assistants before the cards are finally dropped. Accurate filing is of great importance for misfiling can interpret that the material in question is not available in the library. While doing this, the professional should not only be checking the proper arrangement of cards but should also be looking out for errors in cataloguing which should be corrected promptly. Note should also be made where guides or references are needed.
- (2) Incorrect, soiled, old and torn cards should be removed and replaced promptly with new ones.
- (3) Used materials should be shelved daily and in their correct places to make them available to users when needed.
- (4) Books sent in for binding or repair should also be indicated in pencil on the card catalogue so that staff would know where the book is. This indication should however be erased when the book is back to the shelves.

- (5) When books are lost, the cards should be drawn and only replaced when the book has either been found or replaced with a new one.
- (6) Books awaiting to be catalogued should be placed on the shelves marked "unprocessed" within each subject area so that they can be more readily available to borrowers on request only.
- (7) Temporary flimsy slips should be made for materials that have been received but not yet catalogued and filed in their proper places in the Author/Title catalogue so readers can know that the material is available in the library but is not yet ready for borrowing. If such materials are urgently required by readers, they could be processed rapidly for them.
- (8) Additionally, readers should be told that they could use the continuously available professional assistance of the library staff. It is also important that readers be told that no library is self-sufficient in providing all possible services they might demand. Some of these demands could be satisfied by means of inter-library cooperation.

CONCLUSION

Although it is common knowledge that it is difficult to keep a library catalogue up-to-date, the creation of a sub-section in the Cataloguing Section called the Catalogue Maintenance Sub-section should be able to minimise most of these problems associated with inaccessibility of materials in the library. This sub-section should be in charge of not only the maintenance of the catalogue but the book stacks also. They should act as liaison between the book stacks and the catalogues. In this way they will be able to correct the mistakes both in the catalogues and shelves. This should lead to users satisfaction which is the primary aim of librarians.

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