THE GAME OF LIBRARY : USING A SHELF-BASED ADDRESS SYSTEM

An empty space!

Books needing space!

“Tetris” the books!

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What is a shelf-based address system?
- An alternative shelving system in which you give items a physical address based on where they are located on the shelves.

Why would you consider using one?
- No more shifting! Items do not have to remain in call number order because they are found based on shelf they live on. You can shelve materials in any available space.
- Re-shelving of materials takes minimal training. This is a great way to use volunteers who might not have as much familiarity with library shelving systems.
- Flexibility to keep materials together that might necessarily be classified together. Such as a collection of special project books or a number of titles from a certain fund.

When and where might you use an address system?
- Non-public spaces where materials may be stored permanently, particularly areas where materials need to move in quickly and/or sporadically.
- Areas where shifting to keep in call number order is difficult or too time consuming.
- Places where you may need to locate continuing series but can’t predict how much space they will need in the future (changing volume size and number of issues).

Setting up a shelf-based system:
- Label ranges with number and side A/B
- Label shelves by bay/SFU number and by shelf number.
- Label monographs with shelf address in advance or when requested.
- Assign all serial volumes the address of the first volume for the whole series; this allows quick find & replace to allow easier re-addressing if relocating later
- Enter the address for each item into the corresponding item record as a “public note” (or whatever makes sense for your library software and catalog)

Learn from our mistakes! Here’s how to prevent problems:
- Invest the time up front to label accurately both on the physical item and in the catalog. Trying to find items without an address can be like looking for a needle in a haystack without documentation about where it’s been.
- If moving items, enter the new address in the item records and correct address labels on physical volumes immediately.
- Avoid the “leading zero” problem when asking library software or Excel to put in order. Add zero’s before single digits for ranges, SFUs, shelves.
- Consider adding “series start” to serials volumes with addresses that match the first volume rather than the shelf they actually sit on to avoid confusion when re-shelving.

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