



Friends of Libraries Section

FLS creates a network to connect and inspire Friends groups in all types of libraries to support the New York library community.

Book Sales: Donations and Remainders

Some Ideas Worth Sharing!

Nearly every library, every staff member, and the Friends must deal with donations for their book sale or bookstore. Fairly often, there is a somewhat knee-jerk response when customers ask about donating: "the limit is two cartons." Think about the guidelines you have developed for donated materials. Are they reasonable? Are they welcoming?

In general, people just want to support the library and they believe their donations will help the Friends raise money. People that embrace books also do not want these resources to become "waste." They see libraries and book sales as the best form of recycling or reusing books.

On your website, show people how easy it is to donate. The Friends of the Orchard Park Public Library have a photo of a sign and the bench where they want the public to place their donations. (<https://www.friendsofoplibrary.org/how-you-can-help/Donate-Books-and-Materials/2>) Now you know what you're looking for in the library's lobby! And with a stroke of marketing genius, when patrons arrive with their box, the Friends bulletin board is right there on the wall telling donors how to join the Friends, what activities the group is currently working on, and when the next book sale will be. The Friends of the Poughkeepsie Public Library District have a pod behind their bookstore where donations can be placed. Alternately, on Saturday mornings, people can bring their contributions and place them in the library's van at the central library. (<https://poklib.org/donations/>)

Please watch your language. What do you tell your potential donors about the materials you will take for sale?

- No musty books
- Nothing with stains, no mold, mildew
- Nothing that is damp
- No Readers Digest Condensed Books
- No textbooks or encyclopedias
- Only bring two cartons, weighing less than 40 lbs. each, ***on alternate Tuesdays, when the moon is full....***

See what I'm saying?

Try to reframe your guidelines in a friendly way, for example, "We gladly accept items in good, clean condition." Or to quote the Friends of the Poughkeepsie Public Library District, "**Your donations must be in good enough condition for others to want to buy them!**" Point taken. Hopefully stressing saleable condition and using positive phrasing will keep unusable donations from being brought in the first place.

Instead of putting CANNOT all in caps and bolded, why not try a more apologetic tone like the Friends of the Tompkins County Public Library in Ithaca, "Sorry we can't take...books with broken bindings." (<https://www.booksale.org/donate>). They also share this gem: **"If you would not give it to a friend, please don't give it to the Friends!"** Catchy and memorable! They also include photographs of items in poor condition that they cannot accept to drive home the point.

Outside of library circles, the term "weeding" isn't widely understood. If your Friends group sells items that have been discarded from the library's collection, try this: ***We also sell items that the librarians have removed from the shelves to make room for new purchases.*** (courtesy of the Chandler [Arizona] Public Library). Makes those books seem a bit more desirable in your sale!

The Friends of the Clifton Park-Halfmoon Library say "We welcome your donations! By following these guidelines, you will be helping the Friends and your Library by keeping our costs down and our profits up." Now there's a positive spin! See their webpage for more ideas: <https://www.friendsofcphlibrary.org/guidelines-for-donations.html>

Whether your donation guidelines are on a bulletin board or your webpage:

- Please use positive phrases whenever possible.
- Request that people use bags or boxes to contain their donation
- Provide a way for donors to get their questions answered – a phone number or an e-mail address to reach the Friends

As a final way to soften the blow if the Friends cannot use the donations, provide space on the Friends webpage to offer alternatives of what to do with the materials that are not in saleable condition which the Friends cannot accept. The Friends of Clifton Park – Halfmoon Public Library's page tells residents where materials can be taken, to a local recycling center that will take items free of charge. They provide a telephone number for the transfer station to call for more information.

Do a little homework and contact local thrift stores to see what their restrictions are about book donations. Inform the library staff so they can confidently refer patrons to Goodwill, Volunteers of America, and other nonprofits when the Friends are unable to take the donated items. Find out if other groups in town will take magazines or maps for crafting or activities for their clients. The local Rotarians may take books for pre-K to grade 12 for their "Books for the World" initiative. The American Library Association publishes a fact sheet about book donations, including used book sellers and vendors who partner with nonprofits to sell books or recycle them (<http://libguides.ala.org/book-donations>). The library is all about information and referring people to community resources.

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