

Handouts from Breakout Session: Reader's Advisory
Appeal Factors – How People Choose Books to Read

Fontana Regional Library
Annual Staff Training – April 16, 2008

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Pacing

- Characters and plot quickly or slowly unveiled?
- More dialogue or description?
- Densely written?
- Are sentences, paragraphs and chapters short or long?
- Multiple plot lines, flashbacks, alternating chapters or linear plot?
- Do characters act or react to events?
- Is book end or open-end oriented?
- What is pattern of pacing?

Characterization

- Developed over time or immediately recognizable stereotypes?
- Focus on single character or several intertwined?
- Whose point of view?
- Are characters most important element of book?
- Is reader expected to identify with characters or to observe them?

- Are there series characters, followed through and developed over several related novels?
- Memorable and important secondary characters?

Storyline

- Emphasizes people or situations and events?
- What is author's intention regarding storyline?
- Is focus more interior and psychological or exterior and action oriented?

Frame

- Is background detailed or minimal?
- Does the frame affect the tone or atmosphere?
- Is there a special background?

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RA To-Do and NOT-To-Do List

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Remember, fiction subject headings in normal cataloging are not specific enough, therefore:

- Do **NOT** refer a user to an OPAC
- Do **NOT** use an OPAC yourself as a first resort

Remember, your best source of information is the user asking you for a suggestion, therefore:

- Do **NOT** ignore the user's unsolicited comments
- Do **NOT** assume that the reader has NOT read other titles by the author without asking first
- **DO** ask readers what they liked about the book and what they're in the mood for this time
- **DO** talk to the user while you are searching in case clarifying information is offered or needed

Remember to appear "askable," therefore:

- **DO** say "hello"
- **DO** project friendly, NOT nervous, demeanor
- **DO** follow-up if you have to send the person off while you help someone else

Remember that Amazon.com “readalikes” are generated by sales figures, not an analysis of what or why someone really likes or wants at the particular time you encounter them.

Remember “weird” user restrictions, and make sure you can help the person before offering interlibrary loan if there are residency requirements.

Remember that research on RA shows that the largest problem is non-use of RA tools, therefore, do **NOT** assume that you cannot help someone because you have not read the title yourself.

Handouts from Breakout Session: Reader's Advisory
Tips on Self-Training for Reader's Advisory Work With Adults

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Be A Friend

- Make your relationship with users a relationship of equals.
- Don't build yourself up by being an "expert."
- Guide them to their self-knowledge by helping them define their needs and interests narrowly:
 - "I want a book on gardening."
 - "They're over here; do you want a big general book or are you thinking of something specific like pruning, shrubs, mulch, greenhouses or perennials?"
 - "I want a good mystery."
 - "We have a lot of good ones. Do you like any particular kind? English village one? Lady detectives? Hard-boiled and gritty? Scary?"
- Do not say "clean ones" before they do, or you'll shut them up. Also, try not to promise books more pristine than possible.
- Do not make assumptions about users' interests, tastes, reading levels or intelligence based on age, sex, dress, etc. Everyone is equal.
- Learn about now books and forever books. Danielle Steel writes now books; Anne Taylor writes forever books.
- Both kinds of books are essential to all users.

- “Now” books tell us how to talk to people at parties or assure us that we will pass through our current age or passage, or they give us a very contemporary look at current problems.
- “Forever” books deal with such things as long term relationships, philosophy, history and an analysis of the human condition.

Techniques for Becoming More Aware of Books

- Stop reading books cover to cover. You are not a literary critic. You are a guide to reading.
- Consider books you recommend as stimulants to thinking, not as definitive answers. Good books provoke thinking instead of answers.
- For two months, read Publishers Weekly, the New York Times Book Review and one or more genre fan magazines like Romantic Times, Locus or Mystery Buff. Read the articles and pay close attention to the ads. Do not read the reviews. The text and ads will give you a feeling for the publishing world – all the hustling and changes in the world of books outside libraries. Who buys what? What is reprinted? How are covers chosen? What are the trends and controversies? What authors are winning awards or being featured?
- Do not waste time reading Virginia Kirkus Reviews unless you have the book in hand for comparison, or unless you must order from the reviews. If the latter, remember that there are other pre-publication sources now such as “Forecasts” in Publishers Weekly, “PrePub Alert” in Library Journal and “Up Front” in Booklist.
- Use a little time to read periodicals you never usually touch such as Ladies Home Journal, The Economist, GQ, Esquire, Gun Dog, Entertainment Weekly or TV Guide.
- Read a major national newspaper and your local equivalent every day. Every single day!
- Read neighborhood, city or county newspapers at least twice a week.
- Browse regularly in mall, superstore and second-hand paperback bookstores. Besides studying what titles are being featured and how they are packaged, look also at how displays are managed and space is used.

Keeping Records

- Become familiar with at least 25 new adult books every week.
- Make a 3x5 or hypercard with a one-sentence synopsis for each book and a comment on other books similar to it. File these by subject, genre or author, whichever is more useful to you. Soon you will have a huge background building up with links to other books in your mind as well as in your cards.
- Do not use other people's lists unless you revise, copy onto cards or add to them. Doing something physical about a book, like writing down information about it, implants it on your brain.
- Read one book by a popular prolific author and one by a literary award winning author, and then update your file by blurb reading on other books by those authors. Examples would be Sidney Sheldon and Margaret Atwood.
- Read or scan carefully every book on the New York Times and Publishers Weekly bestseller lists. Do not judge them. Think instead about why they are read and who likes to read them. Media blitz alone does not make a bestseller.
- Roam the stacks. Talk to users. Ask their opinions. Check which books have lots of circulation and take some home to scan, regardless of subject.
- Read out of your genre. For example, if you don't know anything about science fiction, get titles from the Hugo or Nebula Awards or the best selling lists in Locus and read in the genre until you do know something.
- Repeat – Keep notes on what you read!
- Talk to co-workers who are different from you about what they read and why.
- Talk to users about what they read and about what the library doesn't have enough of. Accost them [gently] at the paperback racks and new book shelves. You'll get a few rebuffs, but also many enlightening ideas.
- The circulation staff gets a lot of feedback about the collection that you never get at an information desk. See if you can put in a stint at the circ desk every once in a while so you can talk to users about the books they are checking out and returning. Also, interview the circ staff about what they hear and what they themselves read regularly.

- Ask yourself – What do men read? Women? Teenagers? Why do so many people buy the National Enquirer?
- Never assure a user that he or she “will love this book.” We only give conditional recommendations, not guarantees.
- Don't use terms like “fiction” and “nonfiction” with the public too much. They are meaningless to most people. Use “mystery,” “thriller,” “romance,” “biography,” “true crime” and “historical novel” instead.
- Be honest. Never say you've read a book if you haven't. If you really hate a book, say, “The critics like it,” or some such.

Handouts from Breakout Session: Reader's Advisory
A Model for the Process of Choosing a Book for Pleasure

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Reading Experience Wanted: The “What Mood Am I In?” Test

Readers tended to say that mood at the time of reading was more important for choosing fiction than non-fiction.

- Familiarity vs. novelty
- Safety vs. risk
- Easy vs. challenging
- Upbeat and positive vs. hard-hitting, ironic or critical
- Do I want to be reassured, stimulated, frightened, amazed?
- Do I want my beliefs and values to be confirmed or to be challenged by an uncomfortable but stimulating new perspective?

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Improve Interpersonal Communication

Mistake #1 – Immediately turning to OPAC and losing eye contact with patron.

Remedy #1 – Look at patron, explain what you're doing, invite them to look at OPAC while moving through the search.

Mistake #2 – Leaving patron at the desk while you search for specific books or co-workers to help.

Remedy #2 – Look at patron and ask if they'd care to join you as you search for books on the shelf. Tell patron you're asking a co-worker for help. Make a quick phone call to the co-worker or walk to where they are and ask.

Mistake #3 – Ignoring patron's comments and clarifications about what they're looking for can lead to prolonged and uneventful searching.

Remedy #3 – Listen and use what they're telling you – jot a few notes down and take it with you.

Mistake #4 – Not appearing “askable” and not greeting patrons; continuing a conversation with a co-worker instead of stopping to help the patron first.

Remedy #4 – Be alert to patrons approaching or already in your area of library; smile and greet them first; cease talking to co-worker immediately and give your whole attention to patron.

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Reader's Advisory Service in the Public Library

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Popular Fiction

Action – Adventure

Features a hero on a mission, overcoming danger and obstacles to reach goal

Dale Brown
Tom Clancy

Clive Cussler
W. E. B. Griffin

Jack Higgins
Wilbur Smith

Crime – Caper

Told from the point of view of the flawed, often amoral protagonists;
complicated plots; runs the gamut from noir to more comedic

Lawrence Sanders
James Ellroy

Carl Hiaasen
Elmore Leonard

Lawrence Sanders
Donald Westlake

Fantasy

Portrays magic in a world that could never exist

Terry Brooks
Jim Butcher
Charles de Lint
David Eddings

Raymond E. Feist
Neil Gaiman
Terry Goodkind
Robert Jordan

Mercedes Lackey
George R. R. Martin
L. E. Modessitt, Jr.
Terry Pratchett

Gentle Reads

Feel-good books with no sex, violence or strong language

Jennifer Chiaverini
Richard Paul Evans
Philip Gulley
Jan Karon

Joan Medlicott
Robin Pilcher
Jeanne Ray
Anne B. Ross

Nicholas Sparks
Adriana Trigiani
Marcia Willett

Historical

Set in the past with a serious respect for historical accuracy and detail

Jean Auel	W. Michael Gear and	Sharon Kay Penman
Tracy Chevalier	Kathleen O'Neal	Anne Perry
Donald Coldsmith	Margaret George	Edward Rutherfurd
Bernard Cornwell	John Lakes	Jeff Shaara
Diana Gabaldon		

Horror

Produces fear in readers, contains a monster of some type and super-natural elements figure prominently

Clive Barker	Laurell K. Hamilton	Dean R. Koontz
Poppy Z. Brite	Stephen King	Anne Rice

Literary Fiction

Critically acclaimed, often award-winning, character-centered, provocative, elegantly written works

Margaret Atwood	Barbara Kingsolver	Richard Russo
Louise Erdrich	Toni Morrison	Jane Smiley
Alice Hoffman	Chuck Palahniuk	Amy Tan
John Irving	Arturo Perez-Reverte	Anne Tyler

Mysteries

Puzzles, filled with clues that readers and detectives (police, private, amateur) attempt to solve to discover whodunit

Nevada Barr	Janet Evanovich	Alexander McCall Smith
M. C. Beaton	Sue Grafton	Sara Paretsky
Lilian Jackson Braun	P. D. James	Robert B. Parker
Patricia D. Cornwell	Jonathan Kellerman	Elizabeth Peters

Romance

Focuses on the development and satisfactory resolution of the love relationship

Mary Balogh	Julie Garwood	Debbie Macomber
Jo Beverley	Rachel Gibson	Susan Elizabeth Phillips
Millie Criswell	Jayne Ann Krentz/	Mary Jo Putney
Jennifer Crusie	Amanda Quick/	Nora Roberts/
Kathleen Eagle	Jayne Castle	J. D. Robb

Romantic Suspense

Combines hard-edged Suspense with sensual Romance

Sandra Brown

Catherine Coulter

Tami Hoag

Linda Howard

Iris Johansen

Elizabeth Lowell

Science Fiction

Speculative fiction, often set in the future, that explores moral, social, intellectual, philosophical and ethical questions against a setting outside of everyday reality

Catherine Asaro

Greg Bear

Ben Bova

Lois McMaster Bujold

Orson Scott Card

Brian Herbert

Anne McCaffrey

Jack McDevitt

Elizabeth Moon

Michael D. Resnick

Davie Weber

Connie Willis

Suspense

Fast-paced stories in which tension builds as protagonists are placed in perilous situations

Lee Child

Mary Higgins Clark

Harlan Coben

Michael Connelly

Jeffery Deaver

Greg Iles

James Patterson

Thomas Perry

John Sandford

Psychological Suspense

Thomas Cook

Ruth Rendell/

Barbara Vine

Minette Walters

Thrillers

Gripping, plot-centered stories, set in the detailed framework of a particular profession that places heroes or heroines in dangerous situations from which they must extricate themselves

David Baldacci

Dan Brown

Robin Cook

Michael Crichton

Tess Gerritsen

James Grippando

John Grisham

Tim R. LaHaye and

Jerry B. Jenkins

Steve Martini

Douglas J. Preston and

Lincoln Child

Lisa Scottoline

Stuart Woods

Women's Lives and Relationships

Explores the reaches of women's lives, personally and professionally, and the distinctive way women deal with these concerns

Elizabeth Berg

Maeve Binchy

Popular Nonfiction

Adventure – Survival – Exploration – Disaster

True tales of human beings prevailing against the elements, the unknown, or both

Chris Bonnington
Barry Clifford
Tony Horwitz
Sebastian Junger

Jon Krakauer
Edward E. Leslie
Piers Paul Read

David Roberts
Tim Severin
Spike Walker

Animals – Nature – Natural History

Stories of the animal kingdom/natural world and its interactions with human beings

Diane Ackerman
David Attenborough
Gretel Ehrlich
Jane Goodall

Sue Hubbell
Jeffrey Masson
Peter Matthiessen

Farley Mowat
Michael Pollan
David Quammen

Contemporary Issues

Politics, social questions and “hot topics” in civic life

Noam Chomsky
Barbara Ehrenreich
Thomas L. Friedman
Tracy Kidder

Michael Moore
Ishmael Reed
Eric Schlosser

Hunter S. Thompson
George F. Will
Bob Woodward

Crime and Criminals

True crime and tales of crimes and criminals, past and present

Jeff Benedict
Vincent Bugliosi
Alan Dershowitz
Robert Graysmith

Jay Robert Nash
Jack Olsen
Nicholas Pileggi

Ann Rule
Harold Schechter
Joseph Wambaugh

History and Microhistory

Examinations ranging from the history of the world to the intricacies of the smallest aspects of history and events

Thomas Cahill
Kenneth C. Davis
Antonia Fraser
Doris Kearns Goodwin

John Keegan
Mark Kurlansky
Erik Larson

David G. McCullough
Richard Rhodes
Simon Winchester

Humor

Includes the writings of contemporary humorists, from journalists to social and political commentators to comedians

Dave Barry	Bill Cosby	P. J. O'Rourke
Roy Blount, Jr.	Ian Frazier	David Sedaris
George Carlin	Garrison Keillor	Gary Trudeau
Andrei Codrescu		

Memoirs and Biography

Stories from the lives of the famous and not so famous, including intimate first-person accounts and sweeping studies

Maya Angelou	Joseph J. Ellis	Kitty Kelley
Rick Bragg	Homer Hickman	Ross King
Jill Ker Conway	Mary Karr	Garry Wills
Annie Dillard		

Popular Culture – Sociology – Lifestyles – Entertainment

Highlights the new and the popular; reflections on personalities as well as on the way we live

Art Bell	John Gray	Robert D. Putnam
Roger Ebert	Bob Greene	Studs Terkel
Anne Edwards	Michael Gross	Calvin Trillin
Marc Eliot		

Popular Science

Scientific expertise, theories and technology made accessible to the common reader

James Burke	John McPhee	Dava Sobel
Martin Gardner	Richard Preston	James Trefil
James Gleick	Oliver W. Sacks	Carl Zimmer
Stephen Hawking		

Self-Help – Inspirational – Sociology

Wide-ranging advice on how to "live a good life"

Richard Carlson	Tenzin Gyatso,	Thomas Moore
Deepak Chopra	the Dalai Lama	Kathleen Norris
Stephen R. Covey	Harold Kushner	Robert Schuller
James Dobson	Max Lucado	

Sports

Captures the spirit of specific sports and those who participate in them

Roger Angell	David Halberstam	Glenn Stout
Bob Costas	Roger Kahn	Rick Telander
Frank Deford	Rick Reilly	Richard Whittingham
John Feinstein		

Travelogues

Stories for armchair and intrepid travelers alike

Bill Bryson	Frances Mayes	Eric Newby
Tim Cahill	Peter Mayle	Jonathan Raban
William Least Heat-Moon	Jan Morris	Paul Theroux
Peter Jenkins		

Sure Bets

"Titles that appeal consistently to a wide range of readers, from fans of the particular genre to others beyond"

Fiction

Sandra Cisneros	"Caramelo"
Harlan Coben	"Tell No One"
Joseph Garber	"Vertical Run"
Thomas Perry	"Vanishing Act"
Jeanne Ray	"Julie and Romeo"
Adriana Trigiani	"Big Stone Gap" trilogy, "Lucia, Lucia"

Nonfiction

Maya Angelou	"I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"
Bill Bryson	"In a Sunburned Country"
Mark Kurlansky	"Salt: a World History"
	"Cod: a Biography of the Fish That Changed the World"
	"1968: the Year that Rocked the World"
Erik Larson	"The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, Madness at the Fair that Changed America"
James McManus	"Positively Fifth Street"
Bailey White	"Mama Makes Up Her Mind: and Other Dangers of Southern Living"

Excerpts from Joyce G. Saricks, Readers' Advisory Service in the Public Library, Third Edition (Chicago: American Library Association, 2005).