

Focus

In the last few years there has been a shift from bibliographical classification to reader interest classification and this has been seen across fiction and non-fiction.

What are the advantages and disadvantages for fiction?

Organising fiction by genre can improve:

Access – it's faster, easier and lowers barriers so supporting inclusion.

(A US study found 89.2% of librarians saw an increased borrowing; [School Library Connection | Surveying Genreification and the Results](#))

Browsing – it is student centred as it focuses on preferences rather than authors.

Students can discover similar books so developing tastes and read a wider range of texts within their interest area.

(Open University Reading for Pleasure research argues that adolescents are more likely to engage in voluntary reading when they have access to books that match their interests and when young people can identify and access texts that genuinely appeal to them. [New Course to Support Children's Reading for Pleasure | Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies](#))

Independence - it encourages self-selection and reduces reliance on staff. It can be peer led with some categories gaining popularity.

For the librarian - it helps with stock awareness and the development of a more balanced collection. Highlights gaps to help target new acquisitions.

Arguments against organising fiction by genre include:

Standardisation – this is lacking across libraries so pupils may not learn standardised navigation skills.

Limiting- It can restrict browsing and serendipitous discovery, this can be seen as limiting the range of students reading.

Genre categorising is subjective -so reflects librarian bias when categorising into genre, pupils may look in a different genre for the books they seek as books tend to span multiple genre. This may hinder pupils looking for specific authors or titles.

Time consuming to set up as it involves reviewing the entire fiction collection, this time might be better spent on reader development, book promotion, stock selection or literacy interventions. Maintenance.

Labelled books can become unsightly, best practice is to apply these under the plastic jacket at the bottom of the spine. Ideally school library service books should have labels removed before they are returned.

Limited robust research base, most evidence is self-reported perception and it could be that other factors such as new signage or additional promotion causes an increase in borrowing rather than genreification itself.

What does the library need to achieve? Ofsted does not dictate an organisational system but does require pupils to:

- learn research and knowledge skills
- undertake reading that contributes to empathy and cultural awareness
- demonstrate breadth of reading
- undertake voluntary reading
- be independent as readers

And libraries need to provide:

- evidence of a reading for pleasure culture
- opportunities for students to explore
- opportunities for students to practice navigational and research skills

So what's best practice?

- Allow some space for alphabetical fiction – not everything needs to be shoehorned into a genre. Ensure books are alphabetical within each genre.
- Remember it is a 'user centred' system, use student voice to shape categories, survey their interests before you start and remain flexible as trends change.
- Ensure that the books are also discoverable through the catalogue.
- Create cross-genre recommendations and displays to encourage branching out into new interest areas.
- Create special collections (award winners, diverse voices, quick reads, graphic novels) to encourage breadth of reading and highlight quality reads to raise standards.
- Be diligent about ongoing evaluation; monitor borrowing data, seek student feedback and monitor reading engagement outcomes.
- Fiction and non-fiction pairing – encourages disciplinary reading. Can be temporary displays or a more permanent organisation strategy.

If you are considering reorganising your library by genre then here's what's involved:

- ✓ assigning genres
- ✓ relabelling books
- ✓ rearranging the library shelving
- ✓ moving all the books
- ✓ updating the library management system
- ✓ changing catalogue records
- ✓ maintaining consistency for future acquisitions.

The school library service will aid schools through this process as part of our subscription or as bought in advisory days.