

Too Many Books?



There are plenty of wonderful reasons to own books.

Books help us through difficult times, bring us to new places, and teach us new things. They make us think, they touch us deeply, and in some way our collections tell a story about our lives. Many people have grown up with a deep respect for books and the written word, and the books in their collections are either old friends, or the promise of new friendships, places and adventures.

If you have lots of room for all your books, if they are well-maintained and dust-free, and if each one makes you smile every time you pass by it – by all means, keep all of your books!

But this is often not the case. Frequently, people hold onto too many books way past their “shelf life,” causing clutter, space constraints, and even health and safety issues. The thought of parting with these books causes anxiety and resistance. From my experience, this seems to be a normal occurrence – and I’ve come to believe that one of the hardest things to organize and part with is our books.

Questions to ask yourself about your book collection:

- **When did I last review all of my books?** Are they up to date, do they reflect my current interests and passions? Am I really ever going to read or refer to each one of them?!
- **Do I have space for all the books I am keeping?** Would some of the valuable real estate they occupy be better used for more important things?
- **Why am I really keeping all these books?** Are any kept out of guilt (e.g. because “X” gave it to me, or about the money spent), unrealistic expectations of some kind (e.g. I “should” know about this topic), or some odd sense of what their presence means (e.g. they make me look or feel smart or educated!)?
- **Do I take care of these books?** Are they dust and mold free, and do they present a safety hazard to anyone – e.g. precarious piles?
- **Do any of these books reflect back topics that have negative associations** – e.g. old chapters in my life that are best let go...?

Karen G. Kramer - Space to Breathe
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Here are some things to think about that will help as you consider reducing the number of books you own:

- **Come to terms with the fact that *you can't read it all!*** Culling your book collection is an important choosing you need to do, a sorting of what's worth your time and what's not . . . a skill we all need to cultivate in these times of "endless" and "overload"
- **Remember that books tend to serve their purpose for a period of time.** It's good to make room for the next phase, and keep things "flowing" physically and energetically.
- **Notice if the crowded and overstuffed nature of your book shelves is making *you* feel congested or overwhelmed in some way.** Or if many never-touched books are creating a stagnant energy in your life.
- **Keep firmly in mind the benefits of culling your book collection** – the needed space you will gain, the pleasure of an artfully arranged, orderly book shelf, the health benefits, and the good feeling about those who will benefit from your donated books.

Tackling your whole book collection can feel like a daunting task, and getting started is often challenging. Here are a few tips that will make the process much easier:

- **You don't have to do all of the book culling at one time. Start with a small group of books** that are easiest for you to let go, what I sometimes call "the low-hanging fruit"! Actually get the books out of the house, see how that feels, and give yourself credit for taking this step.
- **Put away some of the books you *might* reread someday.** See if you miss them! In the least, they won't be taking up "prime real estate" and you will free up space for more important items and activities. Maybe after a few months, or a year, you'll be able to let them go.
- **Index books before giving them away** – keep a list of titles, authors, topics, what you particularly liked about them, etc., allowing you to hold on to them in a certain way.

Fortunately there are good ways to dispose of books in an environmentally-friendly, socially-conscious manner:

- **Donate to a good cause**, e.g. your local library, rehab and senior centers, schools, shelters, books for soldiers, charitable organizations that make money from reselling books. For a full list of resources, see the article called: **Resources for Charitable Donations** on the [Advice](#) page of my website.
- **Offer books on Freecycle or Craig's List Free.**
- **Sell them to a used book store, at a yard sale, or on-line.**
- **Find out about free online book trading communities.**
- **Try your own version of small scale sharing.** Set up a swap in your school, church or gym. (For a "novel" idea, check out the Little Free Library movement, littlefreelibrary.org).

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Once you've gotten your book-collection down to its proper size, here are a few clutter-free ways to deal with books going forward:

- **Cull your book collection on a regular basis** (ideally once a year). Ask yourself whether you are still interested in these books, whether they are up to date, and whether you could more easily get this or better information from the Internet.
- **Choose a certain finite space for books in your home**, and let that determine how many you will keep.
- **Try a Kindle or the like**, and see if this works for you – perhaps even for one category of books.
- **Use the principle of “one-in, one-out.”**
- **Familiarize yourself with the virtues of your local library!**

Good luck with finding the right amount of books to have in your home. Believe me, I understand what a hard process this can be . . . but I know it can be a very gratifying, freeing one as well.

