

Visual Merchandising Handbook

2023-2025



Visual Merchandising refers to anything that can be seen by the customer inside our libraries including displays, signs, and layout of space. Successful VM practices create attractive environments that encourage customer discovery. All Public Services staff are expected to maintain attractive display areas in their locations. Displays are meant to showcase our collections, promote programs, and reflect the unique interests and lived experiences of CML's communities.

The purpose of this handbook is to explain and demonstrate CML's VM strategy. Our strategy aims to achieve five display goals to enhance customer discovery and experience:

- Displays are full and eye-catching
- Displays showcase new and multiple items
- Displays reflect our customers' diversity and lived experiences
- Displays are easy for customers to interact with and navigate
- Displays are flexible

The information in this manual, coupled with customer feedback and experimentation, is foundational to creating inviting spaces with effective displays.



Display Goals

Goal 1: Displays are full and eye-catching

- Our VM strategy borrows from bookstore models.
 - Emphasis on abundance: “flush and full,” face outs, and stacking.
 - Items should be positioned face out as much as possible to get customers’ attention.

Goal 2: Displays showcase new and multiple items

- New items should have prominent placement in your location.
- Use multiples on displays to get them out of the stacks to be seen and to free up space. Multiples are popular items and carry more impact.

Goal 3: Displays reflect our customers’ diversity and lived experiences

- Always consider the diversity of the items you display, both visually and in terms of content.
- Reflect your location’s community and broaden their exposure to new cultures, experiences, and ideas.

Goal 4: Displays are easy for customers to interact with and navigate

- Displays should be non-restrictive and easy to navigate.
 - Limit plexi on top of stacks of books or in front of books.
 - Limit spine-out at the bottom of shelves. Consider sight lines and best placement.
 - Consider customer height (especially in Children’s areas) and mobility factors when placing items on top of shelves.

Goal 5: Displays are flexible

- Your collection changes over the course of the year and even day-to-day. Change up what is on your displays to accommodate fluctuations.
- In-stack displays are great for on-the-spot merchandising if you have the space. However, they should be the first thing to go if your shelves are getting too tight.
- Displays aren’t “set it and forget it.” All staff need to pay attention to maintaining displays.
- Move displays where customers can see them. Pay attention to branch traffic patterns.
- Experiment! If a display isn’t moving items, move it to a different spot and remeasure effectiveness.



USING PLEXI

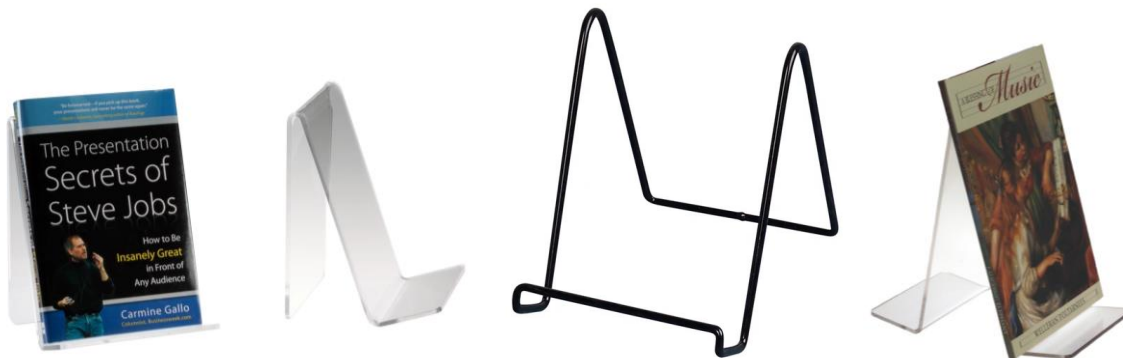
When possible, use plexi sparingly. Use either all plexi or all wire on displays, but not both.

ACCORDION PLEXI



- Use to showcase single copies or thin multiples on a display
- Works well with Newsstands, Fireplaces, in-stack displays, and Wedding Cakes

BOOK EASELS



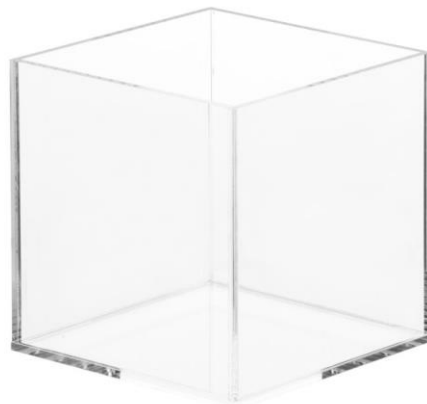
- Single easels
- Double-sided easels
- Wire
- Works well with almost all display fixtures

SIGNAGE



- Only use official CML signs
- Make sure signs are current

CUBES



- Use to prop up signs or books on a display

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Visual Merchandising focuses on all environmental elements that have the potential to attract customers and increase interaction with products. This includes displays, signs, product placement, and layout of space. Scientific research demonstrates attention to these details engages customers and drives sales. At CML, VM compels us to consider the library experience through our customers' eyes and offers techniques we can employ to ensure each visit is exceptional. We can use elements of design to achieve our display goals.

Color

Color is one of the strongest visual elements to incorporate into a display. It is easy to add a pocket of color blocking or arrange books in a gradient or rainbow.

Scale

Scale boosts visibility. Items appear larger, draw attention, and will be noticed from far away. Organized groupings of multiple copies or similar genres and authors carry more impact than single items. Multiples also ensure customers won't feel like they're taking the last book.

Placement

Placement cultivates experiences that "surprise and delight." Intentional cross-merchandising in unexpected places helps customers discover new areas of the collection. Rotate items regularly to keep customer interest and be mindful of the audience. Think about eye level: we have lower shelving for children and include face-out displays higher for adults in our stacks.

Balance

Balance helps achieve a polished look. This demonstrates value to our customers as it shows we put effort and thought into our work. Be aware of the size and sequence of items on display and ask yourself if the items fit well together or if something feels out of place. You can create symmetrical or asymmetrical arrangements that both achieve balance.

Simplicity

Well-organized books displayed face-out and pulled to the edge of a shelf give a neat, ordered look that allows customers to focus. Limit distractions such as excessive signage, bookmarks, plexi, props and dust to ensure the focus is on our books.

Uneven Numbers/Rule of Three

Studies show humans are attracted to uneven numbers and, interestingly, remember things best in threes.



PUTTING TOGETHER A GREAT DISPLAY

- Remember our display goals: the display needs to be **full** of **new** and/or **multiple** items, it's **diverse**, **easy to navigate**, and **flexible**.
- Starting with an empty display and the items you want to use, find all the multiples.
- Arrange multiples in stacks with plexi next to or behind a stack. Stacks should not cover more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of a book's cover.
- Arrange single copies in an accordion, at eye level, or in size- and color-coordinated stacks next to like items.
- Evaluate all covers for diversity. Feature authors and characters of all races and ethnicities, and a variety of lived experiences. Swap out as needed.
- Backstock can be kept in Wedding Cake cubbies or the sides of Newsstands, if applicable.
- Monitor display usage. What works and what doesn't? Is it in a good spot or would it make more sense somewhere else in your space?
- Refill the display as needed. Keep in mind that Ohio library customers visit the library an average of 5.91 times a year. * Displays do not need to be completely redone every day but should be "fluffed" throughout the day as items fluctuate.

* <https://olc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-Return-on-Investment-of-Ohios-Public-Libraries-and-National-Comparison-08.21.pdf>



WEDDING CAKE (ALL MULTIPLES)



Books are flush with the display edge
Stacks are in front of or next to plexi for convenience

GOOD FOR:

- New Books
- High Interest Adult
- Children's Fiction Multiples



WEDDING CAKE (MULTIPLES & SINGLES)



Books are flush with the display edge
Color-blocked singles in cubby are easy to read
Complimentary-colored stack of different titles is attractive
Stacks are in front of or next to plexi for convenience

GOOD FOR:

New Books
High Interest Adult
Children's Fiction Multiples



NEWSSTAND



Shelves are full of multiples, displaying abundance

GOOD FOR:

- New Books
- High Interest Adult
- Children's Fiction Multiples



OVAL



Face outs are colorful and display diverse faces

GOOD FOR:
Quick Picks
Children's Nonfiction
New Books
Smaller Theme Displays



FIREPLACE



Shelves and accordion are full of multiples, displaying abundance

GOOD FOR:

Quick Picks
Adult Fiction and Nonfiction
Children's Fiction
Smaller Theme Displays



SWOOP



Multiples are striking and display abundance

GOOD FOR:

New Teen, Children's, Adult Fiction or Quick Picks
Paperback Fiction (in pristine condition)
Smaller Theme Displays



BLONDE SQUARE



Shelves are full
Multiples in series or read-alikes are convenient

GOOD FOR:
Golden Books
Friendly Faces
Readers
Children's Graphic Novels
Board Books
Quick Picks



SLAT WALL



Multiples in series are convenient

GOOD FOR:
Children's Fiction
First Chapter
Readers



POWER WALL



Multiples are stacked for convenience
Color blocking is attractive

GOOD FOR:
New Books
High Interest Adult
Picture Books



ENDCAPS



Multiples display abundance

GOOD FOR:

Fiction
Genres
High Interest Fiction



BOOK BINS



Upright books are great for browsing

*****PLEASE NOTE: Bottom cubbies should be full of material, too**

GOOD FOR:

- Board Books
- Picture Books
- Concept Books
- Friendly Faces
- Read-Alongs
- Holiday Picture Books



CURVED DISPLAY



Spine outs are mostly at eye level
Face outs on bottom shelf are easier to see

GOOD FOR:
Quick Pick Titles
New Adult Fiction and Nonfiction



LEDGES



Series multiples are eye-catching and convenient

GOOD FOR:

New and Multiple Picture Books
High Interest Children's Nonfiction
Larger-Sized High Interest Children's and Adult Nonfiction



LOW SHELVING DISPLAY



Face outs are placed on the bottom and flush with edge of shelf
Spine outs are higher, making them easier to read

GOOD FOR:

- Children's Fiction
- Smaller-Sized Children's NF
- Audiobooks
- Readers
- Smaller theme displays
- New



STANDARD SHELVING (IN STACK) DISPLAYS



Easels and stacks are flush with shelf edge
Multiples are stacked next to face outs for easy access
Face outs and color blocking are eye-catching

GOOD FOR:

High Interest Fiction and Nonfiction



Collection Appearance Guidelines

The condition of our materials, stacks, and displays significantly impacts customer experience at our locations. Attention to these areas is key to creating an inviting environment for customers to explore. The following guidelines highlight collection appearance expectations and action steps for all Public Services staff.

MATERIALS ARE IN GOOD CONDITION

Maintain an appealing collection that shows we value our customers

- Remove damaged/poor condition items at all touchpoints – follow branch procedures.
- Look out for: stains, rips, water damage, broken or loose spines, discoloration, badly crinkled jackets, evidence of bedbugs or other insects, and odors.
- Wipe down covers as needed to remove dust and grime.

STACKS ARE NEAT AND CLEAN

Ensure shelved material is easy to browse so customers and staff can find what they need

- Spines and face-outs are flush and pulled up front to the edge of the shelf.
- Bookends are pushed tight so books stand upright.
- Abandoned materials left in the stacks are collected, checked in, and reshelved.
- Items found out of place are reshelved in correct order.

Keep shelves full to maximize space and customer accessibility

- Shift material when necessary to maintain an even amount on each.
- While an author's work can be split, exact titles stay together.
- Immediately communicate space issues (too empty or too full) to your location's Collection Lead.
- Be flexible with in-stack displays; remove as necessary to use the space for a cramped section.

DISPLAYS ARE WELL-KEPT

Maintain inviting displays that encourage customers to check out material

- Replenish empty display spaces immediately, primarily with hardcover books in good condition.
- Straighten and pull front-facing items to the edge of the display unit.
- Wipe down materials, display units, and plexi as needed to remove dust and grime.

Intentionally replenish displays to create a pleasant browsing experience for customers

- Refill displays intentionally with items that fit logically with what is already there.
- Purposefully choose attractive covers; group materials by color.
- Select popular authors, titles, and subjects; include titles that represent diverse experiences and cultures.

