

What is the ALA Code of Ethics?

How does it affect me?

Since 1939, ALA has recognized the importance of codifying and making known to the public and the profession the ethical principles that guide librarians. The Code of Ethics will be seventy years old in 2009 and has evolved into a statement of eight principles of the profession. The Code was last revised in January 2008.

The ALA Code of Ethics guides school librarians to:

- Provide the highest level of service
- Resist all efforts to censor library resources
- Respect intellectual property rights
- Treat coworkers with respect, fairness, and good faith
- Distinguish between personal conviction and professional duties
- Not allow personal beliefs to interfere with provision of access to information resources
- Strive for excellence by maintaining personal knowledge and skills

<https://www.ala.org/united/sites/ala.org/united/files/content/trustees/orgtools/policies/ALA-code-of-ethics.pdf>

Print Resources

- *Intellectual Freedom Manual*. 7th ed. Chicago: American Library Association, 2006. ISBN 0-8389-3561-3.
- Reichman, Henry. *Censorship and Selection: Issues and Answers for Schools*. 3rd ed. Chicago: American Library Association, 2001. ISBN 0-8389-0798-9.
- Knowledge *Quest*, "Intellectual Freedom 101" (print journal edition), 36 no 2. November/December 2007.

Online Resources

- Additional information on dealing with challenges may be found on the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom Web site: www.ala.org/oif
- American Association of School Librarians Essential Links: Resources for School Library Media Program Development: <https://www.ala.org/aasl/>
- Knowledge Quest, "Intellectual Freedom 101" (online edition), 36 no 2:
- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU): www.aclu.org
- As If! (Authors Supporting Intellectual Freedom): www.asifnews.blogspot.com
- Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use: <https://vawnet.org/publisher/center-safe-and-responsible-internet-use>
- Electronic Frontier Foundation: www.eff.org
- Freedom to Read Foundation: <https://www.ftrf.org/>
- National Coalition Against Censorship: www.ncac.org
- National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Anti-Censorship Center: <https://ncte.org/resources/ncte-intellectual-freedom-center/>

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What Is Intellectual Freedom?

“Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored.”

Intellectual Freedom and Censorship Q & A

ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/censorship/faq



American Association of School Librarians
a division of the American Library
Association

Why is intellectual freedom important in a school library program?

Intellectual freedom is a core value of the library profession, and Article V of the Library Bill of Rights affirms special protections to minors using libraries: “A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.” The school library center has the unique responsibility of introducing young citizens to the world of information. Nowhere else do children and young adults have unlimited daily access to books, magazines, newspapers, online resources, and the Internet. Students have the right to a relevant, balanced, and diverse school library collection that represents all points of view; school librarians assume a leadership role in protecting minors’ First Amendment right to read and receive information and ideas.

What is the difference between selection and censorship?

Is it selection or censorship? Librarians have been debating this question for years. How do we know if we are being professional selectors or self-imposed censors? Lester Asheim put it best in a 1953 article in *Wilson Library Journal* when he said that selectors look for the positive when choosing acquisitions, whereas censors look for the negative. The selector seeks reasons to include material in the collection; the censor seeks reasons to exclude material from the collection. It is the school librarian’s responsibility to provide a diverse, balanced, and high-quality collection representing all points of view on controversial issues.

What should I do before a challenge occurs?

Intellectual freedom should be addressed in school library programs before challenges occur.

- Create a Materials Selection Policy with procedures for reconsidering challenged materials, and seek approval of the policy by the school board.
- Develop a policy requiring a challenger to read the full book (or other material format) and complete a written form. Sample policies are available through state library associations, state school board associations, other school districts, and the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom Web
- Encourage transparency in the selection and reconsideration process by posting the policy on the district and library Web sites.
- Arrange with administrators for opportunities to educate teachers, students, and parents about the process of selection and reconsideration of materials in the school library collection.

Where do I go for help with challenges?

Despite careful selection, someone may object to and want to remove resources from the school library. If this occurs, assistance is available to help you navigate a challenge.

- Review your district Materials Selection Policy and procedures for reconsideration of challenged materials.
- Contact the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom. Help for challenges to books, magazines, graphic literature, and filtering issues is available at 800-545-2433, ext 4223. All challenges reported to ALA are kept confidential. You need not be an AASL member to call for assistance.
- Seek support and guidance from your school and public library colleagues.
- Find additional information and help on Intellectual Freedom issues from the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Council of Teachers of English, and your state library association.

Why do schools filter Internet content?

In 2000, Congress passed the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and the Neighborhood Children’s Internet Protection Act (NCIPA). CIPA requires that elementary and secondary schools that accept discounted services under the federal Schools and Libraries Program of the Universal Service Fund (aka E-rate Program) or direct federal funding through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

(ESEA) certify that they have installed “technology protection measures” or filters on all computers used to access the Internet by minors and adults to protect against visual depictions of child pornography, obscenity, or material “harmful to minors” as defined under federal law. Under CIPA and NCIPA, minors are considered to be those less than seventeen years of age. Twenty-one states also have legislation requiring acceptable use policies, Internet safety education, or laws is available at the Web site of the National Council of State Legislatures. <https://www.ncsl.org/> filtering on school computers. Information on state filtering.

How does filtering of Internet content affect minors’ intellectual freedom?

- Over-blocking legal content affects minors’ First Amendment right to access constitutionally protected material in the school library.
- Under-blocking may cause students to view inappropriate images and text.
- Filtering de-emphasizes education as the best means of teaching students to be smart and safe while using the Internet, and it gives educators a false sense of security.
- The ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom provides assistance on filtering issues.

Call 800-545-2433, ext. 4223.