Censorship/Challenge Definitions


Expression of concern/oral complaint – A question asked or objection made informally by an individual about a resource in the library collection that they find objectionable or inappropriate. Expressions of concern sometimes lead to challenges.

Challenge – An attempt to have a library resource removed or access to it restricted, based on objections of a person or group. Challenges do not simply involve a person expressing a point of view; rather, they are an attempt to remove material from the curriculum or library, thereby restricting the access of others. Challenges sometimes lead to censorship. There are two types of challenges:

Request for reconsideration – A formal, written request that the library remove or restrict access to resources, submitted on a form and invoking a formal, standardized review process by the library and/or its governing body.

Public challenge – A publicity disseminated statement challenging the value of material, presented to the media and/or others outside the institutional organization to gain public support for further action.

Censorship – A decision made by a governing authority or its representative(s) to suppress, exclude, expurgate, remove, or restrict public access to a library resource based on a person or group’s disapproval of its content or its author/creator.

Obscenity – Sexually themed speech or expressive materials that are not protected by the First Amendment. Only a judge or jury can find that a work is legally obscene.

Pornography – A colloquial, popular term referring to the representation of sexual behavior in books, pictures, statues, motion pictures, and other media that is intended to cause sexual excitement.
Time, Place, and Manner restrictions – Restrictions on the time, place or manner of expression that are justified when they serve a significant government interest and are neutral or unrelated to the content or viewpoint expressed in the speech. EX: Library’s rule of forbidding amplified sound.

Viewpoint-Neutral Restrictions – Constitutionally permissible restrictions on expression that apply uniformly to all speech regardless of the point of view expressed by the speaker. Public libraries, like all government agencies, may not silence speakers whom the government opposes or sanction only those whom the government supports, or silence particular speakers because of popular controversy.

Self-Censorship – A decision made by an individual to suppress, exclude, expurgate, remove, or restrict access to a library resource based on personal bias of its content or its author/creator.