

9. Organising Fiction and Alphabetical Filing

What is filed alphabetically in the library?

Alphabetical filing is used for many library tasks. Most libraries arrange fiction books alphabetically on the shelves using the author's last name (sometimes called 'surname').

Why file alphabetically?

Filing books alphabetically keeps them in order. It means that anyone who knows the alphabet can find any fiction book they want in any library. Alphabetical filing is a system you can teach easily.

How do you file alphabetically?

To file alphabetically, you must put items in A to Z order, starting at A and finishing with Z. It is essential that library monitors and volunteers know their A to Z and are very confident about alphabetical filing.

It is useful to check this, perhaps by using a set of cards, and also to do some of the learning games suggested in the teaching tips at the end of this chapter, before the library opens. This will help readers understand how stock is organised in the library and may encourage some to help the librarian return books to the right bookshelves.

Putting fiction books in alphabetical order

To arrange fiction books alphabetically on the shelves, put all the books written by authors with last names starting with A on the same shelf. Then do the same with all the books written by authors with the last names starting with B, then all the Cs, and so on. Keep on dividing like this until you reach Z.

Use shelf guides (see chapter 10) with large letters to show clearly where each section starts. Figure 9.1 shows what your fiction bookshelves should look like.



Figure 9.2. Shelf guides help readers see that the fiction is shelved alphabetically.

Other methods of organising fiction books

You might want to organise the fiction books by reading level, especially in primary schools. Gaolebale Masego Morobise, a librarian in Botswana, divides the fiction books by the size of the print. She has three categories: large print, medium print, and small print, since, in general, books with smaller print are at a higher reading level. As will be discussed further in chapter 13, put up a sign showing what the categories mean. This will help readers choose the right book for their age and skill level. The descriptions you choose are very important. Terms such as ‘beginning to read’, ‘moving on’, and ‘longer stories’ encourage children much more than terms such as ‘easy’ and ‘difficult’. You can also just label them ‘Level 1’, ‘Level 2’, etc. Here is a sample levelling system:

Level 1 – Picture books with 0–3 words per page

Level 2 – Picture books with one sentence per page

Level 3 – Picture books with lots of words, short stories, etc.

Level 4 – Chapter books (usually under 100 pages, with a picture every once in a while)

Level 5 – Advanced chapter books (over 100 pages)



Figure 9.3. In this library, fiction is divided into levels 1 and 2 (Lesotho).

Filing other items alphabetically

Title catalogues

In all libraries, the index cards in title catalogues should be alphabetically filed by the title of the book.

Information books

Information books (non-fiction and textbooks) are not usually filed alphabetically on the shelves. Instead, they are filed by subject classification (see chapter 7).

How do you avoid problems with alphabetical filing?

Make sure library monitors and volunteers know the difference between an author and a title. Fiction books

such as *Matigari* (title) by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (author) can confuse people.

Assume small letters have the same importance as big letters (e.g. d’Argy would be filed in the ‘D’ section, not the ‘A’ section).

For authors who seem to have several names, like James Hadley Chase or Ruth Praver Jhabvala, file books under their last name. In these examples, it would be ‘C’ for ‘Chase’ and ‘J’ for ‘Jhabvala’. If the author’s last name is hyphenated, like Wu Ch’eng-en, the book would be filed under the first letter of the whole last name, in this case ‘C’.

If your library has two copies of the same book, file them together. If the library has several different books written by the same author, then file them alphabetically by the book title as well. For example, the title of Maya Angelou’s *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes* starts with an ‘A’ and so it should be put on the bookshelf in front of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, also by Maya Angelou, which starts with an ‘I’.

Some books have titles that start with a number, such as *100 Gifts to Make*. It is recommended that you think of this title as starting with a word, not a number, so it would be filed under ‘O’ for ‘One Hundred’.

Ignore ‘A’, ‘An’, and ‘The’ at the beginning of a title, and file the book by the first letter of the next word.

TEACHING TIPS

Help your students to learn the A to Z rules of alphabetical filing with these games. Choose any of the games you like, but try to include at least one of the bookmark games.

- Alphabetical library words

Divide the class into two teams. Ask students to think of some library words, such as book, story, page, shelf, etc.

See which team is the first to find library words for every letter of the alphabet, starting at A and trying to reach Z.

- Alphabetical bookmarks

Ask students to make a bookmark (see chapter 14) with their first name written clearly on it, and then to decorate it. When they have finished, ask students to arrange the bookmarks in alphabetical order.

- Organising books in alphabetical order (see figure 9.4)

Show some books arranged alphabetically on the fiction bookshelf. Now draw some pretend books, in muddled order, on the blackboard and see if students can work out the alphabetical order they should go in.

Fiction books arranged alphabetically

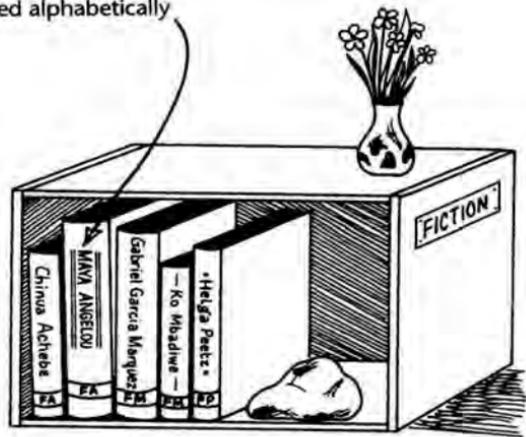


Figure 9.4. Organising books in alphabetical order – an exercise.

- More bookmarks

Ask students to draw another bookmark, this time putting their first and second name (e.g. Nelly Collin). Divide the class into four teams and ask students to arrange their bookmarks in alphabetical order from the surname. Which letter of the alphabet is the most popular?

- Play the Authors Game (see chapter 14).

At the end of this teaching session, students will know more about alphabetical filing and will have one or two bookmarks. Remind students that bookmarks help you remember which page you have reached in the book you are reading. Using a bookmark also stops students from bending the corners of pages to mark the place they have reached – a habit that spoils books and can result in torn and lost pages.



Figure 9.5. Posters remind students of the alphabet (Swaziland).