

LIBRARIES 101

Brush up on book-borrowing basics. It'll help you—and your child—navigate the aisles with ease.



There are over 16,000 public libraries in the United States. And no two are exactly alike! Thankfully, they do have a lot in common. Here's a rundown of library fundamentals to help guide your child.

• Library Card

You don't need a library card to visit and browse the library. But a card is essential for borrowing materials. So, what do you need to get a library card? Requirements vary, but generally you'll only need to bring proof of residency (such as a driver's license). If your child is under 18, a parent or guardian must sign her library-card application. Beyond that, your child may need to bring a report card or other ID.

• Checkouts, Renewals, and Fines

Once your child has a library card, he can check out material. The standard loan period is usually from one week (for new materials) to three weeks (for older books). It's important to return materials on time. Otherwise, you will owe the library fees for each day that each item is overdue.

• The Dewey Decimal System

The Dewey Decimal System is used to classify all library books. The system organizes materials into broad topics in most libraries. Then it breaks these topics down into subtopics. The subtopics are then divided into even more specific subjects. All of this information is used to create a call number for a book. A call number acts like an address. It tells librarians—and library users—where on a specific shelf a book is located. A librarian can help you get familiar with the system.

• Using Computers

Today, most libraries use computers to store their catalogs. Systems vary. But there are four major types of searches you can do across all of them. (And, again, a librarian can help you with your search.)

- 1. Author:** Do you know the last name of the author, artist, or editor of the work you are looking for? If so, you can use the name to do a search.
- 2. Title:** If you know a few words in the book title—and the order in which they appear—you can enter them as the *search term*.
- 3. Subject:** What if the only information you know is the book subject (such as “mammals”)? You can use that to do a subject search. A list of fiction, nonfiction, and any other media related to that subject will pop up.
- 4. Keyword:** Are you looking for books that cover more than one subject? Then do a keyword search. You can also do a keyword search if you can remember a few words in the book's title—but not the order in which they appear.

Computers in the library may also allow access to reference materials. These can include online encyclopedias, family history databases, and photo archives. Some libraries also have workstations set up with helpful software. Your child can use these workstations to learn and to complete school projects. The best way to find out what's available is, as always, to ask a librarian!