

THE FUTURE OF READING

Challenging ourselves as readers

As public library staff, we participate every day in conversations with our customers about their reading habits. But are we offering the best possible service to our customers as we attempt to aid them in their reading choices?

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readers—not your brand.” His call to “cleave to the needs and wants of readers” requires library professionals to “study their reading habits, then design and redesign our content collections, systems, and services to help them improve and maximize their reading experiences.” The NSW Readers Advisory Group is rising to this call and encouraging public library staff to better understand the needs of our readers by instigating their own ‘reading challenge.’

2010 staff reading challenge

Library staff are often approached for book and reading recommendations. We use many techniques to help us understand what a customer is looking for, including Nancy Pearl’s concept of ‘Doorways’. Training in Readers Advisory is available and all NSW public library staff are encouraged to share ideas and techniques on the NSW RA wiki.

This year, however, in order to encourage staff to step outside of their own reading comfort zones and better understand the needs of their borrowers, the NSW RA Group has set up a new annual staff Reading Challenge.

The challenge for 2010 is to ‘Read Outside of the Square.’ Many of us are so comfortable with our own reading preferences that we rarely stray outside them. We all have expertise in the areas that we like to read, but often have large gaps in our knowledge about other parts of our collections. As professional staff who assist customers with their reading choices, it is essential that we know about the material that we make available to our borrowers. The Reading Challenge is about encouraging staff to keep up to date with new reading trends and experience the books we may find ourselves suggesting to customers, even if reading preferences and appeal characteristics differ!

As we break out of our own familiar reading moulds, by sharing our experiences ‘Reading Outside the Square’ with other library staff, we are creating a shared learning experience that we can all benefit from.

How you can get involved

Sign up to the NSW RA wiki (<http://readersadvisory.wetpaint.com>) and join the NSW Readers Challenge. Each month, nominate a book that you will read that is outside of your normal reading zone and explain why. Don’t be afraid to experiment! Peters stresses that there is a need for librarians to not only encourage but “aid and abet experimentation in reading.” This is your opportunity to experiment and test your own tastes and preferences. Why do you like what you like? Do these preferences have to be restricted to the genres you normally read or can you find similar elements in new types of reading? You might be surprised at the results!

The other aspect of the challenge is to read beyond just novels. Our customers are finding other ways to read, outside of the formats that a traditional library offers. Why don’t we join them?

In *The Future of Reading* (*Library Journal* 1/11/2009), Tom Peters beseeches librarians and librarians to “cling to your power base—

Read non-fiction, blogs, wikis, poetry, and novellas. Stick to a favoured genre, but change your format. Try a romance on an e-reader, a Western on audiobook, or a sci-fi vook.

The aim of this exercise is to explore the world of the reader so that we can further understand the needs of our library customers!

Reading the future

Peters states that “never before has so much reading material been so easily and quickly available to so many people. If reading founders, it will not be because of a dearth of things to read.” There is a need for us, as library professionals, to understand the way that writing is changing and the way that the reader is interacting with new forms and formats. The NSW Readers Advisory Group is encouraging public library staff to take the Reading Challenge to discover emerging reading trends and better understand their customers’ reading habits. We also hope to, in our research and experimentation, find new avenues for the voracious readers that already value their local library service.

Through this challenge, we hope that library staff across Australia will find ways to further engage with their library customers. As Peters notes, “we are in a long-term commitment with readers. We need to be vocal, flexible, and patient as the longstanding relationship between readers and the libraries that serve them continues to evolve.” This challenge is but a first step in participating in that evolution, and we look forward to your valuable contribution.

Happy Reading!

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on behalf of the NSW Readers Advisory Working Group
<http://readersadvisory.wetpaint.com/page/2010+Reading+Challenges+for+all+Readers>

Vassiliki Veros is currently reading *The Spellman files* by Lisa Lutz
Jenn Martin is currently reading *In the skin of a lion* by Michael Ondaatje

Murder at the Metcalfe: a Readers Advisory seminar for crime and mystery

The NSW Readers Advisory group is holding their annual seminar on the 23rd of March, 2010. This is a wonderful opportunity for library staff from across the state to come together to explore a reading genre and other advances in readers advisory. <http://crimera.eventbrite.com/>

With crime and mystery on this year's agenda we have a broad group of speakers to help explore the many places that crime and mystery can take you. We have the senior editor from the Genreflecting Advisory series, Diana Tixier Herald, who will be talking about the genreblend of crime and paranormal fiction, Peter Milne, the crime selector from Abbeyes bookshop, and international bestselling author, Matthew Reilly. We will also have speakers talking about the genres of crime, a panel of librarians speaking about crossover genres – romantic suspense, children's crime, and crime in literary fiction as well as a resource information session and a murder game for all attendees.

The Readers Advisory seminar is a highlight on the NSW public libraries annual calendar and we all look forward to a great day at the State Library of NSW.