

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS COLLECTIONS POLICY STATEMENTS

Literature and Language (Classes P-PZ and Sections of Class Z)

(This Collections Policy Statement incorporates the previously separate Collections Policy Statements for Fantasy and Science Fiction and Lesser Known Languages.)

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I. Scope

This Collections Policy Statement refers to materials in the fields of literature and language. The field of literature includes works in the forms of fiction, poetry, drama, the general essay, oratory, and journalism, as well as the historical, theoretical, critical, biographical, and scholarly studies dealing with such works. The field of language includes general works on language as a phenomenon and works on particular languages, including dictionaries, grammars, rhetorics, and histories. The fields of literature and language are covered in a wide variety of formats in the Library of Congress, including traditional printed books and periodicals, books and periodicals issued with CDs or in other multimedia formats, manuscripts, microforms, electronic sources (databases, digitized materials, and born-digital resources), audio recordings, motion pictures, and photographs.

Literature and language are treated in Classes P through PZ of the Library of Congress classification system. The present statement deals with all of these classes except that part of class PZ covering juvenile belles lettres, which is covered in the Collections Policy Statement for Children's Literature. In addition, works relevant to the study of literature and language are scattered throughout Class Z (bibliography), in the sections for national bibliography (e.g. Z1224-Z1232, American literature), subject bibliography (e.g. Z5781-Z5785, drama and theater; Z7001-Z7124, philology and linguistics), and personal bibliography, and in such other areas as Z124-Z228 (printing history). All policies and guidance in the present statement for areas of Classes P-PZ are to be understood as applying also to related areas of Class Z.

The following Collections Policy Statements and Supplementary Guidelines also should be consulted for their application to literature and language. Collections Policy Statements: [Children's Literature](#); [Comics and Cartoons](#) (graphic novels); [Countries and Regions with Acquisitions Challenges](#); [Folklore and Folklife](#); [LGBTQIA+ Studies](#); [Manuscripts](#); [Sound Recordings and Radio](#) (Non-musical Recordings); [Theater](#); [Translations](#); [Women's and Gender Studies](#). Supplementary Guidelines: [Electronic Resources](#); [Open Digital Content](#); [Web Archiving](#); [Datasets](#); [Independently Published and Self-Published Textual Materials](#); [Book Jackets](#).

II. Diverse and Inclusive Collecting Statement

As the nation's de facto national library, the Library of Congress strives to build an expansive, yet selective, collection that records the creativity of the United States and is reflective of the nation's diversity and complexity. The Library's mandate is to have collections that are inclusive and representative of a diversity of creators and ideas. A priority includes acquiring material of underrepresented perspectives and voices in the Library's collections to ensure diverse authorship, points of view, cultural identities, and other historical or cultural factors. The Library also seeks to build a research collection that comprises a globally representative sample of international materials that are diverse in voice and perspective, relative to their places of origin, further supporting the Library's mission to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for Congress and future generations.

Diverse collecting is mentioned within many of the Library's Collections Policy Statements. In addition, the Library has adopted several specific collection policies in an effort to ensure it is building an inclusive and representative collection. For more information, see the Library's Collections Policy Statements on [Ethnic Materials](#), [LGBTQIA+ Studies](#), [Women's and Gender Studies](#), [Independently Published and Self-Published Textual Materials](#), and [Countries and Regions with Acquisitions Challenges](#).

III. Research Strengths

The Library's collections in literature and language are noted for their breadth and depth, both current and historical. No other national library collects as extensively in the literature or languages of other countries as does the Library of Congress. Class P, with more than 3.7 million items, contains more material than any other Library class. The largest group of books and periodicals related to language and literature are found in the General Collections.

Many areas of the Library hold important collections, including the Rare Book and Special Collections Division (first and early editions of selected authors; dime novels; small press books; and the libraries of such authors as Ralph Ellison); the Manuscript Division (papers of many American authors; unpublished plays deposited for copyright since 1900); the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division (motion picture, television, and radio materials, the Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature); the Microform Reading Room (early books and extensive periodicals); and the international collections divisions (Indigenous codices; the South Asian Literature Recording Project; the PALABRA Archive; selected works of world classical literature; contemporary works of literature in more than 470 languages).

One of the Library's collections of distinction in linguistics is the *Lesser-Known Languages Collection*. Started in the latter half of the twentieth century, the Collection is comprised of various and sundry materials printed in over 600 languages, dialects, pidgins, and creoles. The individual items are uncataloged and housed together by language in document preservation boxes, which are discoverable in the Library's catalog. In 2009, the decision was made to close the Collection to new receipts. However, the Library continues to collect materials in these languages, just not as part of a discrete collection. From 2009 onward, materials have been acquired and cataloged following the Library's

standard processes. These items are cataloged individually and shelved as appropriate throughout the Library's collections. Further, efforts to acquire materials in or about regional or endangered languages has expanded to all formats, including digital.

The Library maintains a growing collection of electronic resources relating to literature and language. The Library has digitized several collections related to writers and literary works, including Walt Whitman's papers and notebooks, selected plays by Zora Neale Hurston, the Federal Theatre Project, and the Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature. Digitized collections representing world literature and languages include Cuneiform Tablets: From the Reign of Gudea of Lagash to Shalmanassar III, the South Asian Literary Recording Project, the PALABRA Archive, and Selections of Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Calligraphy. Literary works are also included in other digital collections such as Selected Digitized Books and Children's Book Selections.

The Library subscribes to a substantial number of electronic databases, both indexes and full-text sources, with a subject grouping for "Literature & Language" found on the "Library of Congress E-Resources Online Catalog" page. The Library has expanded its permanent literature holdings through the purchase of full-text databases such as Early English Books Online, Nineteenth Century Literary Society, and Early European Books.

The Library is increasingly acquiring exclusively born-digital materials, such as those found in the Open Access Books collection. Selected Web Archive collections related to literature include Brazil Cordel Literature, Web Cultures, Authors Websites, and Comics Literature and Criticism. Greater emphasis should be placed on the identification of born-digital materials, while monitoring the production of new formats such as datasets.

IV. Collecting Policy

1. Language and Linguistics

The Library, as the de facto National Library of the United States, collects important reference works, including bibliographies and dictionaries; scholarly monographs; and serials. While approximately half of the Library's materials are in English, the Library collects materials in more than 470 languages. For most of the world's languages, works of grammar and textbooks are acquired very selectively. However, special consideration is given to materials related to endangered languages. Materials published in the U.S. about regional or endangered languages are collected at Level 5, non-U.S. publications at a Level 4.

Materials in regional or endangered languages in any format and covering any subject area, may be acquired, as guided by the relevant Collections Policy Statements.

2. American Literature

The Library aspires to collect at Level 5 most works of American literature in any language published or distributed in the U.S. This includes fiction and nonfiction works by both established and new writers that are regarded as having literary merit, value, or significance, or as representing current trends in writing. The Library collects novels; poetry; anthologies; periodicals; new critical and authoritative collections of prominent authors' works; and historical, theoretical, critical, scholarly, and bibliographical studies of American literature.

While works of American popular literature are collected, vanity press and self-published works generally are not collected. Major exceptions include communities underrepresented by the traditional

commercial publishing industry. Examples of groups that are underrepresented by mainstream publishing houses, and thus often turn to self-publishing, include:

- People of Color (African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Spanish-speaking Americans)
- Immigrants to the U.S. who write in their native languages or in English
- The LGBTQIA+ community
- Non-mainstream religious communities
- Political dissidents
- Fraternal organizations
- Cults

The self-published material of similar communities and organizations in other countries should also be considered for recommendation.

3. **Non-U.S. literature**

The Library collects literary works, by both established and new writers, which are regarded as having a high degree of literary merit or as representing important current trends in writing; authoritative or influential anthologies and periodicals whose contents consist principally of such writings; new critical and authoritative collections of prominent authors' works; and important historical, theoretical, critical, scholarly, and bibliographical studies. The Library is less selective for works published in countries with acquisitions challenges (see the Collections Policy Statement for Countries and Regions with Acquisitions Challenges). Unless otherwise stated the Library collects non-English language and literature at Level 4; popular literature at Level 3, and textbooks and grammars at Level 2. As with U.S. literature, vanity press and self-published works are generally not collected and should be considered only on a highly selective basis when in languages not otherwise available or on topics not covered by more traditional publishing outlets. Translations of international literary works into English are collected. In general, literary translations from English into other languages are not collected. There is, however, an exception to these general policies. Literary translations of works by major writers, or writers with significant existing collections, in LC, may be considered on an individual basis (e.g., as the Library's collections hold editions of *Don Quixote* in dozens of languages, new translations of *Don Quixote*, in any language, may be considered for acquisition).

4. **Mass-market Paperbacks**

Since 1978 the Library has retained select mass-market paperbacks in a variety of genres received through copyright. The collection is in the custody of the Rare Book and Special Collections Division.

V. **Acquisitions Sources**

Whenever possible the Library attempts to acquire materials through non-purchase means, such as copyright, exchange, or gift. The Library of Congress collections are heavily dependent upon materials received through the copyright deposit provisions of U.S. copyright law ([17 USC section 407](#) & [17 USC section 408](#)). For copyright demand, the U.S. regulations allow for the Library to receive analog and some digital materials. When items are offered in both formats the Library's default is normally the Best Edition print version, unless the publisher has arranged a special relief agreement with the Copyright Office. For materials not available to the Library through copyright deposit, or other non-purchase means, the Library acquires materials through purchase. Purchase is used predominately for non-U.S. publications that are not widely available within the United States. The Library utilizes an array of

traditional methods of library acquisition (firm orders, subscriptions, and approval plans) with vendors located in different areas of the world. In addition, the Library uses its six Overseas Operations Offices to broaden its acquisitions opportunities outside the United States.

The vast majority of books and periodicals relating to literature and language published in the United States are acquired for the Library's collections through copyright deposit and the Cataloging in Publication (CIP) Program. While most microform and subscription electronic sources are currently purchased, changing interpretations of "best edition" for copyright purposes may mean that the Library can acquire more materials in these formats through deposit. The Manuscript Division usually acquires authors' papers through gift, although some purchases are made in that Division. Some material from outside the United States relating to language and literature is acquired through gift or exchange. The bulk of the Library's acquisitions of material from outside the United States comes from purchases made by the Library's Overseas Offices and through its dealers in countries around the world. Dealers acquire the materials following guidelines established through approval plans based on Collections Policy Statements.

Along with traditional print methods, electronic and open access publishing drive many changes in acquisitions at the Library of Congress. Traditional print methods are subject to change as self-publishing and independent publishing become more common. Some material is printed in very short runs, such as books produced by print-on-demand services. Numerous scholarly journals are moving from print to electronic publication only. While these publishing methods may be useful for literary material such as poetry, collecting must be based on the Supplementary Guidelines for Independently Published and Self-Published Textual Materials.

Subscription electronic journals, as well as open source material, should selectively be acquired, cataloged, archived, and made accessible. In recent years, the Library has been more successful at obtaining such material through aggregators than it has been at collecting individual electronic titles. The Library should continue to expand its methods of collecting this material, especially when it exists solely in an electronic format. The Authors Websites Web Archive is an example of capturing uniquely digital material related to language and literature.

Because born-digital material may not be announced through the traditional published professional and library reviewing literature, Recommending Officers and the Overseas Offices must be more vigilant and creative in locating worthwhile material for acquisitions. International and national literary festivals, online literary journals/web sites and literary blogs are increasingly important outlets for identifying emerging and established literary voices. The Library should seek to establish partnerships with other organizations devoted to producing literature and language materials in electronic formats to enhance our collections.

VI. Best Editions and Preferred Formats

For guidance regarding best editions for material acquired via the Copyright Office, see: <https://copyright.gov/circs/circ07b.pdf>.

For guidance regarding recommended formats for material acquired via all other means; e.g., purchase, exchange, gift and transfer, see: <https://www.loc.gov/preservation/resources/rfs>.

For information regarding electronic resources, open digital content, web archiving, and data sets, see the following Supplementary Guidelines: <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/electronicresources.pdf>, <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/opencontent.pdf>, <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/webarchive.pdf>, and <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/datasets.pdf>.

VII. Collecting Levels

Meeting the Library’s Diverse and Inclusive Collecting Statement (see Section II) and the collecting levels outlined below requires continual evaluation of the publishing landscape, sources of expression, current events, and socio-cultural trends to thus maintain effective collecting policies and acquisitions methods. Changes in publishing or in the creation of materials covered by this policy statement may necessitate collecting efforts not explicitly referenced here. Such efforts will be handled on a case-by-case basis while the Library evaluates the need for policy statement updates.

The following list indicates the collection intensity levels (0 through 5) to be followed in acquiring literature and language materials. When two levels are listed, the first refers to materials relating to the U.S., the second to materials having to do with all other areas. Non-U.S. collecting levels are set lower than U.S. levels. However these levels do not indicate a judgement about the value or importance of international collection materials, but instead provide guidance for the Library to focus its limited resources.

1. Philology and linguistics

The Library aspires to maintain a Level 5 collection of current materials on all the major subdivisions of philology and linguistics, P98-P1091, in the Library of Congress Classification. This includes mass communications, language (general), and philology.

LC Classification	Subject	Collecting Level	
		U.S.	Non-U.S.
P1-P1091	Philology; linguistics	5	4

2. General literature

LC Classification	Subject	Collecting Level	
		U.S.	Non-U.S.
PN1-PN1551	Serials; criticism; authorship; literary; history; poetry	5	4
PN1560-PN3307	The performing arts; drama	5	4
PN3311-PN5650	Prose; oratory; Journalism	5	4
PN6010-PN6790	Collections of general literature	5	4

3. Classical languages and literatures

The Library acquires current and retrospective materials on the ancient Greek and Latin languages and literatures, including early Christian and medieval literature written in Greek and Latin. The classics

collections are developed in all formats at Level 5, with the exception that facsimiles of manuscripts are collected at Level 3. Also developed are collections of Latin and Greek literature which document the textual foundation in the Western world of virtually any subject discipline (e.g. earliest treatises on mathematics, physics). As such, the classics collections can more broadly be taken to mean Latin and Greek texts and scholarship from and about antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Byzantine Empire, and the Renaissance. The Library of Congress does not collect translations of classical texts in languages other than English unless the accompanying material represents the work of an internationally acknowledged scholar or if a non-English translation by an internationally acknowledged scholar is the first translation of a particular work. Within the P range of the LC classification system, the scope of the classics designations is PA1- PA8595 and comprises over 52,000 unique titles. For more detailed information about classics collecting policies, consult the [Classics and the Ancient, Medieval, and Byzantine Worlds Collections Policy Statement](#).

4. English language, American literature, and literature in the English language

LC Classification	Subject	Collecting Level		Notes
		U.S.	Non-U.S.	
PE	English language	5	4	
PS	American literature	5	5	Non-U.S. collecting limited to academic works and biographies.
PR1-PR8469	English literature	5	4	
PR9180-PR9199.3	Canadian literature in English	5	4	
PR9200-PR9333	Latin American literature in English	5	4	
PR9340-PR9408	African literature in English	5	4	
PR9420-PR9570	Asian literature in English	5	4	
PR9600-PR9619.3	Australian literature in English	5	4	
PR9620-PR9639.2	New Zealand literature in English	5	4	

5. Germanic languages and literatures

The library collects materials in all Germanic languages and literature at Level 4 except for popular literature which is at Level 3 as noted in section III.3.

6. Celtic languages and literatures

The Library acquires reference works, the most important monographs, the works of prominent authors, and the major serials for the Celtic languages and literatures. These include the Irish, Gaelic, Manx, Welsh, Cornish, Breton, and Gallic languages and literatures.

7. Romance languages and literatures

The Library collects materials in all Romance languages and literature at Level 4, except as noted in section III.3. and for the following:

- a. Dalmatian languages and literatures - Level 2

- b. Romansch languages and literatures - Level 3
- c. Catalan languages and literatures - Level 3
- d. Galician languages and literatures - Level 3

8. Slavic, Baltic, and Albanian languages and literatures

The Library collects materials in Slavic and related languages and literature at Level 4 except as noted in section III.3. and for the following:

- a. Church Slavonic - Level 3
- b. Macedonian - Level 4
- c. Sorbian - Level 3

9. Finno-Ugrian and Basque languages and literatures

The Library seeks to maintain a Level 4 collection of current materials on the languages and literatures of Finland, Estonia, Sami, Hungary, and the Basque region except as noted in section III.3.

10. Near Eastern languages and literatures

The Library collects materials in Near Eastern languages and literature at Level 4 except as noted in section III.3.

11. Asian languages and literatures

The Library collects all Asian languages and literatures at Level 4. Materials in several Asian languages are scarce and some languages are at risk of becoming endangered, making it important to collect available materials at a high level. Among the Asian languages collected are Dravidian, Javanese, Karen, Kawi, Mon-Khmer, Munda, Nashi, Javanese, and Siamese.

12. African languages and literatures

The Library collects materials on African languages and literatures at Level 4, except as noted in section III.3.

13. Oceania languages and literatures

The Library collects materials in languages and literatures of Oceania at Level 4, except as noted in section III.3.

14. Mixed, artificial, and universal languages

The Library collects materials on mixed languages such as Creole, Gullah, and Pidgin English, and artificial or universal languages such as Esperanto at Level 4 except as noted in section III.3.

15. Other languages

The Library collects materials in any other language not specified above at Level 3 except:

- a. Native-American languages and literature - Level 5
- b. Languages of Indigenous people in Canada, Mexico - Level 4