Missing Items Inventory

High demand titles, authors and topics frequently experience high loss from circulation attrition and theft. Missing items frustrate readers out of proportion to their number, and foster the impression that the librarian is careless or indifferent. By following up on data from the annual review of items that have not circulated since a given date (demand weeding), you are in effect performing a recurring inventory of the circulating collection. The Missing Items Inventory is a combined list of missing items from all reporting sources. Use the list to identify titles to consider for duplication and replacement; to find titles, authors and topics that need high-loss tracking; and to establish baseline loss rates and monitor ongoing losses.

Conventional Inventory	A conventional inventory attempts to account for all items that official records indicate the library owns. Usually a shelf list is checked against items on the shelf or in circulation, although some automated circulation databases can be inventoried directly with a portable bar code scanner. Conventional inventories are so labor-intensive that most public libraries never do one except in conjunction with conversion to an automated system.
Missing Items Inventory	A Missing Items Inventory is a file of all items that have been discovered missing. The focus is on identifying and tracking titles, authors, and topics that are at high risk for loss. Ideally, the file can be analyzed by collection, title, author, and classification/topic. Add items to the file from all reporting sources: weeding, circulation, staff or reader reports, and conventional inventories.
High-Loss Tracking	Once high-loss titles, authors, or topics are identified, implement tracking systems such as quarterly spot checks to help bring them under control. Counter-measures may include duplication, regular replacement, or as a last resort, special security.
Loss Rate	The loss rate for a collection is the percentage of items stolen or lost annually. It does not include items deliberately withdrawn because of damage or weeding. To calculate loss rate, determine the number of items missing from the collection in a year, then divide the number of missing items by the total number of items in the collection at the beginning of the year. Calculate baseline loss rates for the whole library and for particular collections, then compare the specific loss rates for high-demand titles, authors, and topics. Loss rates should also be tracked over time.

Reporting Sources for a Missing Items Inventory

Reporting Source	*Gather From:*	*To Estimate the Annual Number of Items Missing:*
Missing in Weeding	**Items identified as missing during the annual review of items that have not circulated since a given date (demand weeding). To keep the inventory current, use a last circulation date of one year even if the weeding cutoff date is longer.**	**If weeding is annual, use the number of missing items reported annually. Otherwise, use the total number of items reported missing in weeding, divided by the number of years since the last weeding.**
Missing in Circulation	**Items reported lost by readers; items not returned after a reasonable period (often 6 months).**	**Use the number of missing items reported annually.**
Missing from Shelf	**Items reported missing from the shelf by staff or readers.**	**Use the number of missing items reported annually.**
Reference Inventory	**Items not found in a conventional inventory of the non-circulating collection. Conduct a reference inventory at least every three years.**	**Divide the total number of items reported missing by the number of years since the last inventory.**
High-Loss Tracking	**For high loss titles, authors, or topics, do a quarterly spot check of items that have not circulated in 3 months. If you maintain an always available checklist, integrate high-loss titles into that process.**	**Use the number of missing items reported annually.**

Note: Verify items reported missing with follow-up shelf checks before adding them to the Missing Items Inventory or including them in loss rate calculations.