



LIBRARY STOCK VERIFICATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY: CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES**Dr. Yekanath Ningappa**

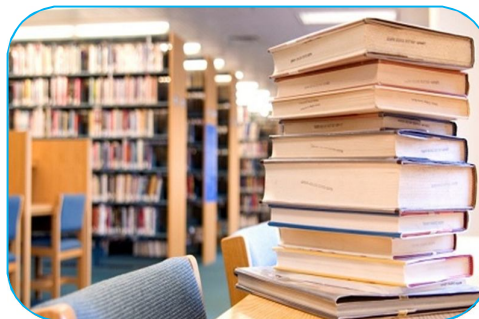
Deputy Librarian , College of Horticulture, Bidar, Karnataka.

Subhash S.

Chief Librarian, Global Institute of Management Sciences, R R Nagar, Bangalore.

ABSTRACT

Library stock verification is an essential component of collection management, financial control, preservation, and institutional accountability. It involves systematically examining library holdings against accession registers, catalogues, inventory records, circulation data, and other relevant documents to establish the physical availability and recorded status of information resources. Although traditionally treated as a periodic counting exercise, stock verification has broader implications for collection evaluation, user services, risk management, financial administration, and institutional governance. Academic libraries face challenges such as missing or misplaced books, incomplete records, duplicate accession numbers, inadequate staffing, outdated inventory systems, and uncertainty regarding responsibility for losses. The growing use of library management software, barcodes, radio-frequency identification, and digital records provides opportunities to improve accuracy and transparency. This conceptual review examines the meaning, purpose, objectives, benefits, procedures, challenges, and implications of stock verification in academic libraries.



KEYWORDS: *Library stock verification, collection management, academic libraries, missing books, accountability, inventory control, library administration, RFID, financial management.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries are responsible for acquiring, organizing, preserving, and providing access to information resources that support teaching, learning, research, extension, and innovation. Their collections include textbooks, reference books, scholarly monographs, theses, reports, periodicals, maps, audiovisual materials, digital resources, and other information products. Considerable institutional funds are invested in developing these collections, making their effective management an important administrative responsibility.

The usefulness of a library collection depends not only on the number of resources acquired but also on their availability, accessibility, physical condition, relevance, and accurate documentation. A book recorded in an accession register but unavailable on the shelf may interrupt academic work, mislead users, and create uncertainty about the reliability of library records. Similarly, an item found physically but not properly recorded may indicate weaknesses in accessioning, cataloguing, transfer, or documentation procedures.

Library stock verification addresses these concerns by comparing recorded holdings with actual holdings and investigating discrepancies. It helps determine whether library resources are available, misplaced, damaged, withdrawn, transferred, or untraceable. It also supports the maintenance of reliable collection records and provides evidence for administrative and financial decisions.

Stock verification has particular significance in academic, public and special libraries such institutions support multidisciplinary teaching, learning and research. Their collections may contain costly reference works, specialized publications, institutional reports, and older materials that are difficult to replace.

Despite its importance, stock verification is sometimes viewed as a periodic counting exercise performed primarily to satisfy administrative requirements. This limited understanding overlooks its wider value in collection evaluation, service improvement, risk reduction, and accountability. Effective verification requires clear procedures, trained personnel, accurate records, appropriate technology, independent review, and documented follow-up.

2. CONCEPT, MEANING AND DEFINITIONS OF LIBRARY STOCK VERIFICATION

2.1 Meaning of library stock verification

Library stock verification is the systematic process of checking the physical availability and recorded status of library materials against the library's official inventory and bibliographic records. It establishes whether each item is present, correctly identified, properly located, and accurately reflected in the library's records.

The process may include checking accession numbers, titles, authors, classification numbers, shelf locations, circulation status, physical condition, and recorded transactions. Depending on institutional requirements, it may cover the entire collection or a specified portion of it.

Stock verification is not merely the counting of books. Counting establishes a numerical total, whereas verification establishes whether the individual items recorded in the inventory correspond with the actual collection.

For example, a library may have 6,000 items recorded in its accession register. A count showing approximately 6,000 volumes does not, by itself, establish that all recorded items are present. Individual item-level reconciliation is necessary to identify missing books, unrecorded holdings, duplicate entries, and other discrepancies.

2.2 Definition

The systematic examination and reconciliation of a library's recorded holdings with its actual physical or otherwise verifiable resources to establish their availability, identity, location, condition, and documented status, and to initiate appropriate corrective action wherever discrepancies are identified.

2.3 Related concepts

Several related activities are often confused with stock verification.

Stocktaking: A process of counting or listing the items held by an organization. Stocktaking may form part of verification but does not necessarily include full reconciliation and investigation.

Physical inventory: An item-by-item examination of physical holdings, usually conducted using accession records, barcodes, RFID, or other identifiers.

Shelf reading: Checking that books are arranged in the correct sequence and placed in their designated locations. It helps locate misplaced books but does not establish the status of every recorded item.

Collection evaluation: Assessing a collection's relevance, currency, adequacy, usage, condition, and contribution to user needs. Stock verification can provide evidence for this broader activity.

Weeding: The systematic removal of materials that are outdated, damaged, duplicated, irrelevant, or otherwise unsuitable for retention, subject to institutional policy. Weeding is a separate decision-making process and must not be used to conceal unexplained losses.

Write-off: The formal removal of an item or its value from the relevant records following appropriate investigation and authorization under applicable rules. Write-off is not the same as declaring a book missing.

Audit: An independent examination of records, transactions, controls, or compliance. A stock-verification report may support an audit, but verification and audit are not identical.

3. AIM, PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 Aim

The principal aim of library stock verification is to establish the accuracy, completeness, physical availability, and accountability of library holdings through systematic inspection, record reconciliation, and appropriate follow-up action.

3.2 Purpose

The major purposes of stock verification are to:

1. Establish the actual status of the library collection.
2. Identify missing, misplaced, damaged, duplicated, and unrecorded materials.
3. Reconcile physical holdings with accession registers and library management systems.
4. Improve the accuracy and reliability of inventory records.
5. Support responsible use of institutional funds.
6. Identify weaknesses in acquisition, accessioning, circulation, shelving, and record maintenance.
7. Facilitate collection evaluation and replacement planning.
8. Provide reliable information for administrative review, financial reporting, and audit.
9. Strengthen the accountability of the library as an institutional asset-management unit.
10. Improve the availability of resources for students, teachers, researchers, and other authorized users.

3.3 Specific objectives

The specific objectives are as follows:

- To verify the presence and identity of individual resources.
- To confirm accession numbers and bibliographic details.
- To check whether materials are located in their assigned sections.
- To identify discrepancies between physical holdings and recorded holdings.
- To distinguish genuinely missing items from books on loan, in binding, under repair, in transit, or temporarily misplaced.
- To examine whether transactions involving transfer, withdrawal, replacement, or disposal are properly documented.
- To assess the condition and usability of physical resources.
- To identify collection-management weaknesses requiring corrective action.
- To provide evidence for decisions concerning replacement, recovery, write-off, or further investigation.
- To establish responsibility through documented procedures rather than unsupported assumptions.
- To improve the consistency of future inventory exercises.
- To develop a culture of transparency, professional diligence, and continuous improvement.

4. IMPORTANCE, USES AND BENEFITS

4.1 Importance of stock verification

Stock verification is important because library collections represent institutional assets. Their value extends beyond the purchase price to include their contribution to education, research, knowledge preservation, and public service.

A reliable inventory allows library staff to identify available resources accurately and reduces the risk of users being directed to items that cannot be located. It also helps administrators understand the actual composition and condition of the collection.

Verification is especially important when library personnel change, when collections are transferred between locations, after relocation or renovation, and when an institution introduces a new library management system. These situations may create risks of incomplete handover, misplaced materials, inconsistent records, or undocumented changes.

4.2 Uses of stock verification

The findings of stock verification can be used for:

Collection management: Identifying missing, duplicate, obsolete, damaged, and underused materials.

User services: Improving catalogue accuracy and reducing unsuccessful searches for unavailable items.

Financial management: Supporting inventory valuation, replacement decisions, and the documentation of asset discrepancies.

Administrative decisions: Providing evidence for resource allocation, staffing, collection relocation, and process improvement.

Audit and compliance: Supplying documentary evidence that required checks have been performed and discrepancies addressed.

Preservation: Identifying materials that require repair, binding, conservation, or improved storage.

Planning: Establishing a baseline for future inventory exercises and collection-development decisions.

4.3 Benefits for students and researchers

Students and researchers depend on accurate information about the availability of resources. When a catalogue shows that an item is available but the item cannot be found, the user may lose time and confidence in the library service.

Effective verification helps improve catalogue reliability, identify heavily used or frequently misplaced materials, and prioritize replacement of essential resources. It can also reveal gaps in subject coverage, especially where missing materials concern core textbooks, reference works, or specialized research publications.

4.4 Benefits for library professionals

For librarians and library staff, verification provides an opportunity to review shelving practices, accession procedures, circulation records, and inventory-management methods. It helps identify procedural weaknesses and establish better workflows.

The exercise also supports professional accountability by documenting what was checked, which discrepancies were identified, what actions were taken, and which matters remain unresolved.

4.5 Benefits for institutional governance

A well-documented stock-verification system improves the quality of information available to institutional administrators. It supports transparent decision-making, helps prevent unsupported write-offs, and enables evidence-based responses to audit observations.

It also promotes continuity when library personnel are transferred, retire, or leave service. A reliable inventory and documented handover reduce dependence on the knowledge of individual employees.

5. SYSTEMATIC PROCESS OF LIBRARY STOCK VERIFICATION

An effective stock-verification exercise should follow a planned sequence. The procedure must be sufficiently detailed to establish the status of individual items and to provide an auditable record of the work performed.

5.1 Planning and authorization

The process should begin with formal authorization from the competent institutional authority. The order or approval should specify:

- The purpose and scope of verification.
- The collection or sections to be covered.
- The verification period and schedule.
- The personnel or committee responsible.
- The inventory method and reporting format.
- The applicable institutional rules.
- The deadline for submission of findings.
- The authority responsible for reviewing and approving follow-up action.

A written plan prevents uncertainty about responsibilities and ensures that the exercise is completed within an agreed timeframe.

5.2 Constitution of a verification team

The institution should appoint a suitable team based on the size and complexity of the collection. The team may include professional librarians, trained library personnel, and authorized staff from other departments where appropriate.

The responsibilities of the team should be clearly defined. Where practicable, independent checking should be included so that the same person is not solely responsible for maintaining records, conducting the verification, deciding the outcome of discrepancies, and approving their closure.

Temporary or outsourced personnel may assist with scanning, counting, or data entry when properly trained and supervised. However, responsibility for technical decisions, reconciliation, documentation, and reporting should remain clearly assigned to authorized personnel.

5.3 Preparation of records

Before physical verification begins, the library should prepare the relevant records, including:

- Accession registers.
- Library management system inventory reports.
- Shelf lists and location records.
- Circulation and reservation records.
- Lists of books sent for binding or repair.
- Interlibrary loan and transfer records.
- Records of books issued to staff or departments.
- Previous stock-verification reports.
- Approved write-off, withdrawal, or disposal records.

The institution should establish a reliable reference date for the inventory. New acquisitions, returns, transfers, and other transactions occurring during verification should be recorded separately so that they are not confused with discrepancies.

Where the accession register and the digital catalogue disagree, the discrepancy should be recorded rather than resolved through undocumented alteration.

5.4 Physical examination of holdings

The team should inspect materials according to an established sequence, such as library section, classification range, shelf, and accession number.

For each item, the verifier should confirm the relevant identifying details and record whether the item is present, misplaced, damaged, on loan, under repair, transferred, or otherwise accounted for.

The inspection should cover all designated areas, including reference sections, reading rooms, stack rooms, special collections, storage spaces, and other locations within the approved scope.

Books on loan or temporarily outside the library should be reconciled against authorized records. Their absence from the shelf should not automatically be treated as loss.

5.5 Reconciliation with official records

After physical checking, the findings should be compared with the accession register and the library management system.

The reconciliation should identify:

1. Items recorded and physically available.
2. Items recorded but not found during the initial check.
3. Items found physically but not properly recorded.
4. Duplicate or conflicting accession numbers.
5. Incorrect shelf locations or classification details.
6. Items listed as missing in earlier reports.
7. Items documented as transferred, withdrawn, or written off.
8. Records requiring correction or further investigation.

Corrections should be supported by documentary evidence and approved according to institutional procedure. Original records should not be altered merely to make the inventory totals match.

5.6 Rechecking apparently missing books

A book not found during the first inspection should be classified as *not located during initial verification*, rather than immediately declared permanently lost.

The library should undertake reasonable rechecking measures, including:

- Checking adjacent shelves and related classification ranges.
- Examining reading rooms, reshelving areas, and temporary storage.
- Reviewing circulation and return records.
- Checking repair, binding, and transfer documentation.
- Examining previous verification reports.
- Confirming whether the item was recorded under an incorrect accession number or title.
- Conducting a second check by an independent verifier where appropriate.

The investigation should be documented. If the item is subsequently found, the inventory record should be corrected through the authorized process.

5.7 Classification of discrepancies

Discrepancies should be classified according to their nature. A useful classification is:

Category A — Located and verified: The item is physically available and the records are substantially correct.

Category B — Located but misplaced: The item is present but stored in the wrong location.

Category C — Temporarily unavailable: The item is on loan, under repair, in binding, in transit, or otherwise accounted for through valid documentation.

Category D — Record discrepancy: The item is physically present but the accession or catalogue record is incomplete, duplicated, or incorrect.

Category E — Not located after rechecking: The item remains untraceable after reasonable searches and documentary examination.

Category F — Damaged or unusable: The item is available but requires repair, preservation, replacement, or an authorized disposal decision.

This classification helps prevent the incorrect treatment of all discrepancies as losses.

5.8 Preparation of the verification report

The verification report should state the period covered, methodology, records examined, sections inspected, personnel involved, discrepancies identified, and corrective actions recommended.

A summary table may include the following fields:

Item or measure	Details to record
Recorded holdings	Number of items in the approved inventory baseline
Physically verified	Number of items located and confirmed
Temporarily unavailable	Number accounted for through valid records
Not located	Number remaining untraceable after rechecking
Record discrepancies	Duplicate, incomplete, or conflicting entries
Damaged items	Number requiring repair or further decision
Previously reported items	Status of discrepancies from earlier exercises
Follow-up action	Investigation, correction, recovery, replacement, or write-off
Approval status	Authority and date of decision

The report should avoid presenting provisional figures as final losses. The status of items under investigation should remain distinguishable from the status of items formally approved for write-off.

5.9 Administrative review and corrective action

The report should be submitted to the competent authority for review. The authority should determine whether further investigation, record correction, replacement, recovery, or write-off is required.

The outcome should be recorded against each discrepancy. Matters requiring further action should have an assigned officer and a reasonable completion date.

An unresolved discrepancy should remain open until the required action is completed or a competent authority formally determines its disposition.

5.10 Updating records and preserving evidence

After approval, the library should update the relevant inventory and catalogue records according to the authorized decision. Supporting documents should be retained for future reference and audit.

These may include the verification order, inventory sheets, discrepancy lists, rechecking records, correspondence, committee reports, approvals, and evidence of corrective action.

A complete documentary trail protects the institution and its personnel by showing what was verified, what was found, what remained unresolved, and how the final decisions were made.

6. ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY IN STOCK VERIFICATION

6.1 Meaning of accountability

Accountability in library stock verification means that responsibilities for maintaining, checking, reporting, and safeguarding library holdings are clearly assigned and supported by records.

It requires personnel to perform their duties with reasonable professional care, report discrepancies accurately, follow approved procedures, and cooperate with authorized investigations.

Accountability should be based on evidence, defined duties, and applicable rules. The mere discovery of a missing book does not establish that a particular employee caused its loss or should personally reimburse its value.

6.2 Role of the librarian or head of the library

The librarian or designated head is generally responsible for organizing inventory procedures, maintaining reliable records, supervising library operations, and submitting reports to the competent authority.

Key responsibilities include:

- Ensuring that inventory records are maintained.
- Proposing an appropriate verification schedule.
- Coordinating staff and resources.
- Ensuring that discrepancies are documented.
- Submitting accurate reports.
- Recommending corrective measures.
- Monitoring the implementation of approved decisions.

The precise extent of responsibility should be determined by the institution's service rules, delegation of powers, and administrative orders.

6. 3 Role of library staff

Library staff should follow prescribed procedures for accessioning, cataloguing, shelving, circulation, transfers, and record maintenance.

They should report misplaced, damaged, or untraceable items promptly and maintain documentation for transactions under their responsibility.

Training and supervision are essential. Staff should understand how to use the inventory system, identify discrepancies, and report problems without altering records improperly.

6. 4 Role of the verification committee

The verification committee should carry out the assigned inspection objectively and document its findings independently.

Its report should distinguish verified facts from assumptions, provisional discrepancies from confirmed outcomes, and administrative recommendations from decisions that require approval by another authority.

The committee should not assign individual financial liability unless that determination is expressly within its authorized role and the required evidence and procedures have been followed.

6. 5 Role of the institutional administration

The competent authority is responsible for approving the verification exercise, reviewing its findings, authorizing required actions, and ensuring compliance with applicable rules.

It should provide adequate staff, time, technology, and administrative support. Where unresolved discrepancies involve substantial value, repeated losses, or possible misconduct, the matter should be referred through the appropriate formal process.

6. 6 Accountability during transfer and handover

Staff transfers and changes in library leadership create particular risks when collection records are incomplete or the physical holdings have not been verified.

A handover should document the records transferred, inventory reports available, pending discrepancies, access credentials and responsibilities where applicable, and the status of any unresolved issues.

If a complete physical verification cannot be completed before a person assumes charge, the limitation should be recorded explicitly. A subsequent verification should establish the physical status of the collection and distinguish newly identified discrepancies from items already reported missing in earlier records.

The date of assuming charge should not, by itself, be treated as proof that the incoming officer caused earlier losses. Responsibility should be examined using relevant evidence, including previous inventories, handover records, transaction histories, and assigned duties.

6. 7 Fair and evidence-based determination of loss

Where a book remains missing, the institution should examine the available evidence before determining responsibility or financial liability.

Relevant considerations may include:

- The date and quality of the last reliable verification.
- The accuracy of accession and circulation records.
- Previous reports of missing materials.
- Documented handover and transfer procedures.
- The assigned duties of relevant personnel.
- Evidence of negligence, unauthorized removal, or misconduct, where applicable.
- The applicable institutional rules and prescribed procedure.

Financial recovery, disciplinary action, or other consequences should follow the institution's applicable rules and due process. A missing-book list alone should not be treated as conclusive evidence of individual liability.

7. MAJOR CHALLENGES IN LIBRARY STOCK VERIFICATION

7. 1 Incomplete or inaccurate accession records

Old libraries may maintain handwritten accession registers that contain incomplete titles, incorrect authors' names, missing prices, illegible entries, or inconsistent numbering. Such deficiencies make it difficult to identify items accurately.

Digitization can improve access to records, but transferring inaccurate information into software does not automatically correct the underlying errors. Records should be checked and reconciled during migration.

7. 2 Missing, misplaced, and incorrectly shelved books

Books may become misplaced because of incorrect shelving, incomplete reshelfing, user handling, or errors in classification and location records. These cases can create the appearance of loss. A systematic search and shelf-reading process is necessary before an item is classified as untraceable.

7. 3 Duplicate accession numbers

Duplicate accession numbers can cause serious problems because two different books may appear to be the same item in the inventory. Duplicate entries may arise from manual errors, inconsistent data entry, migration between systems, or historical recordkeeping problems.

A unique identifier should be maintained for each physical item. Where duplicate numbers are discovered, the library should investigate the original records and correct the conflict through an authorized process while preserving the audit trail.

7. 4 Inadequate staffing and time

Large academic libraries may hold thousands or hundreds of thousands of items. Conducting verification without sufficient staff, preparation, or time can lead to rushed checking and unreliable results.

The institution should plan the exercise according to collection size, arrangement, staff availability, and required reporting standards. Technology may reduce repetitive work, but it does not remove the need for competent supervision and investigation.

7. 5 Limited professional training

Staff who have not been trained in inventory procedures may incorrectly identify missing books, fail to distinguish loaned items from losses, or modify records without adequate evidence.

Regular training should cover inventory workflows, accession control, circulation reconciliation, barcode or RFID use, discrepancy classification, documentation, and reporting.

7. 6 Inadequate technology

Manual verification can be time-consuming and vulnerable to transcription errors. Libraries without an effective library management system may struggle to generate reliable shelf lists, track changes, and reconcile inventory records.

However, the purchase of technology alone is not sufficient. Systems need appropriate configuration, reliable data, staff training, maintenance, and backup procedures.

7. 7 Unclear responsibility

If duties for acquisition, accessioning, circulation, stock verification, and approval of write-offs are not clearly separated, discrepancies may remain unresolved.

Clear responsibility matrices and written procedures help identify who must perform each task, who reviews it, and who approves the outcome.

7. 8 Poor handover practices

When staff change positions without a documented handover, information about previous losses, pending transactions, damaged items, or incomplete inventories may be lost.

A formal handover should include relevant registers, reports, unresolved discrepancies, and the status of the collection as established by available evidence.

7. 9 Lack of follow-up

Some institutions prepare stock-verification reports but do not complete the recommended corrective actions. Repeated discrepancies may then appear in later reports without clear resolution.

A follow-up register should record each issue, the responsible officer, the action required, the deadline, and the final decision.

7. 10 Difficulties involving electronic resources

Electronic resources require different verification methods from printed books. Access may depend on subscriptions, licences, authentication systems, institutional entitlements, and vendor arrangements.

Verification should therefore focus on whether the institution has the rights and access it has paid for, whether the resources remain available, and whether licence and renewal records are accurate.

7. 11 Financial and administrative constraints

Budget limitations may prevent libraries from adopting advanced inventory technology, replacing essential missing materials, or conducting large-scale verification within a short period.

Institutions should prioritize essential controls and use proportionate methods. A properly designed manual or barcode-based system may be more practical than an expensive system that cannot be maintained.

8. TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION IN STOCK VERIFICATION

8. 1 Library management systems

A library management system can maintain bibliographic records, accession numbers, item status, location, and circulation transactions. When properly configured, it can generate inventory reports and support reconciliation.

The system should preserve transaction histories and restrict record changes according to staff roles. Regular backups and data-quality checks are necessary to maintain reliability.

8. 2 Barcode technology

Barcode-based verification uses a unique machine-readable identifier attached to each item. Staff scan the item and compare it with an inventory list or database.

Barcodes are comparatively affordable and suitable for many college and university libraries. Their effectiveness depends on readable labels, accurate records, functioning scanners, and a well-designed workflow.

8.3 Radio-frequency identification

Radio-frequency identification (RFID) enables compatible tags to be detected using radio signals. Depending on the equipment and system design, RFID can support faster inventory checks and other library operations.

Implementation requires investment in tags, readers, software integration, and staff training. The institution should assess the expected benefits and ongoing maintenance costs before adoption.

8.4 Mobile inventory applications

Mobile devices can support barcode scanning, inventory recording, and discrepancy reporting. They may be useful where staff need to verify holdings across multiple rooms or locations.

Mobile workflows should include appropriate access controls, synchronization procedures, and safeguards against accidental changes to official records.

8.5 Data analytics and exception reporting

Libraries can use inventory data to identify repeated discrepancies, duplicate identifiers, unusually high numbers of missing items in particular sections, and unresolved issues from previous verification exercises.

Such patterns can guide further investigation, but they should not be treated as proof of misconduct. Automated flags indicate matters requiring examination rather than definitive conclusions about responsibility.

8.6 Digital resources

For electronic journals, databases, e-books, and other licensed resources, the library should maintain records of subscriptions, access entitlements, renewal dates, licence terms, and vendor communications.

The verification process should confirm that subscribed resources are available to authorized users and that access conditions correspond to institutional agreements.

8.7 Selecting appropriate technology

Technology selection should be based on the collection's size, the institution's budget, staff capability, existing systems, and long-term maintenance requirements.

A small library may achieve effective control using a well-maintained accession register, a reliable spreadsheet, and barcode scanning. A larger institution may benefit from integrated library management and RFID systems.

The key requirement is not the sophistication of the equipment but the reliability, traceability, and consistency of the verification process.

9. STANDARDS, RULES AND PROFESSIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 General Financial Rules, 2017

In India, Rule 215 of the General Financial Rules, 2017 addresses the physical verification of library books in the context of the rules' applicability.

The commonly cited framework specifies full physical verification annually for libraries with up to 20,000 volumes; verification at least once in three years for libraries with more than 20,000 and up to 50,000 volumes; and sample verification at intervals not exceeding three years for libraries with more than 50,000 volumes. The framework also addresses action where shortages are unusual or unreasonable and the treatment of certain high-value or rare books.

These provisions should be checked against the latest applicable version, amendments, and institutional requirements before being used as binding directions. State universities, agricultural universities, and other institutions may be subject to their own governing statutes, financial regulations, government orders, or formally adopted procedures. Applicability should therefore be confirmed by the competent authority.

9. 2 Professional guidance

Professional literature on collection management and shelf inventory provides useful guidance for designing procedures, maintaining records, and evaluating the collection. Evans and Saponaro (2012), Gregory (2019), and Johnson (2014) offer broader perspectives on collection management, while the Association of Research Libraries' guidebook (1985) is relevant to shelf inventory procedures in academic libraries.

These resources can inform institutional practice but should not automatically be treated as legally binding standards.

9. 3 Principles of effective verification

An effective verification system should follow these principles:

- **Regularity:** Verification should take place at prescribed intervals.
- **Accuracy:** Findings should be supported by item-level checks and reliable records.
- **Independence:** Review and approval arrangements should reduce the risk of unchecked errors.
- **Transparency:** Methods, results, and decisions should be documented.
- **Proportionality:** Procedures should reflect collection size, risk, and available resources.
- **Fairness:** Responsibility should be determined using evidence and applicable rules.
- **Traceability:** Corrections and write-offs should leave an auditable record.
- **Continuity:** Findings should inform future verification and collection management.

10. RECOMMENDED FRAMEWORK FOR ACADEMIC AND OTHER LIBRARIES

The following framework provides a practical approach for improving stock verification.

10. 1 Establish a written stock-verification policy

Each institution should maintain a policy defining the scope, frequency, responsibilities, methodology, reporting requirements, and approval procedures for stock verification.

The policy should identify the governing rules and specify how the institution will address discrepancies, missing items, duplicate accession numbers, transfers, and write-offs.

10. 2 Maintain a reliable master inventory

The library should maintain an authoritative inventory containing unique item identifiers, accession numbers, bibliographic details, locations, and relevant status information.

Where historical records contain errors, corrections should be supported by documentary evidence. Unresolved conflicts should be recorded separately rather than concealed through unapproved changes.

10. 3 Use a risk-based verification plan

In addition to the prescribed verification schedule, institutions may use risk assessment to prioritize vulnerable or high-value collections, heavily used textbooks, special collections, and areas with repeated discrepancies.

Risk-based checks should supplement rather than replace mandatory verification requirements.

10. 4 Provide trained and adequate personnel

The institution should allocate sufficient staff and time to complete verification carefully. Training should cover both the technical procedures and the importance of accurate documentation.

Where temporary personnel are engaged, their tasks should be clearly limited and supervised by authorized staff.

10. 5 Separate verification from final approval

Where practicable, the person conducting the initial inventory should not be the sole authority responsible for approving disputed findings or final write-offs.

Independent review strengthens reliability and reduces the risk of errors remaining undetected.

10. 6 Introduce standard reporting formats

All verification teams should use a common reporting format that records the inventory baseline, items checked, discrepancies, rechecking results, and proposed actions.

Standardization improves comparison across departments and campuses and helps administrators identify recurring problems.

10. 7 Establish a missing-book investigation procedure

The policy should prescribe reasonable search steps, a rechecking process, documentary review, and the criteria for escalating unresolved cases.

An item should not be declared permanently lost solely because it was absent during an initial shelf check.

10. 8 Maintain a discrepancy and action register

A separate register should track unresolved discrepancies from identification through final decision.

each case, it should record the item identifier, date reported, investigation undertaken, responsible officer, decision required, approval details, and closure status.

10. 9 Strengthen handover procedures

When a librarian or other responsible officer changes position, the handover documentation should identify the available inventory records, last verification date, pending discrepancies, and outstanding actions.

If physical verification is incomplete, the record should state this clearly and arrange a subsequent exercise. The handover should distinguish established facts from matters that remain unverified.

10. 10 Use technology proportionately

Libraries should select suitable tools according to operational needs and available resources. Barcode systems and well-designed digital inventories can be appropriate starting points, while RFID may be justified in larger collections with sufficient funding and technical support.

Technology should be supported by data-quality controls, access permissions, backups, and documented procedures.

10. 11 Review recurring discrepancies

The administration should examine whether repeated losses or record discrepancies arise from weak accessioning, incomplete circulation records, poor shelving, inadequate supervision, insufficient staffing, or other identifiable causes.

Corrective action should address the underlying process rather than merely repeating the same verification exercise.

10.12 Provide periodic training and internal review

Training should be provided when procedures or systems change and periodically thereafter. Internal review should assess whether the verification policy is followed, reports are completed, and corrective actions are closed.

10.13 Ensure fair treatment of losses and write-offs

Decisions about recovery, replacement, or write-off should be based on documented findings and applicable rules. A write-off should not be used as a substitute for investigation, and financial recovery should not be imposed without the required authority and procedure.

10.14 Develop performance indicators

Institutions can monitor the effectiveness of verification using indicators such as:

- Percentage of the planned collection verified.
- Percentage of inventory records reconciled.
- Number of discrepancies resolved.
- Number of unresolved cases carried forward.
- Frequency of duplicate accession identifiers.
- Time required to complete verification.
- Percentage of corrective actions completed within the assigned period.
- Number of staff trained in verification procedures.

These indicators should be interpreted in context. A high number of discrepancies may reflect poor records, a more thorough verification exercise, or genuine collection losses; it should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of individual negligence.

11. PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

A practical implementation plan can be organized into five stages.

Stage 1: Preparation

Obtain administrative approval, identify the governing rules, establish the inventory baseline, constitute the team, and prepare the verification schedule.

Stage 2: Verification

Inspect the designated holdings, scan or record item identifiers, reconcile transactions, and document initial discrepancies.

Stage 3: Investigation

Recheck apparently missing items, examine historical records, confirm transfers and loans, and classify unresolved cases.

Stage 4: Review and decision

Submit the report to the competent authority for review. Obtain authorization for record corrections, further investigation, replacement, recovery, or write-off where appropriate.

Stage 5: Follow-up and improvement

Update authorized records, close completed cases, retain supporting evidence, and revise procedures to address weaknesses identified during verification.

The institution should assign a responsible officer and completion date to each stage. The schedule should be realistic and consistent with the applicable verification requirements.

16. CONCLUSION

Library stock verification is a fundamental element of collection management, asset control, user-service quality, and institutional accountability. Its purpose extends beyond counting books to establishing the accuracy and status of individual holdings, reconciling records, identifying discrepancies, and supporting appropriate corrective action.

Effective verification depends on careful planning, reliable inventory records, trained personnel, systematic physical checking, independent review, fair investigation, and documented administrative

decisions. Technology can improve efficiency and accuracy, but it cannot compensate for incomplete records, unclear responsibilities, inadequate training, or weak follow-up procedures.

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