
Library Renewal Policy

From Amanda Cooper [REDACTED]
Date Sun 9/29/2024 11:48 PM
To EPL Board <eplboard@elmlib.org>

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-EXTERNAL EMAIL-

Dear Elmhurst Public Library Board Members,

My name is Amanda Cooper, and I have been an enthusiastic patron of EPL for the past seven years. I am writing to request that the board create a policy that explicitly allows borrowers who need extra time with an item to be allowed to check it in, and then immediately check it back out at the front desk in order to reset the renewal timeline.

To give some background, I moved to Elmhurst from the New York City area in 2017, where I was accustomed to being able to do this whenever I needed extra time with a book. Staff at NYPL always did it willingly and with no questions asked, which, for a slow reader like me, was such a relief! I was disappointed to learn that EPL does not allow borrowers to do this without intense pushback. The head of circulation, Sam Cresswell, has told me twice (first in a 2021 email, which is copied below, and then again in person last Thursday, 9/26/24) that the library works to accommodate the needs of each borrower, even if that means checking an item in and checking it back out again. However, the actual procedure consistently followed by the staff members at the checkout desk strongly discourages this. When I first requested this accommodation several years ago, I was told that the best they could do was a third renewal. However, each time I requested a third renewal after that, I was told that they really shouldn't, and while they could do it this *one time,* I would really need to return the item after this. After a while, I wrote a comment card requesting a change of policy, which led to the email exchange below. When nothing changed after that, I eventually just accepted that I would be required to endure this ritualistic shaming every time I needed extra time with a book.

However, this summer I was dismayed when the message changed and the process got more laborious. Now the first response I get when I request a third renewal is that I can just return the item up to 2 weeks late with no penalty. (As I side note, I think this is a terrible message to give borrowers, who are likely to apply the same philosophy to all items, including popular ones with long waitlists!) When I explain that I don't like to return items late, so I would prefer to extend the due date, I am then asked if one week is enough. And then two. The constant pushback is exhausting, and I do not understand why it is so hard for me to keep items that I am still using until I am done with them.

Before continuing, I should explain a few things:

1. I am not referring to new items. Hot copies have their own borrowing rules, which are completely reasonable.
2. I am not referring to anything that has been placed on hold by another borrower. Library materials need to be shared, and if an item has a hold on it (or is from LINKin), then it needs to be returned. I always check this before making my request, and I know that the staff will check it, too.

3. I am not suggesting that items should *automatically* renew indefinitely. The library needs to ensure that checked out items are being used and have not just been lost or forgotten. I am simply requesting that if a borrower brings an item in (so you can see they still have it and it is in good condition) and requests more time with it, that the time be granted graciously, without repeated pushback and challenges.

When I spoke with Ms. Cresswell last week about the idea of allowing borrowers to check items in and back out at the front desk, she expressed concerns about items not being available to patrons who do not use the hold system and prefer to browse the shelves. I have two responses to this concern:

1. The current system does not actually prevent this. All one needs to do to is return the item and immediately place it back on hold. It is usually back in the hold room within a few hours and it never makes it back to the shelf in the middle. This achieves the same result as what I am requesting, except it takes hours instead of seconds, and it creates extra work for both the borrower and the library staff.
2. I do not see how the possibility that someone *might* want an item from the shelf in the future justifies taking it away from a borrower who *definitely* wants it now.

During my conversation with Ms. Cresswell, when I referred to the "policy" of not allowing borrowers to reset their renewals, she explained that this is not actually a policy, but rather a procedure, which is set by the department. She said that policies are set by the board, and she confirmed that if I want this to be a policy, then my next step would be to contact you, which is what led to me writing this email.

In closing, I want you to know that I love the Elmhurst Public Library. It is my favorite place in the city outside of my own home! I think you do amazing work, and I am continuously surprised and delighted by the offerings available, not just in the physical and online collections, but also the programs and services that you provide. I have even gone to a couple of your board meetings this year, and I have been very impressed with everything I have seen. I have found the library staff and board members to be friendly, thoughtful, and supportive. The one glaring exception to this is the procedure of pushing back on requests for more time with checked out items. For that reason, I am asking that you create a policy to better meet the individual needs of library patrons, which is more consistent with the welcoming atmosphere I have personally experienced everywhere else in the organization.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Amanda Cooper

From: Amanda Cooper [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, August 3, 2021 1:48 PM
To: Samantha Cresswell <samantha.cresswell@elmlib.org>
Subject: Re: Library Comment Card

This was very helpful. Thank you for clarifying!

On Aug 3, 2021, at 9:48 AM, Samantha Cresswell <samantha.cresswell@elmlib.org> wrote:

Hi Amanda,

We like to determine what the patron needs. Some people only need a few more days to get through the last chapter. In those cases, we will adjust the due day accordingly. If they need another renewal for the 3 weeks or 1 week, we will override the renewal block to give the patron the extra renewal. In the rare instance that a patron needs the items for another full 9-week loan period, as long as it's not an in-demand item, we will check it in and out again. We try to approach each transaction according to the specific need of the patron. I hope this answers your question.

Have a nice day.

Sam

Samantha Cresswell

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Head of Circulation

(630)279-8696, ext. 307

elmhurstlibrary.org

From: Amanda Cooper [REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, July 30, 2021 1:23 PM

To: Samantha Cresswell <samantha.cresswell@elmplib.org>

Subject: Re: Library Comment Card

Hi Sam,

Thank you for your response! To clarify, are you confirming that if I take to the library checkout counter a book or dvd that has already renewed twice, the person working behind the counter should be able to return it for me and immediately check it out again? This would give me two newly available renewals (ie. three checkout periods) before I would need to return to the library again. I am requesting this clarity because I have been told multiple times, by multiple people, that the best they can do is just give me one more renewal, which shows up on my account as a third renewal, but then I have to return the item. Please let me know if this is no longer the policy.

Thank you!

Amanda

On Jul 30, 2021, at 9:09 AM, Samantha Cresswell <samantha.cresswell@elmplib.org> wrote:

Good morning, Amanda,

Thank you for contacting the library and for your kind words. I completely agree with you regarding receiving extra time for library material. It sounds like there may have been some miscommunication on our side. It is our practice to accommodate extra time for patrons as long as there is not another patron waiting for it or the item is new. I apologize if this is not what you were told. Please let me know if there is anything else I can do for you.

Have a nice weekend.

Sam

Samantha Cresswell

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Head of Circulation

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