

Fine Free Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q: Why are you getting rid of overdue fines?

A: In recent years, public libraries have come to recognize fines as a barrier to access. For people who can afford them, late fines are too small to make a difference. For those who struggle financially, a fine balance becomes a reason to be wary of checking out materials and may prevent the patron from coming back at all. Simply put, public libraries believe that no one should be denied access to the library or its collection because of an inability to pay. We believe that providing the best service to the entire community is the heart of what we do. We never want to turn anyone away from the library because of an inability to pay fines.

Q: Won't the library suffer financially as a result? Will this affect the library budget?

Overdue fines were never meant to become part of the library's budget. When initially instituted at two cents and then a dime a day, were meant to recoup the costs of reminding you to return your materials in a timely fashion. Over time, the methods of reminding you about your library materials coming due have changed, most being sent automatically and electronically, rather than printed and through the mail.

Also, overdue fines, in recent years, have been a declining amount of RDLs operating budget. In 2018, they were under 1% of the annual budget. In 2023, the last year we accounted for them, they were less than a quarter of a percent.

Patrons who still wish to support us are welcome to donate any money they might have spent on late fines in our donation boxes, but we will never limit library access to them if they are unable to or choose not to do so. We would much rather accept a voluntary donation from someone who can afford it than see someone stop using the library's resources just because they kept their items a bit too long. The best investment we can make is ensuring that the library and its resources are available to all in our community.

Q: Does this mean I can keep a book or other item for as long as I want?

A: No. Standard due dates still apply. We expect you to renew your materials if you wish to keep an item longer. It is courteous to your community, so that they may know when to expect an item to be back in the library. Library users will still be charged replacement costs for items that are lost or damaged. If you keep an item too long, it will still go to billed status and a replacement charge will show up on your account. But as always, that charge disappears when you return the item in good condition, unless the library has purchased a replacement, which it may do anytime the item becomes billed to your account. While a replacement charge exists on your account, you will be blocked from checking out additional items until the charges are paid or the items are returned.

Q. Are there any exceptions to the fine-free policy?

A. Yes. There are a few important exceptions.

1. Any items that are checked out by RDL Cardholders at other WWLS System Libraries may still accrue overdue fines.

2. The following items in the RDL collections will still accrue late fines:

The following items will accrue \$.10/day fines:

- New Adult/Young Adult (YA) books, audiobooks, DVDs, & magazines.
- Adult board games.
- WISCAT items.

The following items will accrue \$1.00/day fines:

- Technology/Electronics (hotspots, laptops/Chromebooks, Senior Outreach equipment, light therapy lamp, Watt meter, code reader). **These now check out for 7 days.**
- Adult/Senior/YA Library of Things kits, backpacks, and outdoor games (pink tags).
- Juvenile STEAM kits and backpacks.

Q. What other types of charges may still be incurred on my library account?

A. If an item is overdue for 50 days, it will be considered lost, and a replacement cost will be charged to your account. If the item is returned to the library, those fines will be waived unless the library has already replaced the item. Additionally, if an item is damaged or a part is missing from an item when it is returned, you may still be charged.

Q. What if I have fines on my account from before you made this change?

A. Most existing fines will be waived, and your card will be cleared. Any existing charges for lost or damaged items will still be the responsibility of the cardholder. Please feel free to stop in and talk to us if you don't see your fines disappear or have questions about charges on your account.

Q. I always thought of fines as a way to support the library. How do I continue to support the library, if not through fines?

A. We are fortunate to have a generous community! The best way to support the library right now is to make donations to our Library or stop in and tell us what we can do to improve your library experience.

RDL is excited to welcome all our community members and to remove any barriers that may have prevented you from using all our services!

Q. Are you worried people won't return their Library items?

A. Studies of public libraries that have gone fine free show that there was no drastic increase in late returns, and in some cases saw a drop in the rate of late returns. In fact, most fines have not existed in the Children's Department since 2019 and has proven this. Patrons will still receive reminder notices and are still responsible for returning their items. As a courtesy to others, we expect patrons who wish to keep items longer to please renew them as necessary (you get two!) and then return them when due.

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