An account is blocked as soon as a book is overdue; overdue items can be renewed over the phone as long as they aren't on reserve and have not exceeded their maximum number of renewals.

First contact about an overdue items occurs between 8 and 14 days after it becomes overdue. This is made by email or USPS.

Second and third contact are made by phone calls at 15 to 21 days and 22 to 29 days past due respectively.

A final notice of intent to bill is sent at 35 to 50 days past due (if not returned within 15 days, the following charges will be assessed to your account...). This is sent USPS. At the same time a limit and note are placed on the account which will restrict the account to two items out at a time until a reliable return record has been established as per policy.

Items are moved to lost and fees added to the account approximately 30 days after that.

My circulation clerk handles the overdue contacts, etc., although the replacement costs are handled by me (she lets me know the items she's billing for and I provide her the current market value of them using the vendors we have in place).

We approach the first three notices as courtesy reminders that items are past due and generating overdue fees. The fourth notice, pre-bill, is relatively formal, but without judgement. We attempt to work with patrons wherever possible to deal with moves (please return the item to your new local library to return via the ILL system), deaths/illness (we will waive limits on renewals for these situations), lost-but-I-think-I-can-find (one-month instead of 3-week renewal where possible), and it-was-ruined-but-I-can't-pay-right now (set up a reasonable payment system; waive standard processing fees if possible; or accept a gently used copy purchased by the patron instead of requiring payment).

As long as the patron is actively communicating with us, we try to maintain as much access for them to library services as possible while being a mindful steward of a public collection and trying to prevent reaching the point where the patron would rather abandon their account and library services than to work with us to resolve the issue.

Regards,

Jessica Little

Library Director

T.A. Cutler Memorial Library  
312 Michigan Ave.  
Saint Louis, Michigan  48880

(989) 681-5141

Hi Deborah;

We are a small 2-person Class II library.  As director, overdue notices fall on me to do.  I usually try to do overdues once a month.

Step One: I send (mail) overdue notices to a person if their items are at least 2 weeks overdue.

Step Two: If no response or returns, then the next time I do overdues, a 2nd notice goes out and their account is put on restriction.

Step Three: If still no response or returns, I send (mail) a bill for the items with a set due date (usually 2 weeks past the date of this 3rd notice).

Step Four: If still no response or returns, I send (certified mail) a final notice that specifies the state law that shows the misdemeanor charge if items are not returned.  This notice also has a specific date to comply.

Step Five: If no response or returns, then we contact our county sheriff''s dept. to report a petty theft (note: we made a policy to only involve the police if items are worth more than $100.  Less than this, we eat the cost).  At this point, the person is removed from our computer system and put into our "bad" ledger with a page that shows how much must be paid before they can reinstate their card.

I have been with my library for 16 years and only have had to involve the police 4 times.  Most people return their items when they get the final letter.

As for being compassionate and flexible: we offer payment plans or the option that a patron may purchase a copy of a lost item for replacement (new copy must be in as good of shape as the item they lost).  We also allow patrons to "pay" for overdue fines with item donations (hardcover books = $2.00 in fines, softcover books = $.50 in fines, DVDs = $3.00 in fines, etc)  This option is used mainly when a child has racked up a huge fine - the parents often have the child clean out their own personal bookshelves or movies to "pay" their fines.  Sometimes we are able to use the donations in our collection and sometimes the items go straight into our sale boxes.

Hope this info helps,

-Laura Orlowski, director

Camden Twp. Library

We use a company called Unique Management for patrons. Its for those who owe over $100.

Our rule of thumb is that 3 days after the item is due they accumulate 10 cents of fines, per day, per item.

If the overdue item is checked in, then the fine per day stops. However, if it continues, I believe after 2 or 3 months the patron will be charged with the amount of the cost of the item. When it is checked in after the billed status,  it changes to a $3 fine per item as long as its in good condition.

Between this the patron is sent about 4 letters and/or emails about the item about to be due, when it is due, when it is over due, and the final notice about the due item. (We prefer letter or email, we don't call or text at our library.)

The letters are done be a designated person, to which she checks the shelves. In terms of emails, our system sends them out automatically about once a week.

In terms of tips, be gentle in fines and let them know of other options of replacement. Like if they find a cheaper version online, not used. Be patient and understand the situation. However, don't be afraid to put your foot down and be strict with rules if certain patrons try to cheat the system.

But the best advice is to stay consistent. There is nothing worse then a patron go to Librarian A then go to Librarian B and hear something different. Then come back to Librarian C who has no idea whats going on.

Sorry, its so long. Hope it helps.

Kaisha Simpson, Albion Library

Hi,

When an item is two weeks overdue we call the patron. One staff person does that. She is very pleasant and friendly and gets pretty good results. At four weeks overdue we send them a friendly letter. At six weeks overdue we mark the item lost and bill them for replacement (the full retail price of the item), plus a $10 processing fee. We mail them a bill. If they return the item at that point it wipes out the replacement cost but they still owe the fee. If they still don't return it, two weeks later they are turned over to a collection agency, although Unique has lost their "teeth" in that they can't report to the credit bureaus any more. Patrons are billed another $10 fee at that time. Once they reach that point even if they return the item we collect the fees.

We try to be as compassionate as possible. If someone has a very good reason for being late we will sometimes waive the fees. They are blocked from checking things out if they have anything overdue. We do occasionally override that, again based on circumstances. Once they owe us money they are definitely blocked, no exceptions. We don't have daily overdue fines so if they owe us money it's because they never returned something, or owe us fees. Like I said, fees can be waived in certain situations.

Nannette Miller

Elk Rapids District Library