

Portland Public Library new policy: No fines

On August 4, 2021, The Board of Selectmen authorized the Library to stop charging fines when books and other items are returned late. For the library, going fine-free will foster equity for all patrons and provide barrier-free access to the library's materials and lifelong learning for all.

No fines for late return of most items! When you return an item after its due date, except for short-term popular items (currently, these include only outdoor yard games and museum passes), fines will NOT be charged and will not appear on your record.

Why? Library fines were developed to provide an incentive to return items. This has proven to be ineffective. Studies in the local libraries who have rescinded fines and nationwide studies show very minimal effect on when patrons return library materials. Fines have previously been a financial barrier to access and have made patrons reluctant to return to the library. We want all members of the Portland community to have the opportunity to use the library equally and regularly.

How does it work?

- **I have fines on my record from the past. What happens now?** Overdue fines from items checked out at Portland Library have been wiped clean for a fresh start.
- You are still responsible for paying overdue fines to other libraries that charge them. All items borrowed from other libraries are subject to the lending policies of the owning library.
- The loan periods remain the same. Most books are borrowed for 3 weeks. See the [Loan Policy](#) for details on borrowing.
- “No fines” does not mean “no responsibility”. If a book is overdue approaching 30 days past the due date, then the item will be assumed lost and the patron will be charged the full replacement cost of the item. Library card privileges at all Library Connection member libraries will be suspended until the item is returned, replaced, or the library receives payment for the item. When the item is returned, there is no fine and no cost to the patron.
- If an item is lost or damaged, you must pay the replacement cost for the item(s). Your borrowing privileges at all Library Connection libraries must be in good standing in order to check out materials from any member library including Portland.

What is the loss of revenue to the Town and Library? Fine revenues have decreased dramatically in recent years, and no fines have been charged during the pandemic since March 2020. Revenue for fees such as printing and faxing that provide actual services continues to support services. The experience of many libraries has been that upon going fine-free, many borrowers return to the library with items they have had long overdue. The value of the returned items more than compensated for the small revenue reduction!

Donations in lieu of fines are cheerfully accepted.