## A guide for school library visits

### Objective: To improve the school library experience for all students through effective school library design

As part of the planning process for your library build or remodel, it’s useful to visit other school libraries to gather ideas and suggestions.

This guide describes using a journey mapping approach to record your experience as you visit other libraries. Journey mapping can also be used to record how staff and students experience your current library space. There are also questions included to identify specific features for consideration in the design process, and as suggested observation points during your visits.

***Find out what works and what does not work.***

***Both aspects are important and have implications for the planning of your library.***

### Profile of host school being visited

Name of school

Age level of students

Roll size

Special Character

Library opening hours

Staffing and staff qualifications

Release time for the TLR each week

Student librarian team

Preparation for the host school **–** shared ahead of time so they can be prepared to talk about these points during the visit if required.

**Vision and learning outcomes**

* How does the library support literacy programmes and a school-wide culture of reading?
* How is the library promoted to staff, students, parents, and community?
* Information / Digital literacy skills model used
* Evidence of this in the library - posters, guides, reminders

**Library use**

* Timetabling – fixed or flexible?
* Are students able to use the centre individually or in small groups for research at any time?
* Library use by staff, students, parent community
* Multi-purpose space / Makerspace

**Library functions and services**

* Support for teaching and learning
* Location of teacher resources

## Journey mapping the school library – from entry to exit and all points in between

Journey mapping (or experience mapping) is a method used to record someone’s experience of a service, product, or process from start to finish.

This method captures a holistic view of the user’s step by step experience, by recording highlights, difficulties, and barriers.

Journey mapping works best when there is a specific user goal as the focus, eg using the library for inquiry based group work, finding a book to read, curating digital content.

For the purposes of designing school library services and spaces, journey maps can provide useful information and perspectives. The maps can identify requirements that inform and guide design decisions to create rewarding user experiences for students and staff.

As a starting point, journey mapping could be carried out with both library users and non-users of your current library spaces and services.

The template below can be used as a guide for what to include in each map. Both staff and students can create journey maps to capture different individual experiences across year levels, learning styles, teaching styles, and needs.

The journey map itself may be created using different formats e.g. sketched, written, or in video diary format. Be flexible in your approach and find a style which suits your staff and students. The value of mapping is in capturing the user’s voice to identify each touchpoint and any barriers along the way.

This information will help to identify specific areas requiring improvement, and elements to observe when visiting other libraries for ideas. You can also create a journey map for any library you visit from your perspective as a visitor entering the library for the first time.

### How to get the most out of your visit

* Map a selection of current library experiences for your own library, with students, staff, and your library team focusing on specific tasks e.g. inquiry activities, reading programmes, library services.
* Analyse these maps to identify any barriers that require attention and seek possible solutions from staff and students.
* Use this information to identify points to observe during your visit to other libraries and gather ideas on how others have addressed similar issues.

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| --- | --- |
| *Map elements* | *Description and notes* |
| *Journey maker* | *Who is creating this journey map e.g. librarian, teacher, student?* |
| *Goal/Task* | *What is the main reason for your visit to the library? The Inquirer, The Reader, The Explorer* |
| *Touch points (can involve physical or virtual spaces)* | *What are the main interaction points along your journey from start to finish? These form the signposts of your journey map*  *What do library users need from each touch point?*  *How do users transition from one interaction point to the next?* |
| *See* | *What do you see during your visit, what stands out?* |
| *Say and Do* | *What are you talking about and doing at each point of your journey?* |
| *Think and Feel* | *What does your journey make you think and feel?* |
| *Highlights – enablers to success* | *What are the positives and why?* |
| *Lowlights – barriers to success* | *What isn’t working for you and how can it be improved?* |

Following the completion of journey mapping your current library spaces and services spend some time considering the following questions:

1. What are your school’s expectations and vision for the new library/learning commons space? What current and future services and activities will it provide and support?

2. What are the challenges or barriers within your current library space? Which features aren’t working well?

3. What are the advantages within your current library space? Which features are working well?

4. What changes would you make to create a more inclusive library space?

The following selection ofquestions focus on common design features to consider during visits to other libraries.

**Central location and access**

* Where is the library located in relation to the main school entrance, administration block, staff room and classrooms?
* What messages does this give to the school community about the value of the library and information centre as an inclusive teaching and learning space in the school?

**Entrance**

* Is it welcoming to all?
* Does it showcase what’s beyond the front door?

**Signage**

* Are different areas clearly defined and signposted?
* Does the signage raise students’ expectations of what is possible rather than what isn’t, eg. ‘Please explore/read/share’, rather than ‘Don’t eat/drink/talk’.

**Interior environment**

* Is the environment comfortable for working in, eg environmental controls?
* Can students and staff connect and work as they need to?

**Student-centred layout**

* Can you see students working in a variety of ways in this layout?
* Is the space inclusive – how does the space accommodate different students in the school community?
* In particular, consider how the journey might differ for students in terms of their
* Physical size
* Learning styles
* Special needs
* Can students easily access the digital tools, print resources, and people they require?

**Flexible learning**

* Can students work individually, in small collaborative teams, and in whole class groups?
* What spaces and tools are available to support staff teaching styles and programmes?

**Creating Readers**

* What spaces are included to encourage readers to develop a passion for books and reading across different formats?

**Idea spaces**

* Is there space for students to create, design, present, and share?

**Collections**

* How are different formats included, displayed, and accessed?
* What allowance has been made for future collection development and management, eg different formats, larger proportion of particular parts of the print collection?

**Display areas**

* Are there spaces for library and student displays?
* How do display areas support readers and researchers, eg shelf ends, above and between shelves, standalone focal points, large screen monitor for book trailer videos?

**Traffic flows – including issues and returns area**

* How do students enter, issue and return books, move around, and exit the library?
* Can everyone get to where they need to be easily and without barriers to easy movement?

**Library staff as educators**

* What spaces are required for the library team to deliver services to students supporting both inquiry and reading engagement?
* What programmes are being run that include the wider school community and what type of spaces are required for these?

**Library management**

* How does this space work for everyday routines, processes, and other library management tasks?
* Do the library’s digital tools and virtual presence require access spaces, eg OPAC search terminals, RFID /self-issuing kiosk, BYOD charging/connection stations?
* What space is required to fit the needs of the library team, including student librarians?

**Centralised library/teacher resource work area (if applicable)**

* How will these items be stored and accessed?
* What type of workspace is required?

### Next steps

The journey maps you create, for both your current library and the libraries you visit, will give you lots of research data to consider. This information can inform design decisions and directions as you create plans for your new library.

Journey mapping is a method that can be used at any stage in the development of school library services and spaces. The important thing is to focus on the goals of your students and staff.

It’s all about designing a library that creates successful, happy, and engaging journeys for students when they visit.