

# Using Design to Control Volume in Your Library

Over the past ten years, our libraries and learning commons have changed their policy on how patrons are using the space, especially when it comes to volume. No longer do we quiet our patrons as they talk, work and plan with friends and colleagues. Quiet individual work has evolved into collaborating in groups as innovative ideas are discussed. Yet a balance is needed when we are trying to control volume.

How do we create a space that is welcoming, accessible to everyone, allows people to talk and discuss in groups and yet not be so overwhelming in volume that it disturbs other patrons. Obviously using study or group rooms does help with this situation for those libraries that have that option. Many smaller schools and libraries which do not have the space for extra rooms need other low-cost options.

Redesigning your floor plan to include collaborative zones or small niches will help break up the space. Once a group is set up in a small contained area or collaboration zone, the group, now in a defined space, will keep their volume to suit the space. A room that is wide open sends a signal to your patrons that loud work is what is needed to fill the space. A small zone however, being smaller but not necessarily completely closed, signals to the group to keep the volume lower to fill a small space.

*“Furniture layout signals the intent of a space. As with zoning, furniture plays a role in cueing behavior by either encouraging or dissuading various activities within a given space.” (“Create a high-functioning library,” 81)*

So how do we arrange our space to include various zones for collaboration and individual work? Placing your furniture or shelves in an “L” or circular pattern helps define spaces within your library.

*“Physical space has always been and always will be an essential asset of the library. As books, periodicals, and reference collections become available online, those shelf spaces formerly filled with these items can now become spaces for people to meet and work. Space will remain an effective multisensory, emotional and interactive tool for socializing and learning.” (“Creating a high functioning library,” xii)*

Other material may be used to hang from the ceiling to make a barrier or visually signify a specific area. Make sure there aren’t any sensors that could be set off with something hanging.

Always make sure you have one or two tucked away areas for a single person to work or read. It is easy to forget this area with all the talk of collaboration zones and makerspaces. To create this space use shelves, furniture, netting or other material to help separate this area. It does not need to be completely hidden but some netting or shelving partially hiding the area, gives the illusion of being alone.

*“Aligning a space’s functional requirements with the design and locations within a building created an implicit understanding of how users should conduct themselves within the space.” (“Creating a high functioning library,” 77)*

