Best Practices for Dealing with Lost Items

What is the difference between missing and lost?
For our purposes, lost items are ones that have been checked out to a patron and never returned. Missing items are ones that the catalog says should be on the shelf, but cannot be located.

Lost items are associated with a specific patron record and are therefore more complicated to deal with. Once an item is marked lost it will no longer show up in the online patron catalog unless a second copy is attached to the same record. However, they do show up in the Workflows interface, taking up catalog space, and preventing the patron records from being purged. It is highly recommended that lost items be addressed on a regular basis.

Guidelines for dealing with your library's lost items follow:

1) **When to Mark an Item Lost.** Libraries within CCLINC mark items lost on a variety of schedules ranging from six weeks or 90 days past the initial due date up to only once per semester. Your library is free to determine the schedule that best suits your needs. (When an item is lost while on interlibrary loan, all libraries should follow the CCLINC Interlibrary Loan Policies & Hold Procedures on the System Office Library Services web site.) In order to determine items that may be lost, you will need to run one or more of the reports discussed in section two.
Best Practice for When to Mark Items Lost: Agree upon the parameters for marking items lost and develop a process that works best for your institution for marking the items lost.

2) **Lost Reports.** Lost items need to be addressed on two fronts. First, you need to determine which items are long overdue (at least a certain amount of time past the due date) and then you need to address the patrons' records. You can utilize List Bibliography, Items with Charges, or List Users reports to determine this data, but List Users gives the most flexibility and accuracy. The System Office can help you set up this report if you don't know how. (**List Bibliography reports must be scheduled to run overnight to avoid tying up the server, which is used by all CCLINC schools.)**
Best Practice for Lost Reports: Establish a regular schedule for your List Users reports. The report should be run at least once a month.

3) **Marking Items Lost and Billing Patrons.** Once the report has been run, you need to mark the items lost. Bring up the patron's record and use the "mark item lost" gadget in the Items section of the circulation wizard. Make sure you choose "bill user" and put in the price of the item. The item will now display in the patron's record under "Bills" with the current location of "lost-claim" and an amount owed. If your library charges a processing fee for lost items, you can add that charge at this point, also using the "mark item lost" gadget. You may also want to use the data from your report to determine if you need to reorder some of the items. Additionally, if you block your patrons in your college's student records management system when they have lost or long overdue items, you can use this report for that purpose.
Best Practice for Marking Items Lost and Billing Patrons: Establish a regular schedule, for example once a month, for marking items lost and billing patrons using the "mark item lost" gadget in Workflows.

4) **Contacting Patrons.** Each library can determine how often they want to notify patrons of overdue and lost items, and how they would like to contact them (via email or regular mail). You may want to establish a system of emailing when items first become overdue (the System Office can assist you in setting up automatic overdue e-mails) and then proceeding to sending bills by regular mail if you don't get a response and the item is marked lost. For patrons with large quantities of overdue items, expensive items, or items from another library, you may wish to call them or send a certified letter.

Best Practice for Contacting Patrons: Establish a regular schedule for contacting patrons about overdue and lost items. (Clear the use of certified letters with your Business Office and Administration prior to doing the work of generating letters.)

5) **Deleting Lost Items.**   Proceed with caution. As previously stated, lost items are attached to a specific patron record, and until an item is paid for or returned, you cannot remove the item from the catalog. See the workaround below if you wish to delete lost items that have not been paid or returned.* If the item is returned, then you simply check it in. (If you have billed the patron for a processing fee in Workflows, you will need to cancel it when the item is returned. Workflows will alert you that you are checking in an item that is considered "lost-claim.") If the patron pays for the item, be sure to mark the item as paid in Workflows, even if you do not use Workflows reports to keep up with money received. The item will be disconnected from the patron record but it will still remain at a current location of "lost-claim." You can immediately change the item to a location of "deleteme," or you can run a report for all items in the current location of "lost-claim" each year (setting the parameters for just that year), double check that they are no longer attached to a patron record and then set them to "deleteme." Running the report annually is recommended practice, even if you set items to "deleteme" at the point of payment, so that you catch any items that may have been missed when they were paid.

Best Practice for Deleting Lost Items: Run a List Bibliography report at the end of each fiscal year and double check the items with the current location of "lost-claim" to determine if they have been paid for and, if so, changed to "deleteme."

Following these best practices will mean that your lost items will no longer be clogging up your catalog and will also reduce the number of records tied up in CCLINC by items not really on our shelves.

*Workaround for deleting unpaid lost items: If your library wishes to delete a long lost item from Workflows, even though it has not been paid, you will first have to cancel or forgive the charge for the item in the patron's record before changing the item to "deleteme." If you wish to keep the charge on the patron's record and keep the patron blocked so that payment can be accepted in the future, you can then add a bill for a miscellaneous charge to the patron's record and place a note in the record with the title, barcode number and due date of the lost item.

Approved by Steering Committee 11/21/17 Updated 6/3/19