



## Singapore Library Use: What 65 Years of Data Can and Cannot Show

### Description

The official annual dataset spans 1960 to 2024 and combines measures such as public-library reach, collections and loans. It can show long-run scale and turning points, but it cannot by itself explain why use changed or prove that a branch, programme or format caused the movement.

The practical task is to interpret the official long-run library series while keeping breaks, definitions and missing explanations visible. A sound decision separates the controlling condition from convenience, then records the evidence before money, travel, work or a deadline makes the choice harder to reverse.

### Choose the branch before acting

| Situation                           | Practical next step                              |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| You want a long-run trend           | Use consistent series and mark definition breaks |
| You want branch-level performance   | Do not infer it from national totals             |
| You want to explain a sudden change | Check annual reports and external conditions     |
| You compare print and digital use   | Confirm what each year’s series includes         |

### Start with the series name

[SingStat library reach, collections and loans dataset](#) states the controlling point used here: The official dataset contains annual National Library Board series from 1960 to 2024 and is updated as an annual statistical resource. Reach, membership, collections, visits and loans measure different behaviours. Do not put unlike series on one unlabeled line.

For start with the series name, this becomes consequential when “You want a long-run trend” applies. The next move is to use consistent series and mark definition breaks, but only after the underlying condition has been verified and dated.

## Respect the time span

A 65-year run crosses policy, population, branch and technology changes. Annotate major structural periods.

For respect the time span, record the result as confirmed, pending or not applicable. If it is still pending, do not let a convenient assumption close the gap; identify the person or service that can resolve it and the last safe time to ask.

## Use rates where useful

Raw totals can rise with population even if per-person use is flat. Pair counts with a relevant denominator when available.

For use rates where useful, this becomes consequential when • You want to explain a sudden change • applies. The next move is to check annual reports and external conditions, but only after the underlying condition has been verified and dated.

## Mark missing and non-comparable values

[SingStat source table](#) states the controlling point used here: The official source table provides the annual library series and data definitions for careful long-run comparison. A blank, zero and unavailable figure are not the same. Preserve the dataset notation.

For mark missing and non-comparable values, record the result as confirmed, pending or not applicable. If it is still pending, do not let a convenient assumption close the gap; identify the person or service that can resolve it and the last safe time to ask.

## Do not claim causation

A new branch or digital service may coincide with a change without being the sole cause. Use annual reports to frame hypotheses.

For do not claim causation, this becomes consequential when • You want a long-run trend • applies. The next move is to use consistent series and mark definition breaks, but only after the underlying condition has been verified and dated.

## Keep the endpoint honest

The latest observation is 2024 even though the catalogue was refreshed later. Label data year separately from access date.

For keep the endpoint honest, record the result as confirmed, pending or not applicable. If it is still pending, do not let a convenient assumption close the gap; identify the person or service that can

resolve it and the last safe time to ask.

## A 1960-to-2024 series map separating reach, collections and loans

Start with Start with the series name, then test Respect the time span and Use rates where useful. Show the input, the condition applied and the resulting action in separate columns. If a number is calculated, retain the arithmetic; if a route is selected, retain the branch that ruled out the alternative.

| Input or condition                  | Evidence to keep                                        | Decision it changes                              |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| You want a long-run trend           | Do not put unlike series on one unlabeled line.         | Use consistent series and mark definition breaks |
| You want branch-level performance   | Annotate major structural periods.                      | Do not infer it from national totals             |
| You want to explain a sudden change | Pair counts with a relevant denominator when available. | Check annual reports and external conditions     |

## A causation checklist that pairs statistical turning points with annual-report context

Use Mark missing and non-comparable values, Do not claim causation and Keep the endpoint honest as the verification pass. Check the live condition, note the time checked and keep the response or document that supports the conclusion. Unknowns remain visible until resolved; they should not be replaced by a guessed price, deadline, eligibility result, service level or operating detail.

### Worked example

Suppose loans rise while the number of physical libraries remains flat. That pattern may reflect larger collections, digital borrowing, population change, programme design or several factors together. The dataset identifies the movement; it does not identify the cause. A responsible reading checks definitions and the relevant annual report before offering an explanation.

The example is a calculation or decision model, not a guarantee. Change one material input at a time, preserve the original inputs and recheck the live authority or operator page before relying on the result.

### Before you commit

1. Use consistent series and mark definition breaks.
2. Do not infer it from national totals.
3. Check annual reports and external conditions.
4. Confirm what each year’s series includes.
5. Save the date and evidence used for every material condition.

6. Stop and ask the controlling authority, operator or qualified professional if a disputed fact changes the outcome.

Keep year, measure, unit, population and source together. A long-run series can show scale and direction, but it cannot explain every change without supporting records and careful limits.

## Limits

This article uses published aggregate data and does not audit individual branches or user outcomes. The latest data year and series definitions should be checked before reuse.

For an adjacent live guide, see [Singapore Heritage Trees: Build a Route From the Dataset](#). If the next decision shifts to a second practical issue, [Things To Do In Singapore This Weekend: 25-26 April 2026 \(Public Garden, Van Gogh, Lyrids Meteor Shower More\)](#) provides the relevant progression without duplicating this primary intent.

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