

# Bookcases & Shelving

These are the 10 most commonly asked questions about bookcases & shelving for commercial office environments, with straightforward answers to help you make a confident, well-informed purchase decision.

## Top 10 Questions — Bookcases & Shelving

### 1 What size bookcase do I need for storing binders?

Standard 3-ring binders are 11–12 inches tall, so shelf spacing of 12–13 inches accommodates them with clearance for easy removal. A 36-inch-wide bookcase at commercial grade holds approximately 15–18 binders per shelf. For most commercial offices, a 72-inch-tall, 36-inch-wide bookcase with 5–6 adjustable shelves provides the best combination of storage capacity and accessibility. If you're storing banker's boxes (10.5–12 inches tall), use the same 12–13 inch shelf spacing. Always specify metal shelf pins rather than plastic for commercial-grade durability under full binder loads.

### 2 Does a tall bookcase need to be anchored to the wall?

Yes — wall anchoring is required for any bookcase 60 inches or taller. A fully loaded 72-inch commercial bookcase can weigh 250–400+ pounds and poses a serious tip-over hazard. Most commercial building codes, the OSHA general duty clause, and BIFMA standards require anti-tip anchoring. The connection is made with an anti-tip strap or L-bracket fastening the bookcase top to a wall stud. Always adjust the leveling glides on the bottom corners to keep the bookcase plumb — a tilting bookcase is both a stability hazard and a sign of improper installation.

### 3 How much weight can a laminate bookcase shelf hold?

Commercial-grade laminate bookcases hold 50–75 lbs per shelf on standard 30–36 inch wide shelves. Entry-level laminate falls in the 30–50 lb range, and heavy-duty commercial models reach 75–100 lbs per shelf. Steel open shelving far exceeds this at 150–500 lbs per shelf. At 36 inches, you're near the practical span limit for laminate without center support — a fully loaded 36-inch shelf with binders holds approximately 40–45 lbs. Never exceed the rated per-shelf weight, keep the heaviest items on the lowest shelves, and avoid storing heavy items on the top shelf of tall units.

**4****What are the different height options and which is best for a commercial office?**

Commercial bookcases come in four height ranges: low (36–42 inches, 2–3 shelves) for under-window placement or room dividers; mid-height (60 inches, 4–5 shelves) for general use without wall anchoring; full-height (72 inches, 5–6 shelves) which is the most common commercial configuration for maximum storage; and high-density (84–96 inches, 6–8 shelves) for libraries, storage rooms, and law firms — always requiring anchoring. The 72-inch full-height unit is the standard commercial choice. Mid-height 60-inch units are selected when wall anchoring is not feasible or when sight lines must be preserved.

**5****What certifications should I look for on a commercial bookcase?**

Three certifications matter for commercial bookcases. BIFMA X5.9 covers shelf strength under load, overall stability, tip-over resistance, and assembly integrity — this is the primary commercial-grade structural standard. GREENGUARD or GREENGUARD Gold certifies low VOC emissions from the laminate, adhesives, and particleboard — important for sealed office environments and organizations with indoor air quality policies. CARB Phase 2 limits formaldehyde emissions from composite wood products and is the minimum acceptable standard for commercial laminate furniture. Fixed-shelf bookcases that cannot be repositioned as storage needs change are not recommended for commercial use.

**6****What is the best material for a commercial bookcase?**

Thermally Fused Laminate (TFL) over particleboard or MDF is the most common and practical commercial bookcase material — it resists scratches and moisture, comes in a wide range of finishes, and coordinates with most commercial furniture collections. Steel shelving offers far higher capacity (200+ lbs per shelf) and is used in supply rooms, mailrooms, and high-density storage areas. Solid wood veneer is appropriate for executive offices and boardrooms where appearance is the priority, but requires more maintenance. Always specify a full-thickness back panel rather than thin cardboard or fiberboard, as the back panel provides critical structural rigidity.

**7****Should I use open shelving or closed storage cabinets?**

Open shelving (bookcases) is best for frequently accessed items, reference binders, display purposes, and budget-conscious storage. The limitation is visibility — everything is exposed, which requires organization discipline, and it is not appropriate for confidential materials. Closed storage (cabinets with doors) is better for confidential files, visually messy materials, or environments requiring a clean professional appearance. Many offices use a combination approach: open upper shelves for books and reference binders with closed lower cabinets for supplies and sensitive files. Bookcase-hutch combos and lateral file plus hutch combinations deliver this blend in a single coordinated unit.

**8****What width bookcase should I buy?**

The three standard widths are 30 inches (for smaller offices or supplemental shelving in narrow spaces), 36 inches (the most common commercial width with a good capacity-to-footprint ratio), and 48 inches (the maximum practical span for most laminate bookcases without center support). A single-user private office typically uses 30–36 inch units, while shared team areas or resource stations benefit from the 36–48 inch range for higher capacity. For any unit wider than 36 inches, confirm the per-shelf weight capacity supports the intended load — laminate begins to flex at wider spans under heavy loads.

**9****Can I place a bookcase on top of a filing cabinet?**

Only if the products are specifically designed to stack together — such as a bookcase hutch designed for placement on a lateral file. Never stack a freestanding bookcase on a standard filing cabinet because this creates an unstable, top-heavy configuration that poses a serious tip-over hazard. Manufacturer-designed bookcase-on-lateral-file combinations use locking brackets and are structurally rated for the combined load. If you need shelving above a filing cabinet, select a hutch specifically listed as compatible with that cabinet model and confirm it ships with the appropriate attachment hardware.

**10****How do I match a bookcase finish to my existing office furniture?**

Most commercial laminate furniture is available in standard finish families including espresso, harvest cherry, modern walnut, white, and gray. When adding a bookcase to an existing setup, specify from the same manufacturer's collection for the closest match — finish names are standardized across most commercial lines, but exact shades can vary slightly between brands. Always request a color description or physical sample when adding pieces to an existing furniture collection. Screen and catalog color renderings consistently misrepresent real-world appearance, especially for wood-tone finishes.

Have more questions? Our office furniture specialists are ready to help.

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