
Bookcases & Shelving

Q1. What's the difference between a bookcase and an open shelving unit?

A: A bookcase is typically a freestanding unit with a back panel, designed for book and binder storage in office and home environments. Open shelving units often have no back panel and are designed for heavier-duty or warehouse-style storage. In an office context, the terms are used interchangeably, but bookcases tend to be more furniture-grade (wood grain finish, decorative details) while open shelving tends to be more utilitarian (steel, wire, or industrial). For executive offices and conference rooms, furniture-grade bookcases are the right choice. For supply rooms and back-office storage, open metal shelving is more appropriate.

Q2. What are the standard bookcase dimensions?

A: Height: 36", 48", 60", 66", and 72" (sometimes 84" or floor-to-ceiling). Width: 30", 36", and 42" are most common. Depth: 12" (standard for books) and 15-16" (standard for binders and deeper items). The 72"H x 36"W x 12"D bookcase is the most common all-purpose office bookcase. For binders, 15-16" depth is important — standard binders are 11" deep and need 12-13" of shelf depth to sit flat. Measure the primary items to be stored before specifying depth.

Q3. What is the standard shelf spacing for a bookcase?

A: Standard shelf spacing in most commercial bookcases is 9"-12" between shelves — designed for standard book height. Adjustable shelving (shelves that can be repositioned in 1-2" increments) is far more versatile than fixed shelves. Adjustable shelves allow you to accommodate binders (10"+), large format books (12"+), or small paperbacks (7-8"). Always specify adjustable shelf models for office bookcases — you'll change what you store over time, and adjustable shelves accommodate that change without buying a new unit.

Q4. What's the shelf weight capacity I need?

A: Standard commercial bookcase shelves support 50-100 lbs per shelf. For heavy loads — paper, binders packed full, or heavy books — look for shelves rated 100+ lbs. Open metal shelving units for industrial or supply room use can be rated for 400-800 lbs per shelf. The weight rating is typically labeled per shelf, not per unit. Calculate your actual shelf load: a standard 36" shelf loaded with binders weighs approximately 40-60 lbs fully loaded. Most commercial bookcases handle this easily; verify if you're loading heavy paper stock or medical records binders.

Q5. Should I wall-anchor a bookcase?

A: Yes, for any bookcase taller than 42". An unanchored tall bookcase is a tip hazard, particularly when a heavy top shelf is loaded with binders or books. Tip-forward risk increases when a child climbs the lower shelves or when a bottom drawer is opened while upper shelves are loaded. Most commercial bookcases include anti-tip hardware for wall anchoring. Use it. In earthquake-prone areas, wall anchoring of all tall furniture is strongly recommended. OSHA and most building codes also require tip restraint for tall storage units in commercial environments.
