

Understanding Call Numbers

Have you ever wondered how library books are assigned their places on the shelves? Did you know that the call number -- the number placed on the spine of the book -- is a code that provides valuable information about the book? This page provides an introduction to understanding and using library call numbers.

What are call numbers for?

Each book in the library has a unique call number. A call number is like an address: it tells us where the book is located in the library.

Call numbers appear

- like this, from top to bottom, on the spines of books:

LB
2395
.C65
1991

and,

- like this, from left to right, in the online catalog:

LB2395 .C65 1991

DeVry Library, like many academic libraries, uses **Library of Congress Classification** for call numbers. This system uses a combination of letters and numbers to arrange materials by subjects.

Reading Call Numbers

Read a call number by sections, line-by-line. Each section is part of the "code".

example:

LB
2395
.C65
1991

- **LB** -- Read the first line in alphabetical order:
A, B, BF, C, D ... L, LA, LB, LC, M, ML ...
- **2395** -- Read the second line as a whole number:
1, 2, 3, ...45, ...100, 101, ... 1000, ... 2000, ...2430, 2431, 2432
- **.C65** -- The third line is a combination of a letter and numbers.
 - Read the letter alphabetically: A, B, C, D, E, ... Y, Z
 - Read the number as a decimal.
e.g. .C65 = .65
e.g. .C724 = .724
- **1991** -- This is the year the book was published.
Chronological order: 1979, 1985, 1992, 1999 ...

Putting Call Numbers in Shelf Order

To understand how call numbers are put in order in Library of Congress Classification, again look at each section of the call number. These call numbers are in the correct order:

1. LA2301 .M37
2. LB2327 .M3
3. LB2327 .V53 1990
4. LB2328 .B37
5. LB2328 .C34
6. LB2328 .C55
7. LB2328 .C554 1982
8. LB2395 .C65 1987
9. LB2395 .C65 1991

Could you see why the call numbers were arranged in this order? Shelf-order can be confusing at first. Here is the same list of call numbers, with explanations of how they were put in order:

1. LA2301 .M37
2. LB2327 .M3 (LB comes after LA)
3. LB2327 .V53 1990 (Both start with LB2327, V comes after M)
4. LB2328 .B37 (2328 comes after 2327)
5. LB2328 .C34 (C comes after B)
6. LB2328 .C554 (Both start with LB2328 .C, decimal .554 comes after .34)
7. LB2328 .C66 1982 (Decimal .66 comes after .554)
8. LB2395 .C65 1987
9. LB2395 .C65 1991 (Same call numbers except for date: 1991 comes after 1987)

Exercise

Put the following call numbers in the order you would find them on the shelf.

# _____	# _____	# _____	# _____
TK	QA	PN	TK
52	689	9871	52
.C75	.M87	.T6	.L22