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 which provides valuable information about the book?

This is 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

Note that the same call number can be written from top-to-bottom, or left-to-right.

North Shore Community College Library, like many academic libraries in the United States, 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 call numbers line by line:

- Read the first line in alphabetical order: A, B, BF, C, D ..., L, LA, LB, LC, M, ML ...
- Read the second line as a whole number: 1, 2, 3, 45, 100, 101, 1000, 2000, 2430 ...
- The third line is a combination of a letter and numbers.
  Read the letter alphabetically.
  Read the number as a decimal, e.g., .C65 = .65 .C724 = .724
  (Some call numbers have more than one combination letter-number line.)
- This is the year the book was published.

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.

What does the call number mean?

Remember that Library of Congress Classification arranges materials by subjects.

- The first sections of the call number represent the subject of the book.
- The letter-and-decimal section of the call number often represents the author's last name.
- And, as you recall, the last section of a call number is often the date of publication.

example:

Title: *What You Need to Know About Developing Study Skills, Taking Notes & Tests, Using Dictionaries & Libraries*  
Author: Coman, Marcia J.  
Call number LB2395 .C65 1991

Why is this important to know?

Because books are classified by subject, you can often find several helpful books on the same shelf, or nearby. For example, within the same call number LB2395, there are other guides for college study.

Since Library of Congress Classification arranges materials by subjects, knowing the letter(s) for your subject area gives you a place to start browsing the shelves.

Copied from [http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/legacylib/callno.html](http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/legacylib/callno.html)