Library of Congress Call Numbers

What it is and what it all means.

Tara Guthrie, 2010

What is a call number?

- It is like an address. It tells us where a book or other item is located on the shelf in the library.

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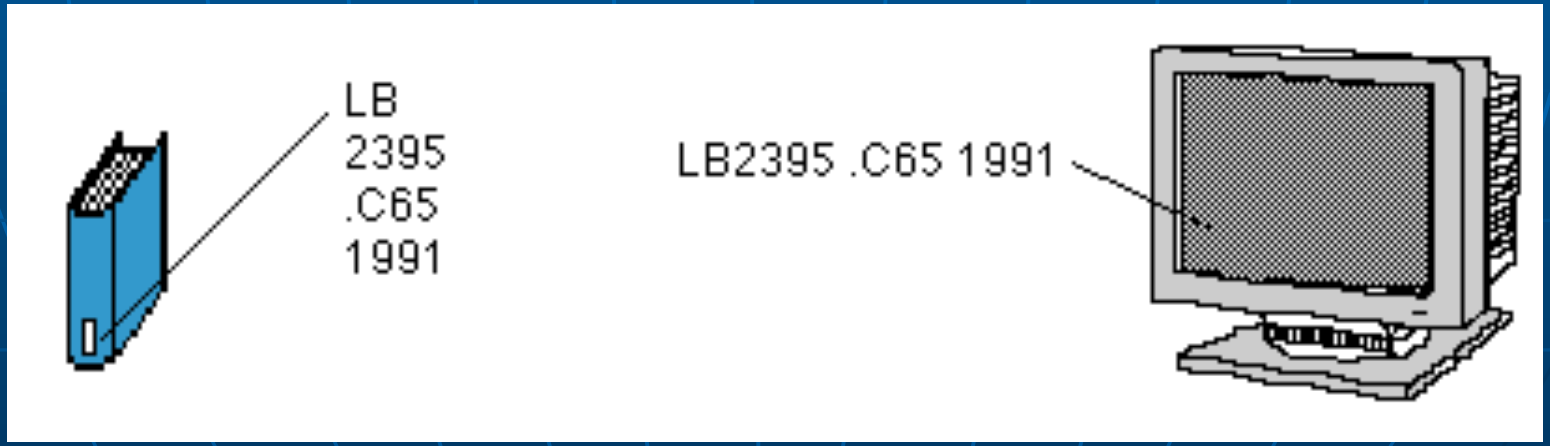
Where do call numbers appear?

- They appear on the spine of the book and in the library's online catalog.
- The call number can be written from top to bottom (on the book's spine), or from left to right (in the online catalog).

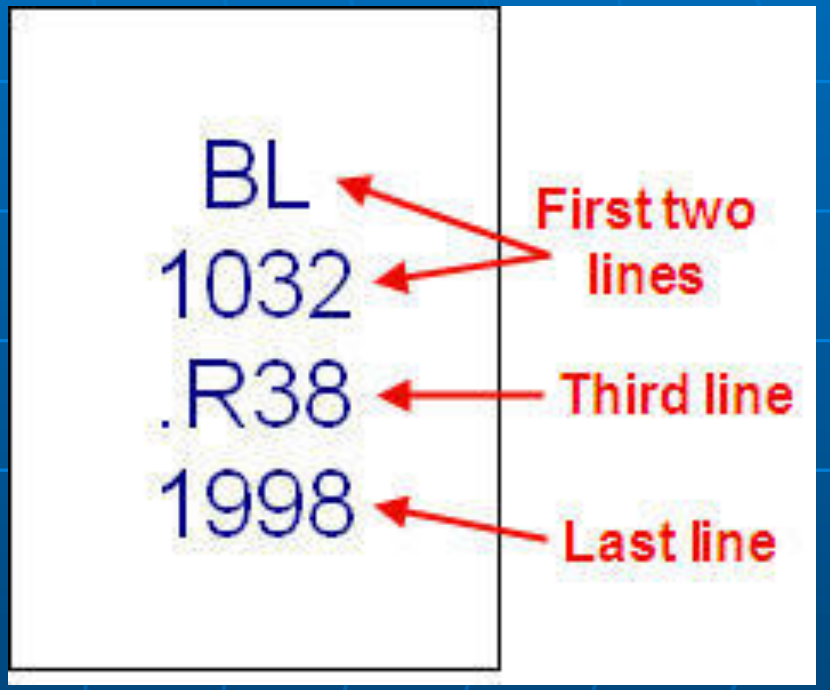


Why Library of Congress (LC)?

- Most academic libraries use the Library of Congress call number system.
- This system uses a combination of letters and numbers to arrange materials on the shelf by subject.

What do the call numbers mean?

- Since LC arranges materials by subject, the first letter(s) represents the general subject area, and the number represents a specific subject.
- The third line represents the author's name.
- The last line is the year it was published.



Which letter represents your subject of study?

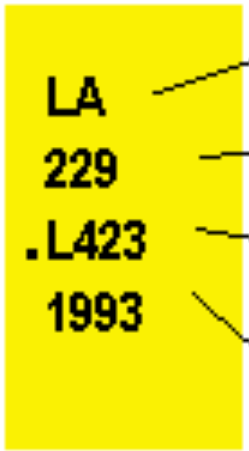
A	General works
B	Philosophy; psychology; religion
C	Auxiliary sciences of history
D	History: General and Old World
E-F	History: America
G	Geography; anthropology; recreation
H	Social sciences
J	Political science
K	Law
L	Education
M	Music and books on music
N	Fine arts
P	Languages and Literature
Q	Science
R	Medicine
S	Agriculture
T	Technology
U	Military science
V	Naval science
Z	Library scienoe

How do I find a book on the shelf with LC Call Numbers?

- The first line of the call number begins with 1, 2, or 3 letters which correspond to a general subject. Read the letters alphabetically.
- The second line may have 1 or more digits which correspond to a specific subject. Read this numerically as a whole number.

Example

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.
Chronological order: 1985, 1987, 1991, 1992 ...

Tip: Always start with the Call Number range signs at the end of the shelves when you begin to look for a book.

Finding a book on the shelf…

- The third line is the trickiest part of the call number since it has a letter and numbers. Look for the letter alphabetically, and the number following the letter is treated as a decimal number. Look for it numerically as a decimal number.

Finding a book on the shelf…

- There may be additional lines of the call number with letter and number combinations. Look for these as you did for the 3rd line of the call number.
- The publication year at the end of the call number is shelved chronologically by year.
- Volume numbers and/or copy numbers may also follow the year.

Why is this important to know?

- Because the books are arranged by subject, you can often find other helpful books on the same topic on the same shelf.
- If you know the letters for your subject area, it gives you a starting place for browsing the shelves.

Reference Books

- Reference books are located in stacks No. 1 and half of stack No. 2.
- Reference materials are labeled "Reference" at the top of the spine.
- The Reference Collection begins near the Circulation Desk.

Special Collections

- High Use resources are in special collections for easy access.
- The **Early Childhood** and **Careers Library** and are identified with unique stickers.
- The **Paperback** Collection has the first letter of the author's last name on the spine.

Special Media Collections

- **Public AVs** (Videos/DVDs) have call numbers that look like this:

  Library Video 23 B

- **Educational Videos** have LC call numbers that look like this:

  DT 63 .A85 2009

- **Music CDs** have LC call numbers that look like this:

  M 1627 .P36 2005

- **Audio Books** have LC call numbers like this: BF 122 .G34 1995 Audio

Special Collections

- If an item is located in a special collection of the library, this will be specified in the Library Catalog when you see the call number.
- Always check the Library Catalog for the collection, the call number, and the item status (to see if it is on the shelf) before trying to find it on the shelf.