How to Shelve Books by Call Number

A Lesson
For Student Assistants at the
Shatford Library

By William K. Grainger

Revised by
Diana Lopez
February 2006
To the Student:

Welcome to the PCC Shatford Library! We are happy to have you join our team! This Dewey Decimal Manual you are about to read is an excellent independent guide in learning/understanding the arrangement of the Dewey Decimal System. The Shatford Library Circulation System is now automated, and of course, there have been many changes.

While you are learning the automated circulation procedures, your supervisor will explain the checking out process in detail. Whatever is not in this manual, you will learn by on-the-job experience and by reading memos that give up-to-date information on any policies or procedures to follow. Your supervisors are here to help you, so please ask them if you have any questions.
Section 1 - Call Numbers

What is meant by a “call number?” If you have ever checked out books from an organized library, you have used call numbers, for they are the numbers which librarians put on the spines of books and in the online catalog. The call number helps you to find the books on the shelves. However, unless you have actually worked in a library, or used one a lot, you may not have thought too much about how the numbers are arranged.

Dewey Decimal Classification is the main classification system used in the Shatford Library. In this scheme all subjects are given a particular number. To find a book on the library shelves you will need to know its CALL NUMBER. You can find this in Voyager and in the Library’s Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC).

Example of a record in Voyager. The call number for this book is here.
As its name implies, Melvil Dewey constructed this classification system on a decimal base. Every subject is given a different number to represent it and a general book will have a lower number than a more specific book. The ten main classes are:

000 Generalia including computers
100 Philosophy and Psychology
200 Religion
300 Social Sciences
400 Language
500 Science
600 Technology
700 The Arts
800 Literature
900 History and Geography

Thus a book given a subject number of 800 would be a very general work on literature throughout the world.

After finding a main subject area, the classification scheme breaks down the subject and gets progressively more specific.

For example:

800 General Literature → 819 American Literature → 820 British Literature → 830 German Literature → 840 French Literature and so on.

To continue the literature example to the third figure, the breakdown of the subject continues:

819 American literature in general → 811 American poetry → 812 American drama → 813 American fiction → 814 American essay
Next comes the decimal feature - that is the decimal point followed by one or more numbers, depending on how specific the book is about a topic.

Examples:

813.4 American fiction 1861-1900
813.5 American fiction 1900-to date
813.52 American fiction 1900-1945
813.54 American fiction 1945-to date

When shelved, books are arranged as a decimal number. That is left to right and digit by digit so that numbers such as 623.8433 will come after 623.843 but before 623.844.

TIP: When shelving, remember to look at the call number, left to right and digit by digit.

Within a subject number the books are filed alphabetically by author—more on that later.

As a Student Assistant in this library, you will be expected to shelve books accurately according to call number. This booklet will teach you how to do it. Later, you will also complete a computer tutorial program called “Shelve It.”

As you will see, this booklet breaks down the shelving task into small steps and presents the process to you in this way so that your supervisor will have more time to teach you other things and to supervise your work. However, if you have any questions about any steps in this “program,” please ask your supervisor to help you.

Good luck!
Directions

Read each page in order as you come to it, unless you are otherwise directed. You will be asked to make various responses—sometimes just answer "Yes" or "No," or fill in a blank; at other times, select a correct response from among several choices, or arrange a group of cards. Decide what you think the best response is; then look at the answers to find the correct response.

Please do not write in the booklet. If you find it helpful to write your answers on a separate sheet of paper, you may do so. In order to be fair with yourself, however, cover the correct answers with a card or with your hand until you have made up your own mind.

You will make very few mistakes. But if you do make any, go back and try to figure out your mistake; then correct it. If you cannot see why your answer is wrong, ask your supervisor for help. He or she will be happy to explain.
Section II – How to Determine Call Number Order

Remember: The number on the spine of a library book is known as the call number.

Each call number has several parts. The first part is known as the Dewey Decimal number. Here, the first part of the Dewey Number is 813, so we'll start there. In order to shelve books properly, you must first be able to arrange Dewey Decimal numbers in correct order.

To arrange books by Dewey Decimal number, you first read the numbers numerically (left to right), and then you put the smallest number first.

Example: 324 is less than 325, so 324 is shelved first.

250 is more than 123, so 123 is shelved first.

Now it's your turn. Put the following numbers in order: (Remember, when shelving books, we start with the smallest and end with the largest.)

804, 424, 505, 020, 321

Answer: 020, 024, 030, 321, 505

Write the following numbers in proper order on a separate sheet of paper:

137  030
021  344
345  220
010  423
120  001

Answer: 010, 120, 137, 220, 345

So far we've been looking only at numbers to the left of the decimal point. Now let's look at numbers to the right. These decimals are valued just as they are in mathematics.

Remember: we look at the numbers from left to right and digit by digit.

Example:
0.21 is less than .3
0.27 is less than .271
0.3 is less than .4

923.5 is more than 923.45, so 923.45 will be shelved first and 923.5 goes after it.

Five is greater than four.
Are these cards in the proper order? Start at the bottom and read up.

If you think they are in the proper order, skip to page 9. If not, continue below.

You are having trouble with decimals. Let’s take a slightly different approach and try reading each figure separately. Compare the numbers in each position from left to right. If they are alike, move to the next position. If they are not alike, put the smaller number first.

Now, let’s compare 629.1305 and 629.134.

The figures to the left of the decimal (629) are alike, so let’s look at the numbers to the right of the decimal. They are: .1305 and .134.

- You can see that the 1s are alike.
- Moving to the right, you see that the 3s are alike.

Hint: Remember to look at the call number left to right and digit by digit.

BUT, in the next position, the 0 and the 4 are not alike. Zero is less than four, so 0 should be filed before 4.

Let’s look at a couple more call numbers. In what order would you shelve the following?

.157 and .2

Answer: .157, since 1 is less than 2.

.95 and .795

Answer: .95, since 9 is greater than 7.

.482 and .53

Answer: .482, since 4 is less than 5.
This is a good time to talk about the "nothing before something" filing rule. When determining shelving order, you already know that we compare numbers left to right and digit by digit, but what if one call number has fewer or no digits in a decimal place? This is where we apply the nothing before something rule.

Let's look at these call numbers:

947.202, 947.21, 947.211

947.202 is first because zero is less than one. (Remember, we compare left to right and digit by digit.) Now, let's look at 947.21. If you compare the numbers digit by digit, 947.21 has no value (0) in the thousandths place (the third place after the decimal), so .21(0) is less than .211. Or we can look at this by remembering that nothing comes before something.

Arrange these call numbers:
808.5, 423, 327.5, 327.43, 808.33

Answer: 808.5, 327.5, 327.43, 808.33, 423

Are these numbers in proper order—top to bottom?

432.6
433.1
436.7
436.52

Answer: No

If a number is the same as the first part of another number, file the shorter number first.

Example:

321.03 is filed before 321

917.3 comes before 917.32

Which comes first
620.31 or 620.311?

Answer: 620.31
Section III – Author Numbers

You learned in Section II to file books by Dewey Decimal numbers. Sometimes, though, Dewey numbers for two books are just alike. It is then necessary to file by other parts of the call number.

The second part of the call number is known as the author number.

Ex: 537.9 C 2
     537.9 C 1

C 1 and C 2 above are author numbers.

In the call number 123 R 1, the author number is R 1.

In 423 V 2, what is the author number?

Answer: Z 4

In 527.35 K 4, the Dewey Decimal number is ______, and the author number is ______.

Answer: 4

In the call number 808.8 L 3, the first part (808.8) is the ______ number, and L 3 is the ______ number.

Answer: 4

Author numbers are composed partly of letters and partly of numbers.

Author numbers are first alphabetized by letter. Then they are arranged by the numbers, as shown: A 1, B 8, B 9, D 7, D 11, E 2, F 1. Where would you shelve K 2 in the sequence F 3, H 2, I 4, L 5, M 2, M 3?

Answer: I 4

Where would you file N 3 in this group?

N 1, N 4, Q 2, P 4

Answer: N 4

Are these author numbers in proper order?

T 3, V 10, U 11, U 13, W 1

If not, put them in order and write your answer on a separate sheet of paper.

Answer: I 9, L 13, N 4, Q 2, P 4
Sometimes the numeric part of an author number contains a dash followed by another number (for example, C 1-3). If there is more than one C 1, put the C 1s in order by the numbers after the dash. EX: C 1, C 2, C 2-2, C 2-3, C 3

Would C 1-2 be shelved before or after C 1-3?  
Answer: C 1-2

Does F 4-1 come before or after F 3?  
Answer: F 4-1

Is 725 R 1-3 before or after 725 R 2-2?  
Answer: 725 R 1-3

Does 437 M 5 come before or after 437 M 6-4?  
Answer: 437 M 5

Put these in order:  
N 4-1, N 4, N 3-4, N 4-3, N 3  
Answer: N 4-1, N 4, N 3-4, N 4-3, N 3

Are these in order from top to bottom?  
Answer: No. The order should be 973 C 1-3, 973 C 11, 973 C 2-2, 973 C 6-8, 973 C 14.
Section IV – Volume and Copy Numbers

Two books often have the same Dewey numbers and author numbers. It is then necessary to file them by volume number (if any) then by copy number.

Ex: 793 D 1 v. 2
    793 D 1 v. 2 c. 2

793 D 1 v. 3
793 D 1 v. 3 c. 2

Copy number 1 is never given a number. As you can see above, it is left blank but is understood to be copy #1.

Are these numbers in order?
623 R 5 v. 1
623 R 5 v. 2
623 R 5 v. 1 c. 2
623 R 5 v. 2 c. 2

Answer: No, and the order is 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. The correct order is 623 R 5 v. 1 c. 2, 623 R 5 v. 1, 623 R 5 v. 2, 623 R 5 v. 2 c. 2, 623 R 5 v. 1 c. 3, 623 R 5 v. 3, 623 R 5 v. 3 c. 2, 623 R 5 v. 3 c. 2.

Remember that volume numbers and copy numbers are used in filing only when the Dewey numbers and author numbers of different books are alike. Are these in order? Read up.

Answer: No.

Section V – Editions

Various editions of a book are shelved in order by the year of publication.
Section VI – How to Place Books on the Shelves

This diagram and excerpt from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library illustrates how you would physically shelve books and in what direction.

When either looking for or reshelving books, remember the rule, "left to right - top to bottom." That means you start at the left on the top shelf and move to the right until the shelf ends. Then, you go to the next shelf beneath that and do the same. When you get to the end of the bottom shelf, move up to the top shelf of the next section, and continue...

http://www.library.uiuc.edu/circ/tutorial/shelving.html
You have completed the first part of your shelving training!! Now, let your supervisor know that you have finished with the manual. If time permits, you will complete the Shelve It! program and/or practice shelving some reserve books at the Circulation Desk.