

# Understanding AMU Library 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 is an introduction to understanding and using library call numbers.

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## 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

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

**LB**  
**2395**  
**.C65**  
**1991**

and,

- from left to right, in the online catalog:

**LB2395 .C65 1991**

Ave Maria University Library, like many academic libraries in the U.S., **uses Library of Congress Classification** for call numbers. This system uses a combination of letters and numbers to arrange materials by subjects.

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## Reading Call Numbers

Read a call number by sections, or 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 letter 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 .C55 (Both start with LB2328 .C, decimal .55 comes after .34)
7. LB2328 .C554 1982 (Decimal .554 comes after .55)
8. LB2395 .C65 1987
9. LB2395 .C65 1991 (Same call numbers except for date: 1991 comes after 1987)

## 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: Marcia J. Coman.

Call number:

**LB2395 .C65 1991**

Let's crack the code by examining the sections of this call number:

- **LB2395** = subject of the book: Methods of Study in Higher Education
- **.C65** = Coman, the author's last name
- **1991** = the publication year

### **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.

- LB2395 .C6 1960 - A Student's Guide to Efficient Study, by Luella Cole
- **LB2395 .C65 1991 - What You Need ... Study Skills, by Marcia J. Coman**
- LB2395 .L447 - Keys to College Success, by Minnette Lenier
- LB2395 .O54 1983 - A Successful Student's Handbook, by Rita Phipps
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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. Which letters represent your subject? View the attached Library of Congress Classification table.