Understanding Library of Congress Call Numbers

A call number is a unique number assigned to all library materials. This number is the “address” of the item. It tells you where the item is located in the Library.

When you look at the library catalog, the record looks like this:

The **call number** is included in the record.

The **location** tells you in which library the item is housed, and whether the item can be circulated, or checked out. If the location says “Reference”, the item may be used in the library only. If the location says “Reserve”, please ask for the item at the Circulation Desk. Reserve items have been set aside by a professor for students to use and must be used within the library.

The **status** tells you if the item is available to be checked out. If there is a date in the status field, the item has been checked out of the library, and that is the date the item is due.
The Call Number on the Item
On the item itself, such as a book, the call number looks like this:

   RC    (1)
   1210   (2)
   .J58   (3)
   2009   (4)

Call numbers usually consist of three to four lines.

1. The first line is arranged alphabetically, and represents the subject area of the book according to the Library of Congress classification schedules.

2. The second line is arranged numerically. This number represents specific topics within the subject area.

3. The third line is alphabetic, then numeric. It usually represents the author’s name or, in the case where there is an editor, the title of the book. In the example above, the letter (J) represents the last name of the author.

4. The fourth line may represent the volume, the year published, or other information. In the above example, the fourth line – 2009 – represents the date of publication.

All books that are REFERENCE (REF), OVERSIZE (OVER), or JUVENILE (JUV) will be identified as such at the beginning of the call number.

Tips

- To locate the item on the shelf, read the call number line by line.

- Items with the same subjects are shelved together. Once you have located the item you’re looking for, browse the shelves around it. Often, you will find additional materials that pertain to your topic.

- If the item you are looking for is not on the shelf, and the record in the library catalog reads “Available”, see a Librarian. The book may be temporarily located elsewhere.