An Overview of the Library of Congress Classification System

The University of Saskatchewan Library, along with most of the college, university and research libraries in North America, uses the Library of Congress Classification System. The LC Classification System organizes library material according to 21 branches of knowledge. The 21 categories are labeled A-Z (the letters I, O, W, X and Y are not used) and are further divided by adding one or two additional letters and sets of numbers. For a detailed view of LC Classification see: http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/lcco/

Outline of the Library of Congress Classification System—annotated for DRAMA Students:

A – General Works

B – Philosophy, Psychology, Religion

C – Auxiliary Sciences of History

D – History: General and Outside the Americas

E – History: North America

F – History: The Americas, including Canada, Mexico, Central and South America

G – Geography, Anthropology, Recreation
   Includes costume and fashion

H – Social Sciences

J – Political Science

K – Law

L – Education

M – Music
   Includes musical theatre of all types

N – Fine Arts
   Includes design, costume and decorative arts

P – Language and Literature
   P -- Includes communication, mass media and speech
   PN – Is the principal range for drama and theatre, stage and film--by period and by region and country
   PQ – Includes Canadian literature and drama in French
   PR – Includes English, Commonwealth and Canadian literature and drama in English
   PS – Contains exclusively American (U.S.) literature and drama
Call numbers: An understanding of Library of Congress classification is vital for efficient library research. Part of the understanding of the classification system is the understanding of call numbers. The call number is a unique code, which provides valuable information about a title and is, in effect, the “address” of the title both on the shelf and in the online catalogue.

How is a call number read? On the spine of a book, the call number can be read line by line. In the online catalogue the call number will appear on a single line and, therefore, needs to be read in sections.

Read the first section or line, the letter or letters, in alphabetical order. Read the second section or line, the number or numbers following, as a whole number. The third section or line is a combination of a letter and number: read the letter alphabetically; read the numbers as a decimal. The last section or line indicates the year in which the title was published. An example is:

Author       McNicoll, Susan
Title         The opening act : Canadian theatre history, 1945-1953 / Susan McNicoll
Published     Vancouver : Ronsdale Press, c2012

LOCATION: Murray Library-3rd Floor North Wing   CALL #: PN2304.M35 2012   STATUS: IN LIBRARY

Call numbers can begin with one, two or three letters. The first letter of a call number represents one of the 21 major divisions of the Library of Congress system. In the example, the subject P is Language & Literature

- The second letter, N represents the general subdivision which includes drama.
- The first set of numbers in a call number helps to further define a title’s subject. The 2304 in the example, indicates that the book is about Canadian drama and theatre.
- The system of letters and numbers after the period is called the “cutter number.” (This is after Charles Cutter, who first developed that coding system.) It is a coded representation of the author’s or an organization’s name or the title of the work. In the example, the M refers to the author—McNicoll, and combined with the 35 makes this call number unique to this particular title.
- The final number after the space refers to the year of publication, which, in the example, is 2012.

Shelving and locating: Items are located by their call numbers, both on the actual shelves in the stacks and within the online catalogue, in both alphabetical and numerical order.

- The letters at the beginning of the call number are alphabetical. The numbers immediately following are in basic numerical order. For example, PR2304 is after PR22303 and before PR2305.
- The cutter numbers [the M35 in the example] are sorted first by the letter, and then by the number as a decimal.
- Dates, volume and issue numbers, copy numbers and other annotations are treated like additional cutter numbers, but are shelved by basic alphabetization.