

How to Read Dewey Decimal Call Numbers

Libraries assign a unique number to each book, government document, video, etc. in their collections, which is used to distinguish it from all other items in the library and indicates where it will be shelved in a collection. This is known as a call number. A label containing this call number appears on almost every item in the library, usually on the spine, but sometimes on the front cover if it is very thin. The major exception in the University Library is periodicals, which are shelved alphabetically by title in each location.

Dewey Decimal call numbers are most often used in public libraries, and in the University Library are assigned to Juvenile Nonfiction books in the Media Center.

Both the Library of Congress (LC) classification system and Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system use call numbers that are a combination of letters and numbers. The first part of each type of call number is designed to arrange materials by subject. A quick way to identify the difference between them, is that LC call numbers begin with letters, and DDC call numbers begin with numbers.

Every DDC call number begins with a three-digit whole number, and some are followed by decimal numbers. In the University Library, the second part contains three letters. In the library catalog, a space separates the parts. On the book label, the first part is usually above the second part, but sometimes they could follow each other as in the Catalog.

Compare DDC and LC Call Numbers

	title	Dewey Decimal	Library of Congress
COMPARE :	<i>The Declaration of Independence</i>	973.3 Uni	
	<i>The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution</i>		JK146 .L35 1956
	<i>Quasars, Pulsars, and Black Holes</i>	523.8 Asi	
COMPARE :	<i>Quasars and Pulsars</i>		QB860 .L37

Let's illustrate how a DDC call number works using the following book from the Oversize Juvenile Nonfiction collection:

973.3 *The Declaration of Independence*
Uni by the United States of America

The first line of a DDC call number identifies the subject of the work and each digit has a specific meaning. In our example, the digits may be interpreted thus:

- The first number, **9**, places the book in the 900s which is History & Geography,
- The second number, **7**, places the book in the 970s which is General History of North America,
- The third number, **3**, places the book the in 973s which is United States,
- The fourth number, **3**, places the book the in 973.3s which is Revolution and confederation, 1775-1789,
- Thus **973.3** is used for materials about the American revolution and confederation which occurred between 1775 and 1789.

Fortunately, you do not need to memorize this. However, you may use this knowledge to your advantage. Can you see how similar materials might be grouped together on the shelf?

The second line identifies the author of the work by using the first three letters of the author's last name, or the corporate name. In this example, the author is a group or corporate entity with no "last name", so the first three letters of the whole name are used, **Uni**.

When using the call number, treat the number that precedes the decimal/period/full stop as a whole number, and that which follows it as a decimal number. Therefore, 091 comes before 910, and 940.13 comes before 940.3. Letters on the second line are read alphabetically. Can you see below that how the number is read, effects where it is located on the shelf?

DDC Numbers Arranged in Alpha-Numeric Order								
098	973.3	976.3	976.4	976.4	977.219	977.5	977.5	978.827
Ha	Uni	Hal	Car	Joh	Ayl	Arc	Gar	Arn

Figuring out the Dewey Decimal System: Dollars and Sense

A call number is the combination of letters and numbers on each book spine. A call number acts as the book's address by indicating exactly where it should be put on the shelf. Books are shelved in increasing order, both numerically and alphabetically. There are 3 simple steps to shelving by Dewey Decimal order.

1. Look at the numbers BEFORE the decimal point as if they were dollars. In this example, \$391 goes before \$392, which goes before \$399.

391.103
WE

392.93
SM

399.94
CL

2. If the numbers before the decimal point are the same, you have to look at the numbers AFTER the decimal point. In order to compare decimals, you need to give them an equal number of digits. For example, .103 has three digits, .93 has two digits, and .940 has three digits. Add zeros so they will both have the same number of digits.

391.08
QZ
↓
↓

1, 2 digits

391.103
SA
↓
↓
↓

1, 2, 3 digits

391.93
LI
↓
↓

1, 2 digits

391.940
MO
↓
↓
↓

1, 2, 3 digits

Therefore, look at the numbers as 080, 103, 930, and 940. Now, look at these numbers as if they were pennies. As you can see, 80 pennies goes before 103 pennies, which would go before 930 pennies.

3. If the numbers before AND after the decimal point are the same, shelve alphabetically by the letters below them.

391.103
SA

391.103
SM

391.103
TY

That's all there is to it. Sorting by the Dewey Decimal System may take a little getting used to, but I've found it much easier when looking at it in terms of dollars (before the decimal point) and pennies (after the decimal point). Also check out: Dewey Decimal Classification System <http://www.tnrplib.bc.ca/dewey.html> and The Consumer Health Information Service: List of Dewey Decimal Classification Numbers for Books http://www.tpl.toronto.on.ca/uni_chi_dewey.jsp

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<http://www.geocities.com/nqiya/deweyshelving.pdf>