

Making Sense of Call Numbers

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Every Library of Congress (LC) call number begins with one to three letters, followed by various combinations of whole numbers, decimal numbers, and/or letters. Sometimes at the end of the call number will be a year, a volume number, and/or a copy number. This guide should help answer questions you have when you are looking for or trying to shelve a book.

Items are arranged in alpha-numeric order, with single-letter call numbers shelved ahead of multiple letter call numbers with the same first letter. Thus, K40 comes before KA1.

Numbers to the left of the decimal point in LC call numbers are whole numbers. Thus, KF54 (KF Fifty-four) comes before KF5381 (HF Five-thousand, three-hundred, eight-one).

Numbers to the right of the decimal point in LC call numbers are decimal numbers. Thus, KF5381 .M37 (M Thirty-seven hundredths) comes before KF5381 .M5 (M Five-tenths or Fifty-hundredths).

Shelving Rules

1. The first part of the call number consists of between one to three letters. Items are shelved alphabetically according to these letters. Tip: single letters are filed before double letters.

K
KA
KB
KC

- 2 The first letter represents a broad subject category. The addition of a second or third letter further defines the subject.

K Law in general
KF Law of the United States
KFN Law of New Jersey

3. The next part of the call number will be a number. This number further defines the subject, for example KF5300 indicates the subject is "Law of the United States", within the category of "Local Legislation".

KF5300 U.S. Law – Local Legislation

4. If several items begin with the same letter(s), the items are then arranged numerically. Numbers which appear on the right of the decimal point are treated as decimal values, i.e. KF5300.432 is "less than" KF5300.5 and KF:

KF5300.432
KF5300.5

5. The second line of the call number consists of a single letter followed by a number. The number on this line is treated as a decimal value. Following is an example of shelf order for a set of books which share the same call number prior to the decimal point.

KF1051.J3
KF1051.J37
KF1051.J378
KF1051.J46

6. If the first two parts of the call numbers (letters and numbers) turn out to be identical, the books are then arranged alphabetically by looking at the letter on the second line. If you discover the letters on that second line are the same, the items are then arranged numerically (remember it's a decimal). To decide how a book should be placed on the shelf please read the call number from left to right, top to bottom. If letters and numbers are identical on one line, drop to the line below. If that line shows a difference, you should shelve the books alphabetically, then numerically in the following fashion:

KF76.76 .A65 P69
KF76.76 .H85 P47
KF76.76 .H94 U85
KF76.76 .063 C683
KF76.76 .063 L33

7. If the entire call number is identical, that the books should be filed in descended order by year, volume number, or edition number that should appear on the final line of the call number. For example, KF5503 .A375 1923 would be shelved before KF5503 .A375 1926.

As a general rule, when in doubt about where to find or shelve a book, consult or leave a note for the circulation supervisor.