

2017

Principles of Explaining LC Call Numbers

Frank Newton
Gardner-Webb University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/doverlibfacpub>



Part of the [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Newton, Frank, "Principles of Explaining LC Call Numbers" (2017). *Dover Library Faculty Professional Development Activities*. 14.
<https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/doverlibfacpub/14>

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the John R. Dover Memorial Library at Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dover Library Faculty Professional Development Activities by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@gardner-webb.edu.

Principles of Explaining LC Call Numbers

Frank Newton, Catalog Librarian

fnewton@gardner-webb.edu

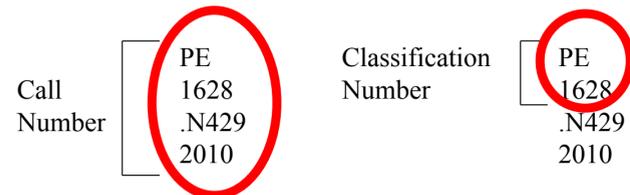
Dover Memorial Library · Gardner-Webb University · Boiling Springs, N.C.

GARDNER-
WEBB
UNIVERSITY



The Principles

1st. Refer to them as call numbers.



2nd. Teaching about call numbers should be sequenced. The person who is explaining LC call numbers should have a clear idea of what people need to know first about this topic.

3rd. All library staff's understanding of call numbers should be expressed in words, and not merely intuitive.

4th. All library staff should participate in explaining call numbers to new people (new students or new library patrons, and new staff).

5th. Catalogers should be involved in explaining call numbers to new people.

6th. LC and Dewey are among our country's contributions to librarianship!

7th. LC call numbers are complex because the world is complex.

Background Assumption

The background assumption is that call numbers as we know them will continue to be useful in libraries for at least another decade. That justifies investing resources in improving how we teach and communicate about call numbers! If print collections in libraries continue to shrink for another couple of decades, then eventually we may find that we will prefer simpler, perhaps dramatically simpler, call numbers for our remaining print collections (such as subject term + year of publication + author for nonfiction). This poster presenter believes we're not going to turn that corner until most of another decade has passed -- or longer.

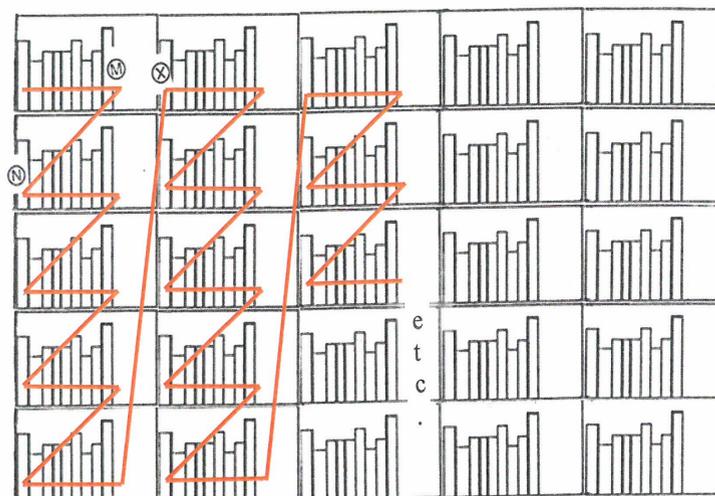
The Principles Exemplified: Highlights from "Just a Few Secrets of Call Numbers"

Today's poster is an outgrowth of a previous talk which I gave three years ago at my library's annual library staff workshop. Copies of the written version of the earlier talk are available here for you to take with you, in two versions (full version for LC libraries, and abbreviated version with notes for Dewey Decimal libraries). In this part of the poster, I will tie in the principles with points made in the original talk. Numbers in [square brackets] refer to sections of the original talk.

[1] Library of Congress and Dewey: Two different languages for describing the topics people write about

Area of Knowledge	Dewey Decimal Classification		Library of Congress Classification
American history	973	≈	E
Materials about the English language (dictionaries, etc.)	420-428	≈	PE
Movies and moviemaking	778.5, 791.437	≈	PN1993 - PN1999, TR840 - TR899

[2d] "Library zigzag"



[2e] "The first line of numbers is read as a whole number" -- What does that mean?

► This is an insight expressed in words, but there is room for improvement in how we explain it.

If we say the first line of numbers is read as a whole number, we mean: 4 before 39

PN 4 is before PN 39

If we say the second line of numbers is read as a decimal, we mean: .x39 before .x4

PN 10 is before PN .H39 is before .H4

[5] Cutters

BF721 .P25 : Main Collection
Adult involvement in child development for staff and parents; a training manual / by Gerald Pavloff and Gary Wilson.

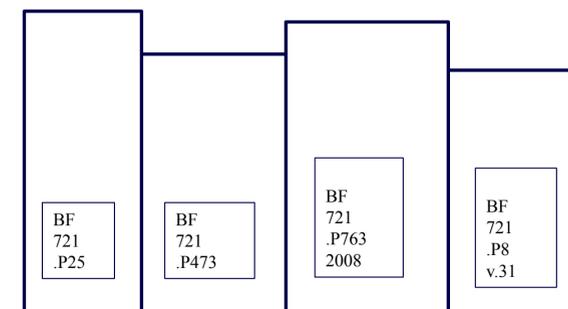
BF721 .P366 1998eb
Applied child study [computer file] : a developmental approach / Anthony D. Pellegrini, David F. Bjorklund.

BF721 .P473 : Main Collection
The origins of intelligence in children / by Jean Piaget; translated by Margaret Cook.

BF721 .P763 2008 : Main Collection
When the labels don't fit : a new approach to raising a challenging child / Barbara Probst.

BF721 .P8 v.31 : Main Collection
The Psychoanalytic study of the child.

In the "stacked format" on the spines of the books, omitting the E-book (BF721 .P366 1998eb), these call numbers would look like this:



Discussion of the Principles

1. The point of the 1st principle is not to be ashamed of our terminology. It is not perfect, but it is good enough, and it makes distinctions which deserve to be respected.

2. Examples of the 2nd principle about sequencing the learning about in "Just a Few Secrets of Call Numbers." The concept of Dewey Decimal and Library of Congress Classification as two parallel languages is put right near the beginning, because most researchers and library staff in the U.S. come to LC with some prior knowledge of Dewey Decimal. The concept of when library users need ISBN's and when they need call numbers is also put very near the beginning, because it is important not to waste our library users' time by letting them focus on the wrong number from the point of view of what they need to retrieve.

3-4. The 3rd principle makes the 4th principle possible. If we can put our understanding of how call numbers work into words, then we are prepared to help explain call numbers to new people.

5. The 5th principle is a logical outgrowth of the 4th principle. Just as reference and instruction librarians take part in explaining call numbers as a part of library instruction, so also catalog librarians should take part in explaining call numbers as a logical outgrowth of their experience working with the classification schedules. From the classification schedules, lots of principles can be extracted, varying widely in importance and basicness.

6. The 6th principle is not a "love it or leave it" statement, but it is something for American librarians to be proud of.

7. The last principle justifies the fact that call numbers need to be talked over in order to be understood.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my colleagues at Dover Memorial Library, Gardner-Webb University, who were the audience for the first version of this talk and gave me a lot of helpful and encouraging feedback. Several of them have inspired me with their enthusiasm for research and presentations. In particular I thank Pam Dennis for help with PowerPoint and Mary Roby, Dean of Libraries at Gardner-Webb, for providing an environment where research is not required but is celebrated.

Celebrate LC call numbers if you use them to organize the physical books in your library.
Innovate and *collaborate* in how you explain them to new students and new library staff!

North Carolina Library Association
Biennial Conference, October 19th, 2017