What is the purpose of call numbers? Each book or journal has a unique call number, which provides an address or location for the item, and also provides valuable information about it, such as the subject, first letter of the author’s last name, and date of publication.

How do you read call numbers? The Library of Congress Classification System uses a combination of letters and numbers to arrange materials on library shelves by subject:

1. Read the first line in alphabetical order. A, B, BF, CD… Q, QA, QB… QE, R, S…
2. Read the second line as a whole number. 1, 2, 45, 101, 500, 500.1, 500.5, 871, 1000, 2468…
3. The third line is a combination of a letter and numbers:
   - Read the letter alphabetically.
   - Read the number as a decimal: 
     .B535 comes before .B56 (Some call numbers have more than one combination letter-number line.)
4. The last line is the publication date, read in chronological order: 2005, 2006, 2007

Call numbers appear: on the spine of books…

QE
871
.C45
2007
In what order do call numbers appear on the shelf? Call numbers are arranged line by line, just as they are read, starting with the letter or letters in alphabetical order:
What information does the call number tell you? The Library of Congress Classification System arranges materials by subjects. The first sections of the call number represent the subject of the book. The letter-and-decimal section of the call number often represents the author’s last name. The last section of a call number is often the date of publication:

Title: *Glorified Dinosaurs: the origins and early evolution of birds*
Author: Chiappe, Luis M.
Call Number: QE 871 .C45 2007

The first two lines describe the subject of the book: QE871 = paleozoology - birds
This line often represents the author’s last name: .C45 = Chiappe
The year the book was published
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