

Shelving Books in Pierce County Library

How the Dewey Decimal System Works

The Dewey System only applies to non-fiction items. Any given item can have a long Dewey Decimal number (also called the "call number"), such as 595.789 BROCK. The reason these numbers get so long is because each digit helps narrow down to the specific subject that the book is about.

The Dewey System first organizes all books into 10 main subject classes. These are:

- 000 Generalities
- 100 Philosophy and Psychology
- 200 Religion
- 300 Social Science
- 400 Language
- 500 Natural Science and Mathematics
- 600 Technology (Applied Sciences)
- 700 Arts
- 800 Literature
- 900 Geography and History

Within each class, Dewey call numbers continue to get more and more specific. The example 595.789 is a book about butterflies. To get to the subclass for butterflies, the Dewey number grows like this:

- 500 Natural Science
- 590 Zoological Sciences
- 595 Other Invertebrates
- 595.7 Insects
- 595.78 Lepidoptera
- 595.789 Butterflies

Finally, since more than one book about butterflies could have the number 595.789, we also add to the end the first seven letters of the author's last name (or, if no author is given, the first seven letters of the publisher). In our example, the author is James P. Brock, so BROCK is added to the end of the Dewey call number to get 595.789 BROCK.

In a decimal system, books are filed digit by digit--not by whole number.

Another way to think of it is if all the numbers were the same length (zeros have been added in this example):

- 331.0000
- 331.0100
- 331.0160
- 331.0200
- 331.0410
- 331.0413
- 331.0420

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331.1000
331.1980
331.2000

A sample shelving of decimal numbers and letters without zeros added:

641 Betteri
641.5 Cornwel
641.5 Wolk
641.555 Ray
641.594 Munsfie
641.5945 Food
641.596 Montagu
641.596 West
641.65 Desmond
641.812 Savo

Shelving Items in "Dewey Order"

Remember in the Dewey Decimal System, books are filed digit by digit, not by whole number. It doesn't matter how long the number is. Items get shelved in order of the numbers, as if they all had the same number of digits. Here is another example - the call numbers below are in proper Dewey order:

331
331.01
331.016
331.02
331.041
331.0413
331.042
331.1
331.198
331.2

Notice that the number of digits to the right of the decimal point can vary from 1 to 4 digits. Just because there are more digits does not mean that the number is larger.

In this example, after the decimal numbers come the letters from the author's name (or publisher). When two books have the same number, then they go in alphabetical order by the letters. Here is an example of Dewey order with decimal numbers and letters:

641 Betteri
641.5 Cornwel

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641.5 Wolk
641.555 Ray
641.594 Munsfie
641.5945 Food
641.596 Montagu
641.596 West
641.65 Desmond
641.812 Savo

If an author has written two or more books on the same subject the shelving order then considers the title of the books. For example:

158 McGraw, P Life Strategies: Doing What Works, Doing What Matters
158 McGraw, P Real Life: Preparing for the 7 Most Challenging Days of your Life

In this case both books are written by the same author, they have the same call number. To decide which one is place on the shelf first the title is considered. In this case “Life Strategies” would come before “Real Life”.

In addition to Dewey and alphabetical organizations, this library system also uses a number of prefixes to designate content and where in the library an item is shelved. For instance, E 595.789 Morriso is a non-fiction book about butterflies, but since it has an E prefix; it is shelved in the Children’s area.

Here are a few of the most common prefixes used in our system:

J – Juvenile	YA - Young Adult	PB - Paperback
DVD - DVD movie	B – Biography	W – Western
LP – Large Print	E – Easy	R - Reference

How Fiction Items are shelved

Shelve fiction items alphabetically from left to right by the author’s last name or publisher if no author is assigned. Fiction materials are not assigned numbers:

Mitchel, M
Sunset

If two or more items have authors with the same last name, then go to the initial of the author’s first name:

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Michael, F

Michael, J

After considering the author, books are shelved by the title.

Ignore the words "A," "An," and "The" at the beginning of the titles.

Critchon, M Andromeda Strain (The Andromeda Strain omitted "The")

Critchon, M Jurassic Park

Critchon, M Lost World (The Lost World omitted "The")

Once the title has started use all words in the title.

The Fox and the Hounds *would shelve as* Fox and the Hounds