

## Reading Library of Congress Call Numbers

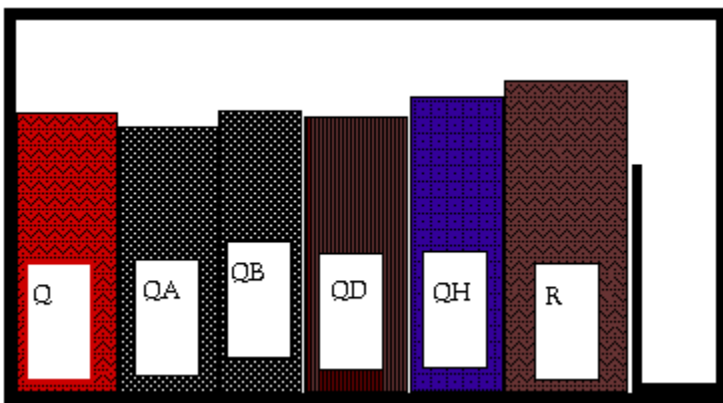
**AN OVERVIEW:** Library of Congress call numbers are made up of at least three lines:

- The first line is a letter and it is arranged in alphabetical order.
- The second line is a number and it is arranged in numerical order.
- The third line is a combination of a letter and a number. This line is arranged alphabetically and then by *decimal* number.
- Sometimes there is an additional line with a letter-number combination which is arranged the same way as the third line and sometimes there is a publication year on the bottom line of the call number.

### LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK:

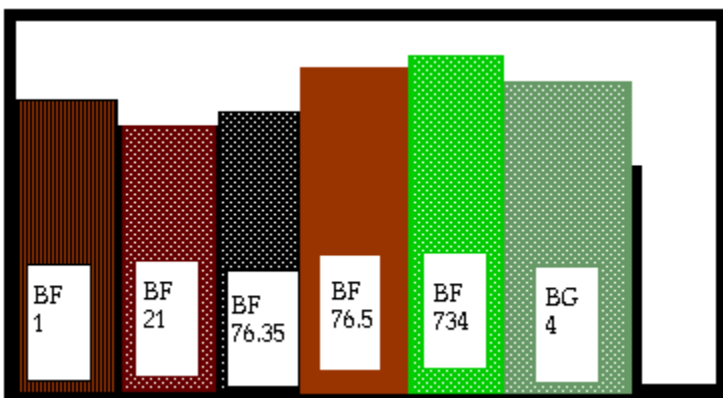
#### FIRST LINE:

The order of the first line is alphabetical.



#### SECOND LINE:

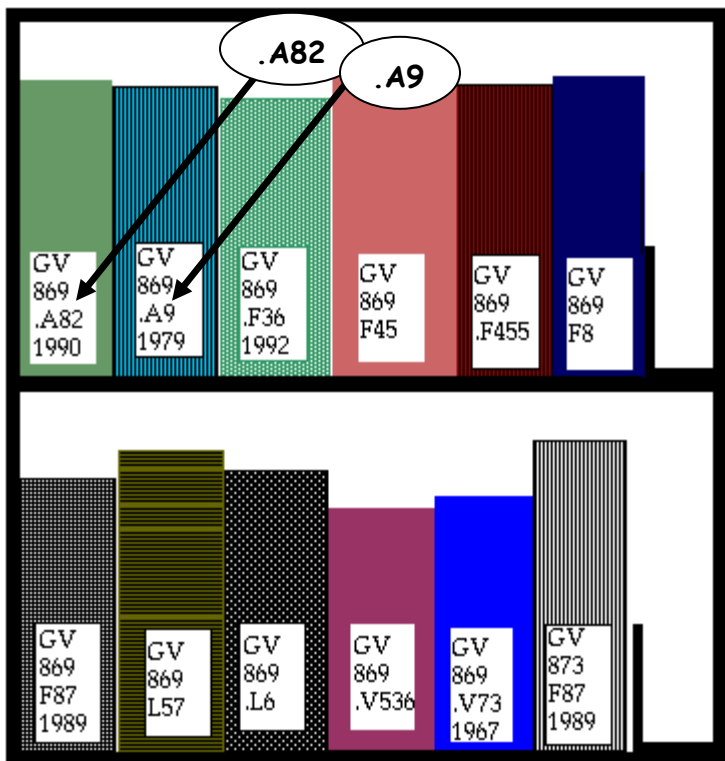
Books with call numbers starting with same first line (for example, all the **BFs**) are next arranged in order by the second line of the call number. The second line of the call number will be a number, so the order of the second line is numerical: 1 comes before 2, 2 comes before 20, 76.5 comes before 734, etc.



### THIRD LINE (& sometimes the fourth line):

The third line of the call number will contain both a letter and a *decimal* number. The order of the third line is alphabetical and then by *decimal* number.

**A NOTE ABOUT DECIMAL NUMBERS:** Decimal numbers can be problematic when shelving books. Looking at the call numbers below, a person may think: "The number 82 is greater than the number 9, so the number 9 should come first in call number arrangement. This means that *GV869.A9 1979* should precede *GV869.A82 1990*." This is **NOT** the case because the numbers following the decimals are *read as decimals*: .9 is greater than .82.



#### This May Help!

Add zeroes to the decimal numbers to make them appear "balanced" with the other decimal digits.

For Example:

When you compare: .A82  
.A9

Add a zero to .9 and look!

.A82  
.A90

Now it is easier to tell which is the greater number.

### FINAL LINES:

The final line of the call number will include some details to indicate the publication date of the book. Dates are now added to all call numbers, this wasn't always the case. If you find a book without a date that might be a clue that it has been around for a long time. Books with the same call number but different publication dates are shelved in chronological order: 1985, 1991, 1992.... Books with the same call number that are part of a multi-volume set (like encyclopedias) are arranged in numerical order by volume number. The same idea applies to books that are duplicate copies (c. 2, c.3).