

The Library of Congress Call Numbers

- **Classification Numbers**

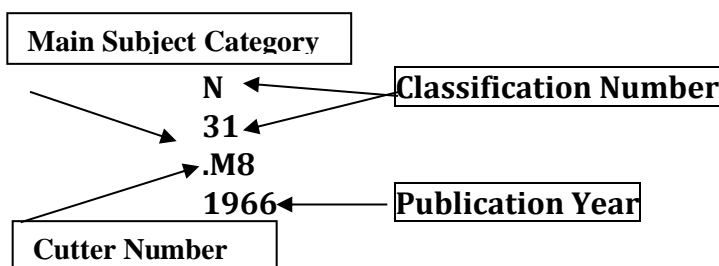
The Library of Congress (LC) uses **twenty-one letters** of the alphabet to indicate broad subject areas. The LC call numbers begin with one or two or three capitalized letters followed by whole numbers with possible decimal extensions ranging from 1-9999. Together, it forms the subject of a book, and we call this field a **classification number** which are listed on either side of book shelves in the library to guide people to the main call number area to locate books.

A single letter with a whole number (e.g. N31) indicates a broad subject category which we often refer as the **main class**. Two or three letters with a whole number (e.g. NA31 or KFC35) designate a **subclass** from the main class.

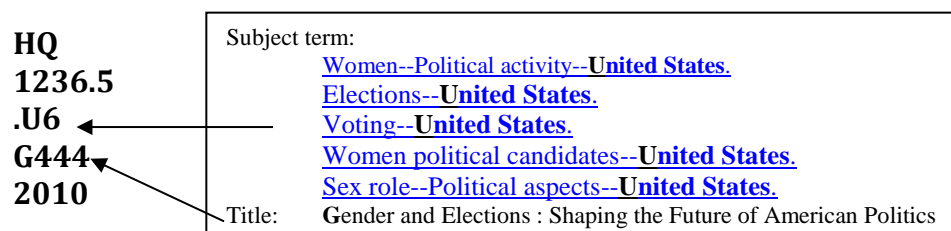
The following is an illustration of a simple call number which can be found on a little sticker pasted on the spine of a book owned by a library. The **classification number** is N31.

- **Cutter Numbers**

A **Cutter number** refers to a dot, a letter, and a decimal number right after the classification number. The dot in a cutter number indicates that the number in this field is a decimal number, and the letter in this field represents the author or the title of the book. The cutter number is used to further identify the book. In the following example, the cutter number is .M8 which is followed by the publication year.



Some of the books have **double cutter numbers**. The first cutter number indicates a specific aspect of the main subject, and the second cutter number indicates the author or title. The first cutter number has a dot in front of the letter, but the second one does not.



- **LC Call Numbers**

The classification number, the cutter number(s), and sometimes the publication year are combined to form a **call number**, so named because, in early libraries, these numbers were called out to library staff working in the stacks that were not open to the public so that they would retrieve the items for patrons.

Nowadays, we have open shelves for users to locate books in most of the libraries in the world, and we use call numbers as addresses to locate books in print format in a library.

If you are a visual learner, go to the following websites to learn how to read a Library of Congress call number.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vdh3O5PdEiw>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4djuA5ZfOWE>

