How to find books and DVDs on the shelf

Each book or DVD has a Call Number on its spine. This call number is like a house address – it identifies the house location and is unique to the book or DVD. If you have the call number, you can look at a “map” and find the item.

The “map”, or the organizational system used to decide where to shelve books is called Library of Congress. This system is similar to the Dewey Decimal system you may have used in elementary or high school. It groups books and DVDs with similar themes into the same letter category, and then gives each book a unique number that is more specific about its topic.

For example, this book “Climate Change: what everyone needs to know” has a call number of:

RA 793 .R66 2018

RA stands for Public aspects of medicine
793 stands for Medical geography, climatology and meteorology
R66 stands for the other, Romm, Joseph
2018 stands for the year of publication

All the books are housed alphabetically, and then numerically. When you find a book you’re interested in, write down the call number and then follow the letters and numbers until you find your book.

Different locations for different materials

The libraries have different locations for different materials. DVDs are kept in different places than books; children’s books are in a different location than adult books; periodicals (magazines and journals) are in a different location than those. And reference books (large books that provide an overview on a topic) are kept in another place. They will all have similar call numbers, except at the end of the call number, a location identifier will be there.

For example, if you’re looking for research material about moose, you can find it in a variety of places:

QL 737 .U55 .G57 – this is in the regular collection
QL 737 .U55 .R54 JUV – This books is located in the Juvenile Books section (kid’s books)
QL 737.U55 .M66 AV – This is a DVD
QL 751 .E61 REF 1987 – This is in the reference section
You can browse QL 737 in any section and you will find something about moose. In the reference section you may have to go a bit broader, but there will be something relevant close to the numbers you were looking for.

**Library of Congress Classification**

Here is a summary of the Library of Congress classifications. You can also go to the shelf and browse for interesting books on your topic.

A – General works
B – Philosophy, Psychology, Religion
C – Auxiliary Sciences of History
D – World History and History of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, New Zealand
E – History of the Americas
F – History of the Americas
G – Geography, anthropology, recreation
H – Social Sciences
J – Political Science
K – Law
L – Education
M – Music and Books on Music
N – Fine Arts
P – Language and literature
Q – Science
R – Medicine
S – Agriculture
T – Technology
U – Military Science
Z – Bibliography, Library Science, Information Resources (General)