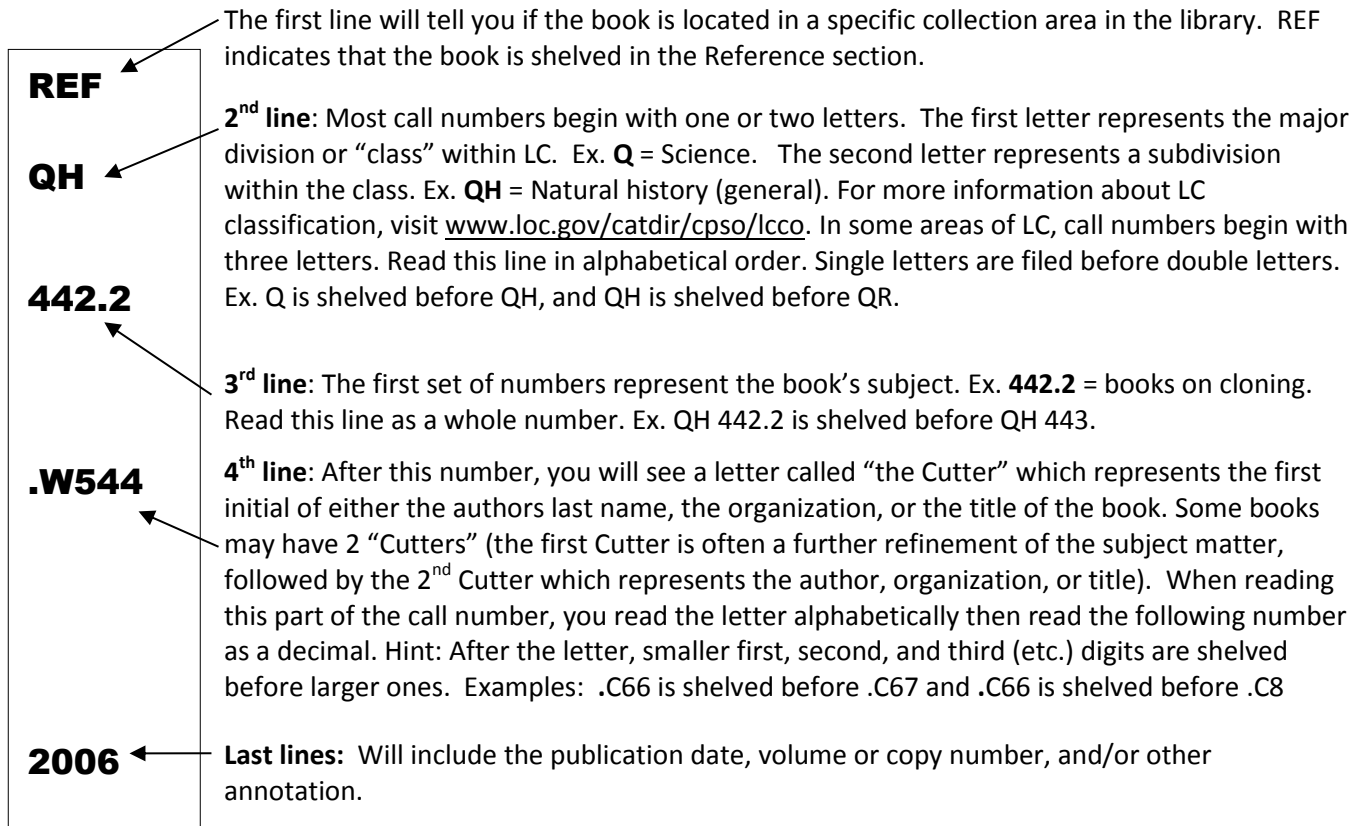# Understanding call numbers

Most college and university libraries use the Library of Congress Classification System (LC) to organize materials. Every item in our collection is assigned a unique call number, or address - based on the subject and publication details. Library materials are shelved in call number order, and other titles on a similar topic will be shelved nearby.

Read the call number top-to-bottom, line by line

REF

QH

442.2

.W544

2006

The first line will tell you if the book is located in a specific collection area in the library. REF indicates that the book is shelved in the Reference section.

2nd line: Most call numbers begin with one or two letters. The first letter represents the major division or "class" within LC. Ex. **Q** = Science. The second letter represents a subdivision within the class. Ex. **QH** = Natural history (general). For more information about LC classification, visit www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/lcco. In some areas of LC, call numbers begin with three letters. Read this line in alphabetical order. Single letters are filed before double letters. Ex. Q is shelved before QH, and QH is shelved before QR.

3rd line: The first set of numbers represent the book's subject. Ex. **442.2** = books on cloning. Read this line as a whole number. Ex. QH 442.2 is shelved before QH 443.

4th line: After this number, you will see a letter called "the Cutter" which represents the first initial of either the authors last name, the organization, or the title of the book. Some books may have 2 "Cutters" (the first Cutter is often a further refinement of the subject matter, followed by the 2nd Cutter which represents the author, organization, or title). When reading this part of the call number, you read the letter alphabetically then read the following number as a decimal. Hint: After the letter, smaller first, second, and third (etc.) digits are shelved before larger ones. Examples: **.**C66 is shelved before .C67 and **.**C66 is shelved before .C8

Last lines: Will include the publication date, volume or copy number, and/or other annotation.

Summary: this diagram will help you visualize how call numbers are shelved:

Q before QH		.B before .C		.C555 before .C5577		.C5577 before .D38		442.2 before 447		v. 1 before v. 2		2002 before 2007	
Q 1 I48	QH 442.2 .W544 2006	QH 442.2 .B678	QH 442.2 .C555	QH 442.2 .C555	QH 442.2 C5577	QH 442.2 .C5577	QH442.2 .D38	QH442.2 .D38	QH 447 .B76	QH 447 .B76 v. 1	QH 447 .B76 v. 2	QH 447 .B76 2002	QH 447 .B76 2007

☞ For more information about call numbers, visit http://www.uvic.ca/library/research/tips/callnumbers/index.php.

☞ To view detailed floor maps and call number locations in the McPherson Library, visit www.uvic.ca/library/use/floormaps/index.php.