Understanding Library of Congress (LC) Call Numbers

Edmonds Community College uses the Library of Congress classification system to organize books, DVDs, videos and CDs in our library. The LC system uses letters followed by numbers to group items based on 21 general subject disciplines. These disciplines (labeled A-Z) are further divided into more specific subject areas by adding one or two additional letters and numbers. For example, Q represents Science while QB represents Astronomy, a specific subject area of the science discipline.

What is a “call number”? A call number is like an address of a house; it tells you where the book is located on the shelf. Each book, DVD, etc., has its own unique call number on a label which is attached to the book’s spine. A book’s call number also appears as part of the record for that book in the library’s online catalog.

How do I read call numbers?
1. The Library of Congress arranges materials by subject discipline.
2. The call numbers begin with a letter or letters, which tells you the subject of the book.
3. The second section often represents the author’s name, and the last section is the date of publication.

Read call numbers line by line:
- Read the first line in alphabetical order: A, B, BF, C, D... L, LA, LB, LC, M, Ml... 
- Read the second line as a whole number: 1, 2, 3, 45, 100, 101, 1000, 2000, 2430... 
- The third line is a combination of a letter and numbers. Read the letter alphabetically. Read the numbers as a decimal, e.g. .C65 = .65 .C724 = .724 (Some call numbers have more than one combination letter-number line.)
- This is the year the book was published. 