Library of Congress Classification: Module 4.1

Library of Congress Classification
Module 4.1
Principles of Classification
Part 1

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In this module and the next, we will discuss the principles of LC classification, which are enumerated and explained in CSM instruction sheet F 10.

These principles form the foundation of classification with LCC, and should be followed unless there are explicit instructions to the contrary in the classification schedules.
Before we delve into the specific principles covered in F 10, there is an overarching principle to discuss: the fact that resources are classed by discipline and not by subject matter.

For example, this means that you will not find all of the resources about airplanes classed together.
Instead, resources about how airplanes are designed and constructed will be classed in the aeronautics technology schedule; resources about how airplanes are used to transport goods and people from place to place will be classed in HE, the transportation schedule; and resources about how airplanes are used by air forces will be classed in UG, where air forces are classed.
The same principle applies to resources about people. A resource about Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands – whether it is a biography or about the Netherlands during her reign – would be classed in the history of the Netherlands: DJ.

Resources about how she is depicted in fiction, drama, and/or poetry are not about her, personally. They would be classed in the literature schedules. If you think about it, that makes sense. Lots of real-life people are depicted in literature, but sometimes the depiction does not bear any relation to real life. Therefore, it would not make sense to class those resources with the real biography of that person.

Likewise, resources about the portraits of Queen Beatrix would be classed in N, the art schedule. The resources are not about her as a person, but how she is portrayed in works of art.

Now let’s talk about the specific principles contained in CSM instruction sheet F 10.
First, the most specific number should always be used. We should use a broader number only if there is not a specific number available and a more specific one cannot be established.

What do you mean when you say that a more specific one cannot be established?
It can have two different meanings.

This often happens when the resource is about a brand new topic – perhaps a new scientific discovery – and it is not clear what hierarchy it belongs to. In that case, you would use a more general number. An appropriately specific number can be established when the situation becomes clearer.

“If one cannot be established” has another meaning, too: that the library doing the cataloging does not have the ability to propose a specific number. Catalogers at the Library of Congress and in SACO libraries can make proposals, but that is a minority of all of the libraries using LCC. If your library cannot make proposals, use a more general number. If you work in a SACO library or at LC, you should make a proposal.
One of the ways that specificity can be increased is to choose a classification number that includes as many of the significant topical and form aspects of the resource as possible. It is important to realize, though, that it is rare to find all of these aspects within a single classification number. Difficult choices sometimes have to be made.
Here we have a resource about the production and direction of television programs.
One possible number is PN1990.9.P76, but look at the hierarchy pane. The number is for the **Production and direction** of broadcasting – and there are several types of broadcasting, including radio, television, and internet. The number is much less specific than the resource.
If we look a bit further, we find that there is a subhierarchy for television broadcasting. It also has a **Production and direction** number. By using PN1992.75, we are able to bring out the significant aspects of the resource.
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### Specificity

**Example**

Production and direction of television programs

| Drama — Broadcasting — Special topics, A-Z — Production and direction |
|----|---|
| PN1999.9.3 | Language |
| PN1999.9.M5 | Music |
| PN1999.9.P76 | Production and direction |
| PN1999.9.B2 | Public service programs |

- **Wrong**: Drama — Broadcasting — Television broadcasting — Special topics — Production and direction
  - PN1992.46 Performing arts and television
  - PN1991.14 Authoring: technique of script writing, editing the script
  - PN1992.75 Production and direction

- **Wrong**: PN1999.9.3 Language

- **Wrong**: PN1999.9.M5 Music

- **Wrong**: PN1999.9.P76 Production and direction

- **Wrong**: PN1999.9.B2 Public service programs

- **Correct**: Drama — Broadcasting — Television broadcasting — Special topics — Production and direction
  - PN1992.46 Performing arts and television
  - PN1991.14 Authoring: technique of script writing, editing the script
  - PN1992.75 Production and direction
  - PN1999.9.3 Language
  - PN1999.9.M5 Music
  - PN1999.9.P76 Production and direction

[No audio]
Now we have a resource about Boolean operations in algebra.
Boolean operations are based on mathematical logic, so QA9.A5-Z, General works, treatises, and textbooks about mathematical logic, which is part of mathematical philosophy, may seem appropriate. Again, though, it is awfully imprecise when compared to the resource.
There is a better number just below it in the schedule, QA10. If you look at the hierarchy pane, you can see that although the numbers are very close to each other – QA9 and QA10 – QA10 is at a lower level of hierarchy. Algebraic logic has been added as a subhierarchy. QA10 is a General works number, which means that this is where resources about Algebraic logic in general would go. That is still rather broad, since Boolean logic is not the only type of algebraic logic.
The next number down, QA10.3, is the best answer. It is at the same level of hierarchy with QA10, but the caption indicates that it is specifically for Boolean logic.
Specificity

Example

Boolean operations used in algebra

QA10.3 is the most specific number possible.
A resource about how science is depicted in American fiction of the 19th century would be classed with American literature in subclass PS.
Here we have PS169.S413, which, if we read the hierarchy pane, we know is for **Science** as a special subject in American literature. In this context the word history in the hierarchy means history and criticism. This number, therefore, includes the significant aspects of the resource: American literature and science, but it is not for American fiction, and we have lost the century.

Let’s look for a different number.
PS217.S34 also has the caption Science, and we have to look at the hierarchy pane for context. This number is for science as a special topic in 19th century American literature. So we have science and the time period, but not the fact that it is about fiction. Let’s try again.
PS374.S33 again has the caption **Science**. The hierarchy indicates that it refers to science as a special topic in American prose fiction. We have it! Or do we? Now we’re missing the 19th century.

Let’s try one more time.
The caption on PS377 is 19th century. Again, we have to look at the hierarchy pane for the context. It is for the history of 19th century American prose fiction. So now we have fiction and the time period, but not science!

This is a very common situation. Oftentimes, there is no perfect number, there is just the best number. We do want to be as specific as we can with the type of literature that is being discussed, so we can exclude the numbers that are in the literature hierarchy (as opposed to the fiction subhierarchy).
That leaves us with two options: 19th century American fiction, or science in American fiction. Now we have to think about the other resources that are classed in those numbers. PS377 includes histories of 19th century American fiction in general. PS374.S33 includes resources about science in American fiction, from any time period.

To me, it makes more sense to class the resource with Science in American fiction. Otherwise, the 19th century number would be full of resources about special topics in 19th century American fiction along with general resources about 19th century American fiction, and there would be just no organization to them.

That’s what I would do, too, and that is usually what happens. When you have to choose between a special topic and a chronological period, the topic is usually considered to be more specific. Sometimes the special topic and the chronological period are both represented in the number, and when that lucky circumstance happens, you do not have to choose between them.
PS374.S33 is the best number for this resource – although it is not “perfect.”
The final example we want to discuss for the principle of specificity is a general resource about the battles of the Russo-Finnish War.
One option is to class it in DL1037, the **Military history** of Finland. There are two problems with this approach. First, the military history of Finland is much longer than the duration of a single three-month-long war. Second, classing it with the military history of Finland completely leaves out the Soviet Union’s involvement. Let’s exclude that number right away, because there is usually a number or a span of numbers for wars that have conventional names.
The better approach is to class it in DL1099, which as we can see from the hierarchy pane, is for the Military operations of the Russo-Finnish War. As you can see, it is still classed under Finland, but the hierarchy for the war indicates the Soviet Union’s involvement.
As we stated in an earlier module, libraries that use LCC are not required to use Library of Congress Subject Headings. Most of them do, though.

LCSh and LCC work together to fully describe the contents and form of a resource. Aspects of resources that cannot be brought out with classification can be brought out with subject headings.

When using LCSh and LCC together, the class number should match the first (or sometimes the first two) subject headings. According to the rules for LCSh assignment, the first heading is the predominant topic of the resource. If the predominant topic cannot be brought out in one heading, then a second heading is assigned and the two in conjunction determine the class number.

It is important to remember that the class number and the first heading may not be an exact match. LCSh and LCC are different systems that are developed separately on different principles, so the class number may be slightly broader or slightly narrower than the headings.
The first heading assigned to this resource on parent participation in early childhood education is **Early childhood education—Parent participation**.

In this case, there is a classification number that matches the subject heading perfectly: LB1139.35.P37.

Take a look at the hierarchy. It means parent participation as a special topic in early childhood education. You cannot find a better match than that!
Now we have a resource that compares automatic train control and the block system and makes some determinations about how they affect passenger safety.

As a bit of background, block train control is a system that keeps trains apart by making sure multiple trains are not on the same portion of track. Automatic train control is a newer system that uses telecommunications to more precisely locate trains, and keep them apart.

The LC subject headings assigned to the resource are **Railroads—Automatic train control** and **Railroads—Signaling—Block systems**.
Our first option for the classification number is TF630. Looking at the hierarchy pane, it means block systems as a way of signaling in the operation and management of railroads.
The other option is TF638, automatic train control, which is in the same hierarchy – a way to signal on railroads.

So which is better?
Since the first heading assigned is **Railroads—Automatic train control**, we will choose TF638.

We should point out that the choice of a class number can sometimes seem arbitrary, particularly when the possible class numbers are at the same level of hierarchy. In this example, the cataloger may have assigned the heading for automatic train control before the heading for block systems only because the headings are then in alphabetical order. That does happen sometimes. However, the resource may focus more heavily on automatic train control. We would have to examine the resource itself to determine whether the headings – and therefore the class number – were assigned in an arbitrary fashion.
Here is one more example.

A resource on the maintenance of plumbing in office buildings would be assigned the subject headings **Plumbing—Repairing** and **Office buildings—Maintenance and repair**.

So, how would it be classed?
There are two options, and both of them are in the TH Building construction, hierarchy.

The first is TH615.O3, which is for the plumbing of office buildings.
The second is TH6681, which is for **General works** on plumbing maintenance and repair. It is not specific to a type of building.

We have two choices. Which one do you think is better?

If we class it with plumbing in office buildings, we cannot bring out the fact that the resource is about maintenance and repair, rather than a topic such as the installation of plumbing. If we class it with maintenance and repair, we cannot bring out the fact that it is specific to office buildings, which might be very important. I think if we class it with office buildings, it keeps everything about office building plumbing together, which would probably be very useful for plumbers who work in office buildings. It should probably go in TH6515.O3.
I agree. The better number is TH6515.O3.
In this module, we discussed the overarching principle of LCC – that resources are classified by discipline, not by subject matter. We also discussed the principle of specificity, and the relationship between the Library of Congress Subject Headings assigned to a resource and the resource’s classification number.

In the next module, we will cover the other principles contained in CSM F 10: how to choose between the topic and the form or geographic treatment of a resource; how to classify multi-topic resources and resources that discuss how one topic influences another; and how to choose among several satisfactory numbers.
Exercises

Click when you are ready to begin