

## Dewey Decimal system

Dewey Decimal Classification is the most widely used method for organising non-fiction items in a library. It is named after Melville Dewey, who devised the system originally in 1876. It is now in its 23rd edition.

The numbers assigned by the Dewey Decimal System are important for two reasons:

1. they determine the order the books are placed on the shelf
2. they classify items according to subjects that are divided into 10 main groups, each represented by numbers

Dewey said that almost every single subject could fit into 9 broad subject areas and to each of these he allocated a number, from 100 to 900. The subjects left over, which did not conveniently fit into one of these broad categories e.g. journalism, or which covered several categories e.g. encyclopaedias, he placed in a General class and gave it the number 000.

000-099	Generalities (encyclopaedias, bibliographies, periodicals, journalism)
100-199	Philosophy and Related Disciplines
200-299	Religion
300-399	Social Sciences (economics, sociology, government, law, education, work, customs)
400-499	Language (dictionaries, grammar)
500-599	Pure Sciences (astronomy, biology, botany, chemistry, geology, mathematics, palaeontology, physics, zoology)
600-699	Technology (agriculture, aviation, economics, engineering, home business, medicine, radio, television)
700-799	The Arts (architecture, sculpture, painting, music, photography, recreation)
800-899	Literature (novels, poetry, plays, criticism)
900-999	General Geography and History

Major subject fields under each broad grouping have a more specific number:

### **600 Technology**

610 Medical Sciences

620 Engineering

630 Agriculture

etc.

More specific subjects follow:

### **630 Agriculture**

631 Crops and production  
632 Plant diseases, pests  
633 Field crops  
634 Orchards, forestry  
etc.

At this stage Dewey decided to put a decimal point, or full stop, hence the term Dewey Decimal Classification. The only reason for doing this was to make it easier to say, for example, 'Milking is at 6, 3, 7 point 1,2,4' than 'Milking is at six hundred and thirty-seven thousand, one hundred and twenty-four'.

Following the decimal point, subjects are broken down into classes or groups of 10, and given a further number between 0 and 9:

### **637 Dairying**

637.1 Milk production  
637.2 Butter production  
637.3 Cheese production  
etc.

The numbers continue to grow in length the more specific the subject.

Dewey also made combinations of numbers denote treatments of a subject no matter where they appeared throughout the scheme. So anytime you see a classification number containing, after the decimal point, the number '09', you know the book is either history or geography. Anytime you see '03' it tells you the book is either a dictionary or an encyclopaedia. These special numbers will always be followed by other numbers which will tell you, for instance, which country, region, State, or historical period the book covers. '94' is always Australia, '943' is always Queensland. We therefore have:

### **637.109943 Dairying in Queensland**

This is derived from,  
600 Technology  
630 Agriculture  
637 Dairying  
637.1 Milk production  
637.109 Shows the book covers an historical period or geographical area  
637.1099 Geography of Oceania etc.  
637.10994 Australia  
637.109943 Queensland

In small collections it is enough to keep the Dewey Decimal number to the broad subject only. The public library collection is limited to 3 numbers past the decimal point.