Going on a Book Hunt? 1

A safari's success is uncertain because it depends on the unpredictable behaviour of wild animals. Luckily, a hunt for a book in your local library has much better prospects. Books are sorted and classified by a system which places them in a specific and repeatable order, not only making them easy to find but also easy to return to their proper place.

HOW ARE BOOKS CLASSIFIED?

All over the world, books are classified by the Dewey Decimal System. Developed in 1876, it has been modified many times since to allow for the increasing volume and variety of titles.

Apart from fiction, most books are classfied by subject which means all books on the same topic will be placed conveniently together. There are ten main subject classes in the Dewey system:

000 – Computer science, information, and general works
100 – Philosophy and psychology
200 – Religion
300 – Social sciences
400 – Languages
500 – Science and Mathematics
600 – Technology and applied science
700 – Arts and recreation
800 – Literature
900 – History, geography and biography.

Each class is further divided into ten divisions and each of those, into 10 sections, so that the subject becomes more and more specific. Decimal places are added to continue this process (See example at right).

EXAMPLE: Dewey number:

595.789

Science and Mathematics
Zoology
Worms and Insects
Insects
Lepidoptera
Butterflies

would identify that the book was about butterflies.

Of course there are many books about butterflies so further identification would be added identifying the author, the title and the year of publication.

DID YOU KNOW?

The United States Library of Congress in Washington DC is the world's biggest library with over 805 kilometers of shelving and 118 000 000 separate items!
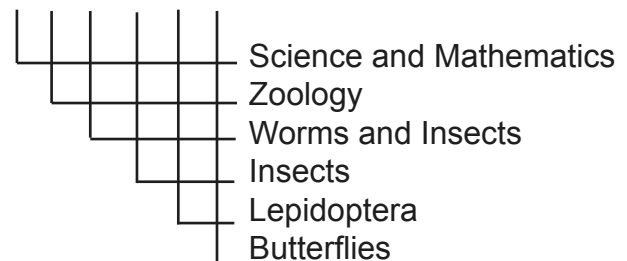
WHO DEVELOPED THE DEWEY SYSTEM?

Melville Louis Dewey was born in a small town in northern New York in 1851. His family was poor and to help pay his way through college he worked in the library, eventually becoming the librarian after graduation.

In those days books had a fixed place on library shelves which was very impractical because each time new books were added, placements had to change. Also, each library had a different system of classification making it difficult for borrowers to use different collections. Dewey worked to develop a classification system that would overcome these problems. His solution was one which combined numbers and decimals. It is now used worldwide and bears his name. As well as helping to standardise libraries and make them more efficient, Dewey worked to train librarians and developed the concept of travelling libraries and picture collections. He started a library supply company, was a founding member of the American Library Society and held important positions in a number of libraries including Director of the New York State Library. He died in 1922.