An Explanation of the Superintendent of Documents Classification System

Principles of the System

The Superintendent of Documents classification system was developed in the Library of the Government Printing Office between 1895 and 1903. It was first described in October 1903 by William Leander Post, then in charge of the Library, in the preface to List of Publications of the Agriculture Department 1862-1902, Department List No. 1, issued by the Superintendent of Documents in 1904.

Mr. Post gives credit for the foundation of the system (classification by governmental author) to Miss Adelaide R. Hasse, who used government organization authorship to assign classification numbers to a List of Publications of the U.S. Department of Agriculture from 1841 to June 30, 1895. Miss Hasse prepared the list while assistant librarian in the Los Angeles Public Library. It was published by the Department of Agriculture in 1896 as its Library Bulletin No. 9.

This system has expanded as the Federal Government has grown. Though still retaining the principles upon which it is based, it has changed in some details and methods of use.

Because the classification system is based on the current organizational status of the government author, it changes as the organizational structure of the federal government changes. Thus, publications of some issuing agencies may be located in as many as three different places in the system.

Despite this functional weakness, it has stood the test of time as a workable arrangement for uniquely identifying publications issued by the United States Government. The Superintendent of Documents classification system has been used for over 90 years to identify public documents which were distributed to depository libraries and described in the Monthly Catalog of U. S. Government Publications. The system is also used to arrange the documents collections in most depository libraries, as well as in the documents collection of the National Archives.

It is hoped that this explanation will also provide a helpful guide for depository libraries which use the Superintendent of Documents (SuDocs) classification system, as well as for other libraries and persons interested in, or concerned with, classification numbers assigned to publications by the Library Programs Service.


Principles of the System

The Superintendent of Documents (SuDocs) classification system is designed to group together publications by the same government author. Within an agency or department, publications are grouped according to the subordinate organization. The purpose of this system is to uniquely identify,
logically relate, and physically arrange each publication so that all publications of a single agency or
department may be found together.

Author Symbols

Each executive department and agency, the Judiciary, Congress, and other major independent
establishments are assigned a unique alphabetical identifier, based on the name of the organization,
e.g., "A" for Agriculture Department, "JU" for Judiciary, and "NS" for National Science Foundation. However, the letters "X" and "Y" are reserved for Congress. The designation "Z" is not used.

Subordinate Offices

To distinguish the subordinate bureaus and offices, numbers are added to the alphabetic identifiers with "1" designating the parent organization, and the secretary's or administrator's office. Beginning with "2", the numbers are applied in numerical order to the subordinate bureaus and offices. These numbers were assigned to bureaus and offices arranged alphabetically when the system was established, and newer subordinate bureaus or offices have been given the next highest number. A period follows the combination of letters and numbers representing the bureau or office. For example:

Agriculture Department (including Secretary's Office) A 1.
Forest Service A 13.
Information Office A 21.
Rural Electrification Administration A 68.

Series Designations

The SuDocs classification system also identifies the various series of publications issued by a particular bureau or office. A number is assigned to each series and this number is followed by a colon.

Initially, the following numbers were assigned for the types of publications common to most Government offices:

1: Annual reports
2: General publications (unnumbered publications of a miscellaneous nature)
3: Bulletins
4: Circulars

In establishing classes for new agencies or bureaus, these numbers were reserved for those types of
publications. Later, new types common to most offices evolved and the following additional numbers were set aside in the classes of new agencies for particular types of series:

- 5: Laws (administered by the agency and published by it)
- 6: Regulations, rules, and instructions
- 7: Releases
- 8: Handbooks, manuals, guides
- 9: Bibliographies and lists of publications
- 10: Directories
- 11: Maps and charts
- 12: Posters
- 13: Forms
- 14: Addresses, lectures, etc.

Any additional series issued by an office are given the next highest number in order of issuance, i.e., as an office begins publication of a series the next highest number not already assigned to a series is assigned to the new series of that particular office.

Related Series

New series which are closely related to already existing series are "attached" to the existing series so as to file side by side on the shelf. The relationship is provided by use of the slash mark (/) after the number assigned to the existing series, followed by a digit for each related series starting with "2". (The "1" is not generally used in this connection since the existing series is the first.) Separates are distinguished by use of a letter beginning with "A" rather than by numbers.

A theoretical example of these "attached" classes is as follows:

- 4: Circulars
- 4/A: Separates from Circulars (numbered)
- 4/B: Separates from Circulars (unnumbered)
- 4/2: Administrative Circulars
- 4/3: Technical Circulars
Class Stem

Combining the designations for authors and those for the series published by the authors results in the class stems for the various series of publications issued by the United States Government.

For example:

A 1.10: Agriculture Yearbook
A 13.50: Forest Resource Reports
A 57.38: Soil Survey Reports

The List of Classes contains class stems only.

Book Numbers

The List of Classes does not include book numbers. The following explanation summarizes the construction of the complete number assigned to individual documents.

A unique alpha-numeric identifier follows the colon of the class stem. For numbered series, the original edition of a publication is classed with the series number of the book. For example, Department of Agriculture Home and Garden Bulletin number 86 would be classified as A 1.77:86. For revisions of numbered publications, the slash and date are added, as: A 1.77:86/993, A 1.77:86/994, etc.

In the case of annuals, the last three digits of the year are used for the book number, e.g., Annual Report of Secretary of Agriculture, A 1.1:994. For reports or publications covering more than one year, a combination of the dates is used, e.g., Annual Register of the U.S. Naval Academy, 1993-1994 is D 208.107:993-94.

Unnumbered publications are assigned a number based on the principal subject word of the title, using C.A. Cutter's Two-Figure Author Table. An example is Radioactive Heating of Vehicles Entering the Earth's Atmosphere, NAS 1.2:R 11, "Radioactive" being the key subject word and the Cutter designation being R 11.

Another publication, Measurements of Radiation from Flow Fields of Bodies Flying Speeds up to 13.4 Kilometers per Second issued by the same agency, falling in the same series class (NAS 1.2:), and having the same Cutter number for the principal subject word, is individualized by adding the slash and the superior number 2, as NAS 1.2:R 11/2. Subsequent different publications in the subject group which take the same Cutter designation would be identified as R 11/3, R 11/4, etc.

C.A. Cutter's Three-Figure Author Table is used for the purpose of providing for finer distinctions in class between publications whose principal subject words begin with the same syllable.

Revisions of numbered and unnumbered publications are identified by addition of the slash and the last three digits of the year of revision. For example, if the publication Radioactive Heating of Vehicles
Entering the Earth's Atmosphere was revised in 1994, the complete classification would read: NAS 1.2:R 11/994. Subsequent revisions in the same year would be identified as 994-2, 994-3, etc.

Periodicals and other serials are identified by number, or volume and number as the case may be. Volume and number are separated by use of the slash. Some examples are:

Agriculture Outlook No.160 A 93.10/2:160
Social Security Bulletin, Vol.15, #2 HE 3.3:15/2

Unnumbered periodicals and continuations are identified by the year of issuance and order of issuance throughout the year. The last three digits of the year are used, and a number corresponding to the order of issuance within the year is added, the two being separated by the slash. An example is:

United States Savings Bonds Issued and Redeemed T 63.209/8-3:994/1

Special Treatment of Publications of Certain Authors

While the foregoing principles and rules govern the classification of the publications and documents of most Government authors, special treatments are employed for those of certain Government agencies. These consist of classes assigned to:

1) Boards, Commissions, and Committees established by Act of Congress or under authority of an Act of Congress, not specifically designated in the Executive Branch of the Government nor as completely independent agencies;

2) Congress and its working committees;

3) Publications of the President and the Executive Office of the President including committees and commissions established by Executive Order and reporting directly to the President.

Boards, Commissions, and Committees

Those agencies established by Act of Congress or under authority of an Act of Congress, not specifically designated in the Executive Branch of the Government, nor as completely independent agencies, are grouped under Y 3, which is reserved for all such agencies. The individual agency designation follows the period, instead of the series designation. This agency designation is the author number from C.A. Cutter's Two-Figure Author Table for the first main word of the agency name, followed by the colon. Thus the agency designation for Consumer Product Safety Commission is Y 3.C 76/3: and that of Selective Service System is Y 3.Se 4:. The slash and numbers are used to distinguish between author designations of agencies having the same or similar first principal word in their names as Y 3.F 31/8: for Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and Y 3.F 31/15: for Federal Council on Aging.

Series designations for publications of these agencies then follow the colon instead of preceding it.
These series designations are assigned in the regular way.

The unique identifiers are then added to the series designations with no separation if the individual book numbers begin with letters, and are separated by the slash if they begin with numbers. Thus the Annual Report of the Consumer Product Safety Commission for the year 1994 is Y 3.C 76/3:1/994 while the unnumbered general publication For Kid's Sake is classed as Y 3.C 76/3:2 K 54.

**Congress and its Working Committees**

The working committees of Congress such as Appropriations, Judiciary, etc., are grouped under Y 4. An author designation based on the name of the Committee follows the period and is followed by the colon. Thus the House Committee on Judiciary is Y 4.J 89/1: and the Senate Committee on Judiciary is Y 4.J 89/2:, the slash and the numbers 1 and 2 being used to distinguish between two committees.

Where series do occur within the publications of a Committee they have been treated in various ways. Some examples follow.

**Congressional Directory.**

This has been given a series designation of "1" following the colon, as Y 4.P 93/1:1. Individual book numbers are then marked off by use of the slash following the series designation, as Y 4.P 93/1:1/ with the particular issue being designated by Congress, as Y 4.P 93/1:1/101.

**Economic Indicators.**

This monthly periodical issued by the Joint Economic Committee has been assigned a place in the group of publications issued by this Committee by use of the Cutter designation following the colon (instead of the regular numerical series designation), based on the subject word "Economic" as Y 4.EC 7:EC 7. The book numbers for individual issues are then designated by year of issue and number corresponding to the month of issue as 994-1 for January 1994, 994-2 for February 1994, etc. These are added to the series designation of "EC 7" following the colon and separated by the slash, as: June 1994 issue, Y 4.EC 7:EC 7/994-6.

**Serially Numbered Hearings and Committee Prints.**

Hearings and Committee prints of some Congressional Committees are numbered as serials within each Congress. These are designated by Congress and number (separated by the slash) immediately following the colon as: House Judiciary Committee Serial 13, 103rd Congress would be Y 4.J 89/1:103/13, the number of the Congress taking the place of the usual numerical series designation. These are filed behind the hearings and committee prints bearing letter and number Cutter designation, i.e., to the right on the shelf.

**Congressional Bills, Documents, and Reports.**

These numbered series of publications issued by Congress are not given a place in the system by use of lettered symbols but are simply filed at the end of all other classifications by
Congress, session, and individual number with numbers representing the series titles.

**Series Individual examples**

- Senate Documents: Y 1.1/3:
- Senate Reports: Y 1.1/5:
- House Documents: Y 1.1/7:
- House Reports: Y 1.1/8:
- Senate Bills: Y 1.4/1:
- Senate Resolutions: Y 1.4/2:
- Senate Joint Resolutions: Y 1.4/3:
- Senate Concurrent Resolutions: Y 1.4/4:
- House Bills: Y 1.4/6:
- House Resolutions: Y 1.4/7:
- House Joint Resolutions: Y 1.4/8:
- House Concurrent Resolutions: Y 1.4/9:

Publications of the President and the Executive Office of the President including committees and commissions established by Executive Order and reporting directly to the President

The agency symbol assigned to the President of the United States is PR followed by the number corresponding to the ordinal number of succession to the presidency as PR 42, Bill Clinton, 42nd president of the United States. The normal series and book numbers follow the class stem.

However, a different treatment has been necessary for the special committees and commissions established by the president to study particular problems and which report their findings directly to the president. These organizations usually cease to exist after making their report. As their publications are usually few in number, normal bureau treatment is not practical and special treatment is therefore indicated to prevent establishment of classes which will not be used, and to keep together the publications of all such organizations appointed by one president.

Therefore, beginning with those commissions appointed by President Eisenhower, one series class (PR -.8:) has been assigned to each based on the principal subject word of its name, as PR 34.8:H 81, President's Advisory Committee on Government Housing Policies and Programs. Publications of the committee are distinguished by addition of the slash and Cutter numbers based on the principal subject word of the title as in normal classification.

Beginning with the administration of President Kennedy, the continuing offices assigned to the President, which make up the Executive Office of the President, have been given permanent classes under the symbol PREX. Previously, each change in administration required a change in classes for
such offices as Office of Management and Budget, National Security Council, Central Intelligence Agency, etc. Subordinate offices of the Executive Office of the President are given their own numbers, the Office of Management and Budget for example, being assigned PREX 2. Series and book numbers are then assigned in the usual manner.