What is a shelfmark?
At Brunel we use the Library of Congress classification scheme to organise our books into specific subjects. Each book in the library has a unique code, called a shelfmark (or call number), which indicates its location in the library. Books with similar shelfmarks will be on the same topic.

Breaking it into bits
A shelfmark can be broken down into different parts which help you find out where the book is. The first parts are broad and the latter parts, very specific. Therefore it is essential to look at it in the right order. Look at the example on the right. The book Britain since 1945 has the shelfmark DA592.B76
Each layer of information helps narrow down the location of the book:

DA – Refers to its subject and can be used to find what floor the book is on using the first letter only. A-J are on Floor 1, and K-Z are on Floor 2. So this book is on Floor 1. The A indicates where it is within the D books, i.e. before DB.

592 – The location of the title in the DA series of books in simple number order. Shelfmarks beginning DA1 would be first and so on.

B76 – An alphabetic layer to distinguish from similar books often based on the author’s name. So DA592 books with an A after the dot would come before our example book. After this, it becomes slightly trickier as the numbers need to be looked at one at a time, rather than as a whole. Take a look at how in the middle picture British politics today is shelved before Britain since 1945. The B76 is actually a B7 with a 6 added to differentiate it further, while the B743 is a B7 with a 4 and an additional 3 added. Therefore British politics today with B743 is shelved before our B76 example, because B74 comes before B76, even though on face value 743 seems like it should go after 76. Take each number one at a time.

2003 – In the middle picture, British politics today has a year after its shelfmark, while our main example Britain since 1945 does not. Some books have this to refer to the date it was published, as there are sometimes older editions available. This can be important if you only want the newest one.

Floor 0  | Study Skills Collection
Floor 1  | Books A-J
Floor 2  | Books L-Z
Floor 3  | Print Journals A-Z, Law Library

Still confused?
Contact us!

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