

Assignment #4 - Classification – Analyze

Classification System:

Museum of Modern Art Library (MoMAL) Classification System

Context:

The MoMAL was founded in 1929 and continues to operate as a special art reference library that serves a specific, arts-oriented patron-base. The MoMAL is situated within the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), a large contemporary art museum in New York City.

General:

- **When was it created / published and by whom?**

The MoMAL library classification is an original scheme created specifically for the MoMAL in the 1930s by Beaumont Newhall who was an art historian interested in photography without formal librarian training. Newhall's classification scheme is a simplified version of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system. The MoMAL system drops the "7" in front of the DDC call number and then a decimal point / numerical extension can be added on to the end to indicate geographic location, ethnicity, and history. The classification scheme is organized according to medium and artist names for exhibition catalogs and artist monographs.

Example:

Description	DDC Number	MoMAL Number
The Arts	700	00
Architecture	720 etc.	20 etc.

- **Who maintains it?**

Today, five librarians and occasionally interns do the cataloging work at the MoMAL.

- **What resources does it label and organize?**

Over 100,000 art books, artist monographs, and exhibition catalogs that address the primary subjects of art, architecture, design, drawing, and film from 1880-present make

up the MoMAL's Library collection. Artist files and a card catalog are also part of the library collection.

- **What institutions / collections is it for? Which currently / historically use it?**

Currently, the MoMA is the only institution that uses the MoMAL / Newhall system.

Analysis and Critique:

- **What use case is it best for?**

The MoMAL Classification System is best used for its intended purpose: to classify resources related to the arts, such as exhibition catalogs, artist monographs, and art history books.

- **What are the obvious issues with the system?**

- Item numbers can be confusing and long, due to the system using a “telephone dial” system for assigning item numbers. Longer item numbers can be difficult to work with and to discover.
- The medium-based classification of MoMAL is not specific enough compared to the LCC or DCC.

- **How are you likely to encounter / implement it?**

Specialized art researchers, art students, or art scholars are most likely to encounter this system at the MoMAL. The system is most likely to be implemented at the MoMAL by a formally trained art librarian. It is possible that other art libraries with similar collections to MoMAL would consider implementation.

LIBR 509: Foundations of Resource Description and Knowledge Organization
Emma Metcalfe Hurst
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Sources:

Roberto C. Ferrari. (2000). "The Art of Classification: Alternate Classification Systems in Art Libraries". *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 28:2, 85-8.

FAQ: MoMA. The Museum of Modern Art. (n.d.). Retrieved February 20, 2022, from <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/library/faq#library-catalog-faq>