



# *AC's Call Number Relabelling Project*

By Kerrie Stevens

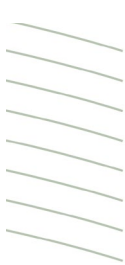
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Today, I'm going to share about the call number relabelling project that has become a little more than we initially bargained for at the Sydney campus library of Alphacrucis University College. I say it got a little bigger than was first envisioned, because it has now spread across all 6 Australian campus libraries of AC and incorporates a stock-take and bibliographic record enhancement. But first, let me start at the beginning...

## **What Is A Call Number?**

As librarians and people who work in libraries, we will all be familiar with the term 'call number,' describing the classification number of a book, but they are also known as the location numbers or book numbers.

But what about our library users, do they know what they are? A recent article published in the *College & Research Libraries Journal* (McDonald & Trujillo 2024) listed library terms that users don't understand and 'call number' was one of them. The term 'call number' comes from the libraries of early last century when library collections were only accessible by librarians. Users would identify the book they wanted in the card catalogue, then desk staff would call out the book or classification number to the librarians who would retrieve the books from the shelves for the user.



Since reading this article, I have been trying to make myself call them ‘spine labels’ especially when speaking with library users as that is what they are and where they are located but having always called them call number labels, it is difficult not to slip up occasionally.

## Pre-Project Problems

This project came about after a visit to our Sydney campus library at the beginning of 2024.

I noticed that the spine labels:

- 1 – Were positioned on the back cover of more than half the collection
- 2 – Even newly printed labels appeared faded and old
- 3 – Labels needed to be hand-cut to size so each label was a different size which was a real time waster
- 4 – Depending on the length of the classification number, the labels were printed in different font sizes

Altogether, this meant the labels appeared inconsistent, messy and dated and that was if they could be seen at all.

In the following image, you can see a shelf from our Sydney library where many books appear not to have a call number label, but it is located on the back cover meaning you have to remove the book from the shelf to identify it. Labels are not positioned uniformly, and many labels appear faded.



Less than half the books on this shelf have a visible spine label which makes locating yourself within the collection as you walk down the aisles problematic and finding a particular book much more difficult than it needs to be.

Many labels also show the copy number, which is unnecessary as this information is recorded in the library catalogue and it clutters the labels unnecessarily. It also changes as soon as a copy is withdrawn from the collection or if an item is transferred to another library – does it become copy 1 at its new library or remain copy 3 of the overall collection? Either way, it doesn't need to be included on the spine labels.

Another issue with these spine labels was that edition numbers had been historically recorded as the edition number minus one. So, a 2<sup>nd</sup> edition would have .1 after the author's letters or a 4<sup>th</sup> ed would have .3 etc. – this was very confusing to students as it was not obvious what the number after the letters meant. The first time I saw this, I needed it explained to me because it was not intuitive and made no sense – if I was confused, how would our students know what it meant?



## Why Does It Matter?

Having the classification number visible without the need to remove the books from the shelves means users can immediately see where they are located within the collection, and avoids unnecessary handling of the resources., which over time can lead to damage of the resources.

Being able to quickly and correctly reshelve items to their correct location is vitally important if items are to be easily accessed again in the future. And for library staff to have the time to attend to other important tasks in the library as well.

Having uniform, neat and consistent spine labels also affects the overall aesthetic of the library which Ladwig identifies as an undervalued characteristic of a well-maintained collection, making it appear under control, in order, and organized – which is what users expect from libraries.



These images show the same books before and after spine relabelling.

The labels on the right are much easier to identify and read, and having a consistent label format means the collection looks better, even though the books are the same as those in the left picture. Having spine labels in a uniform and consistent font, font size, and position on the book spine improves the appearance of the books on the shelf, despite the books themselves being old and used.



At AC, we break the classification number into rows of 3 digits – because this fits on the spine of the majority of books.

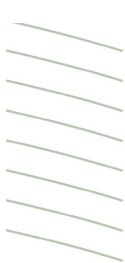
Location information (such as REF) is not part of the spine label, except for Theses and WHI collections. Other locations are identified by location labels which can be easily removed if, for example, an item was relocated from 7-day loan to the general collection without the need to relabel the book.

<b>220. 601 BLA</b>	<b>THE 658. 406 3 SMI</b>	<b>370. 145 THO.2</b>	<b>227. 607 7 FEE</b>	<b>WHI 266. 001 MIS</b>	<b>360. 124 34 STE.2</b>	<b>289. 940 994 BLA</b>
REFERENCE. ‘REFERENCE’ label would be placed above this call number label ‘NOT FOR LOAN’ label placed next to barcode label on front cover	THESIS. ‘NOT FOR LOAN’ label would be placed above this call number label	SHORT TERM. ‘7-DAY LOAN’ label would be placed above this call number label	GENERAL. No location information or additional labels required	WORLD HARVEST INSTITUTE. No additional labels required	TEXTBOOK. ‘TEXT BOOK’ label would be placed above this call number label	RARE. ‘NOT FOR LOAN’ label would be placed above this call number label

The decimal point is placed at the end of the first row so that the following rows will line up evenly with the left margin

The 3 letters of the author or editor’s surname are followed by the exact edition number if applicable.

Font size 14 and font Arial Rounded is used – the rounded font appeared slightly less jarring than regular Arial, and size 14 is quite clear and easy to read even at a distance of 1-2 meters.



The text is centered on the label with left justification, and we use the Avery L7165 labels so the labels are all the same size regardless of the length of the classification number. These A4 sheets can be run through the printer several times as required.

Occasionally, if an edition number makes the last row too long, that row's font size is reduced so it fits on the label – that is the only difference in font and font size that may occur in our new spine labels.

I'll also mention here that we have a campus library in Auckland New Zealand which uses the Library of Congress classification scheme. This collection is also being relabelled with the main class letters appearing on the first row, followed by the sub-class numbers then author letters on subsequent row. Only the numbers before the decimal place are used in this library so there is only a single row of numbers on the spine labels.

## How Are We Relabelling The Collection?

It is a mammoth and lengthy task – not something that can be done in a few weeks – unless you have multiple staff with nothing else to do. We don't.

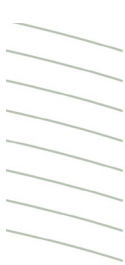
And we haven't completed it yet...

But rather than simply relabelling, we decided to roll in a few other tasks to the job as well... As relabelling meant all books were going to be individually handled, it was decided to undertake a few other tasks that also required all books to be handled at the same time.

Smaller collections were done first over a couple of weeks: reference, theses, textbooks, WHI.

Our library officer began by stocktaking the general collection, shelf by shelf. At the same time, he would record the contents and summary information for each resource that didn't already have it in the bibliographic records in a Word document, saved with the filename of the book barcode – this was in response to the growth in chapter scan requests we have experienced over recent years



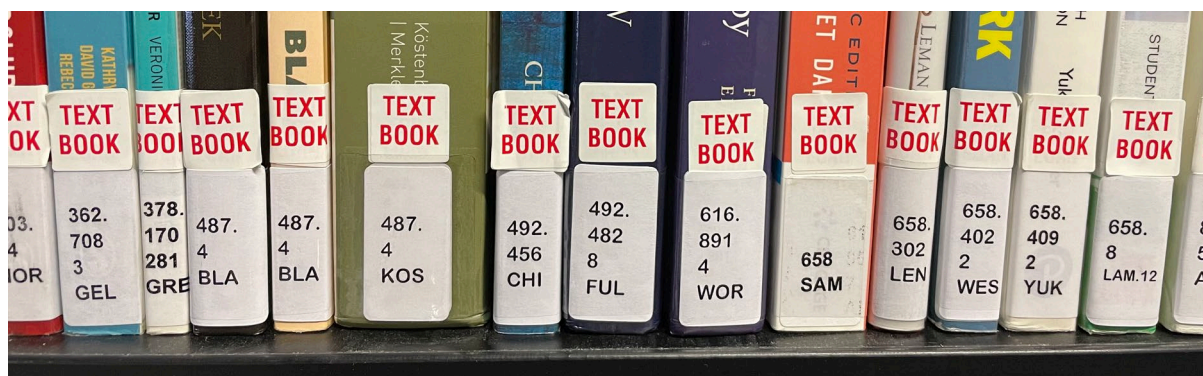


for titles which have the contents listed in the bibliographic record (Stevens 2022). That information is then used to update the bibliographic records by trained library staff. Part of this process also included the merging of duplicate records and correcting of bibliographic record errors, of which there were many – all hangovers from a 2-system merger when we upgraded our catalogue in 2021. My own library had a variety of spine label formats due to the acquisition of collections from other libraries and the labels never being replaced. This was the opportunity to get some consistency with the spine labels across our entire collection.

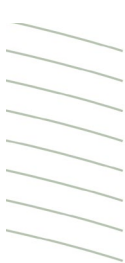
Then the new spine label is printed and attached with a clear adhesive strip so that it is visible at the base of the book spine. For particularly skinny books, the spine label is positioned so that the first digits of each row are visible and then it wraps around to the front cover. We do not remove the old labels from the back covers.

All library staff also replace the labels on all returned loans so we can immediately see which resources have been used in parts of the collection that the stock-take is not yet up to. This adds a few extra minutes to the usually quick process of returning books, but it saves time later when the stocktake process gets up to that location so it all evens out in the end.

## New Labels



Our spine labels are positioned at the base of the book spines – this presents a uniform appearance along the shelves and due to the font size, a clear and easy way to read the labels



The large, clear font makes identifying an item in the incorrect location quite easy and allows users to find what they are after much more quickly.

In our case, the benefits of beginning the relabelling project also meant we are reducing the number of duplicate bibliographic records in our catalogue, improving the bibliographic records for resources in our collection which in turn improves discoverability and search retrieval. And of course, we get new spine labels which improves the overall aesthetic of the library's presentation, inspiring users to perceive it as a place that is organised and in order, which should be hallmarks of any library.

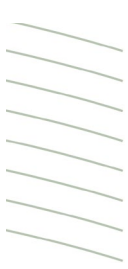
You can see in the previous image, that the textbook labels are separate to the spine labels – meaning when the title is no longer a textbook, these can easily be removed and the item returned to the general collection without the need to replace the spine label. Notice the 658.8 LAM.12 book, has a slightly smaller font size on the last row of the label due to 2-digit edition number.

## What Have We Learnt?

We have learnt there are a few things that can make spine labels better:

- Consider the font and size of font you use for your labels – do you need a magnifying glass to read the label or can it easily be seen from 1-2 metres away?
- Consider the printing of the labels – do they appear faded as soon as they come off the printer or are they clear and bold?
- Is there unnecessary information that clutters the spine labels – consider the basic information the user needs to find that book on the shelf? Do you really need to say what volume it is when that information already appears on the spine, cover and title page?
- Do your labels need an explanation of what the components mean when someone visits your library? If it's not obvious, why is that information included? Is it making things easier for you or the user?





We have now rolled out this relabelling project across all of our Australian campus libraries so that in the future, when books are transferred from one campus library to another, there will be no need to relabel them. They can be shelved immediately and consistently match the call number label format of their new home. And users will not have to become familiar with a new format to find what they need.

## References

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- McDonald, C., & Trujillo, N. (2024). Library terms that users (don't) understand: A review of the literature from 2012-2021. *College & Research Libraries* 85, no. 6 (2024): 906–929. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.85.6.906>
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