

Introduction to the Wessex Classification Scheme

History

The National Library of Medicine (NLM) in Washington DC, USA published the first edition of their library classification scheme in 1951. This covered the field of medicine and its related sciences whilst the various schedules of the Library of Congress classification scheme (LC) supplemented NLM classes for subjects other than medicine. NLM is now published electronically and updated annually.

In the early 1980s the librarians of the Wessex Regional Library and Information Service (WRLIS) based in Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire took the decision to revise the whole of the United States National Library of Medicine (NLM) Classification schedules to accommodate current British medical practice. This work was originally in liaison with colleagues from other regions and the newly-formed national NLM Classification User Group. The first edition of the Wessex Classification Scheme was formally published in 1987 and it continued to develop under the auspices of SWRLIN (South and West Regional Library Information Network) until 1999. The 3rd revision of the classification scheme was published in 1999, and the 4th in 2004 after extensive consultation, to keep it fit for purpose for the new union catalogues and shared library management systems being developed in many regions.

A brief survey of usage carried out in 2004 indicated the scheme is in use across the UK in a number of various settings and circumstances, including hybrid Wessex/NLM schemes. Librarians using the Wessex classification keep in touch via a Wessex Classification mailing list, managed by Lucy Vaux-Harvey at Worcester.

In addition to the schedules the Wessex team also developed, as an index, a version of annotated MeSH that combines the broader terms of NLM's Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) with a number of extra terms that reflect concepts particular to the UK health sector. A shortened form of this doubles as a printable "where to find a book" index for library users.

5th Edition 2013

Completed in 2013, this revision began in 2009 with significant updating of the early sections and WE, and more minor updates to the rest of the classification, including terms to reflect the new structures of the reformed NHS. Significant expansion of the Annotated Subject Headings Index, with new terms and cross references, accompanies this revision.

The scheme is currently updated by the SWIMS Network Cataloguing Group, supported by a number of other users from across the country via the email discussion list. The annotated subject index is also maintained by the SWIMS Network Cataloguing Group, to incorporate changing issues in UK health care and annual updates to MeSH and NLM.

All those who have worked on it are conscious that the Wessex Scheme is not perfect! The scheme cannot match the speed of change in health care even though it is a dynamic entity. It has been developed over a period of time by many different librarians, often working voluntarily and in their own time. Its publication on the web is an attempt to share that work with library colleagues. However, all users are free to adopt parts of the scheme, or modify it as needed.

All users of the scheme are also encouraged to offer feedback and suggest changes and/or additions for the following year via the contact details listed on these pages.

We would like to acknowledge the guidance of the National Library of Medicine. *NLM have asked us to make it clear that the Wessex Scheme is not an official NLM revision of its classification scheme and it is the product of the local efforts of UK health librarians. The National Library of Medicine neither endorses nor supports the Wessex Scheme.*

Hints on Use

The basic arrangement of the scheme is by specialty. As a general rule items should be classified within the appropriate specialty, unless there are compelling reasons such as explicit instructions in the schedules to do otherwise, e.g. a book on quality of life in mental disorders goes in psychiatry at WM70 rather than at the more general quality of life section at WA5.

Where a book covers more than one specialty (e.g. obstetrics and gynaecology) there will usually be guidance in the schedules as to which takes precedence.

Please note that specialties include paediatrics (WS) and geriatrics (WT).

Never classify by title alone. Titles can be very misleading concerning the real content of the book. Read prefaces, blurbs, introductions, contents pages etc. for information on the true nature of the publication. Cataloguing-in-Publication (CIP) data may help, but is not always reliable and should be used with discretion. Do not use class numbers from CIP records (although they look similar, CIP uses the NLM classification scheme not Wessex).

Never classify by relying on the classification numbers in the Annotated Subject Index to the Wessex Classification Scheme. Always check the classification

numbers given in the Index against the actual schedules. The numbers given in the Index are a guide only and it is also essential to check that the context for the given classification number is correct for the publication in hand (e.g. rational emotive therapy and other psychotherapeutic methods were developed as mental health therapies, but are now sometimes used in other settings where a mental health classification number would be incorrect).

Classify by the subject of the book – not who it is written for (e.g. statistics for nurses is about STATISTICS) or its form (e.g. an encyclopaedia of nursing goes with nursing, not with general encyclopaedias).

Classify at the most specific number available (e.g. put items on general practice at the general practice number, not primary care).

Promote consistency by checking how similar works and previous editions have been catalogued and indexed in the past within your library.

Recurring numbers

A few classification numbers are the same in most specialty sections e.g.

- 13 Dictionaries, encyclopaedias, bibliographies (e.g. WY13 for a dictionary of nursing, WB13 for an encyclopaedia of medicine). However if a dictionary etc. covers a more specific topic, such as nursing research, it should be classified with that topic (e.g. an encyclopaedia of nursing research at WY20)
- 18 Education, examinations, questions and answers, MCQs etc. These are classified together by form for the convenience of students. Use a secondary classification number to indicate actual subject where appropriate.
- Z Bibliographies. This is a suffix which can be added to any classification number in the scheme in order to separate bibliographies from other works on the topic.
- A Adolescent/ce. This suffix can be added to any WS number to indicate the age group the content relates to

Non-Wessex Scheme Numbers

Where a subject is outside the Wessex schedules, Library of Congress numbers can be used. Reference to some of these is made in the index (e.g. BF for magic, HG for insurance).