

BOWMAN, J.H. **Essential Dewey.** New York: Neal-Schuman, 2005. 150 p. ISBN 1-55570-544-8.

The title says it all. The book contains the essentials for a fundamental understanding of the complex world of the Dewey Decimal Classification. It is clearly written and captures the essence in a concise and readable style. Is it a coincidence that the mysteries of the Dewey Decimal System are revealed in ten easy chapters? The typography and layout are clear and easy to read and the perfect binding withstood heavy use. The exercises and answers are invaluable in illustrating the points of the several chapters.

The book is well structured. Chapter 1 provides an "Introduction and background" to classification in general and Dewey in particular. Chapter 2 describes the "Outline of the scheme" and the conventions in the schedules and tables. Chapter 3 covers "Simple subjects" and introduces the first of the exercises. Chapters 4 and 5 describe "Number-building" with "standard subdivisions" in the former and "other methods" in the latter. Chapter 6 provides an excellent description of "Preference order" and Chapter 7 deals with "Exceptions and options." Chapter 8 "Special subjects," while no means exhaustive, gives a thorough analysis of problems with particular parts of the schedules from "100 Philosophy" to "910 Geography" with a particular discussion of "Persons treatment" and "Optional treatment of biography." Chapter 9 treats "Compound subjects." Chapter 10 briefly introduces WebDewey and provides the URL for the Web Dewey User Guide [http://www.oclc.org/support/documentation/dewey/webdewey\\_userguide/](http://www.oclc.org/support/documentation/dewey/webdewey_userguide/); the section for exercises says: "You are welcome to try using WebDewey on the exercises in any of the preceding chapters."

Chapters 6 and 7 are invaluable at clarifying the options and bases for choice when a work is multifaceted or is susceptible of classification under different Dewey codes. The recommendation "... *not* to adopt options, but use the scheme as instructed" (p. 71) is clearly sound. As is, "What is vital, of course, is that you keep a record of the decisions you make and to stick to them. Any option chosen must be used consistently, and not the whim of the individual classifier" (p. 71).

The book was first published in the UK and the British overtones, which may seem quite charming to a Canadian, may be more difficult for readers from the United States. The correction of Dewey's spelling of Labor to Labo[u]r (p. 54) elicited a smile for the championing of lost causes and some relief that

we do not have to cope with 'simplified spelling.' The down-to-earth opinions of the author, which usually agree with those of the reviewer, add savour to the text and enliven what might otherwise have been a tedious text indeed. However, in the case of (p. 82):

Dewey requires that you classify bilingual dictionaries that go only one way with the language in which the entries are written, which means that an English-French dictionary has to go with English, not French. This is very unhelpful and probably not widely observed in English-speaking libraries ....

one may wonder (the Norman conquest notwithstanding) why Bowman feels that it is more useful to class the book in the language of the definition rather than that of the entry words – Dewey's requirement to class a dictionary of French words with English definitions with French language dictionaries seems quite reasonable.

In the example of *Anglo-French relations before the second World War* (p. 42) the principle of adding two notations from Table 2 is succinctly illustrated but there is no discussion of why the notation is -41044 rather than -44041. Is it because the title is 'Anglo'- 'French', or because -41 precedes -44, or because it is assumed that the book is being catalogued for an English library that wished to keep all Anglo relations together?

The bibliography lists five classic works and the School Library Association (UK) website. The index provides additional assistance in locating topics; however it is not clear whether it is intended to be a relative index with terms in direct order or nouns with subdivisions. There are a few cross-references and some double posting. The instruction "()" means 'compared with' (p. 147) seems particularly twee since the three occasions in the index could easily have included the text "compared with;" the saving of space is not worth the potential confusion. There is no entry for "displaced standard subdivisions;" one must look under "standard subdivisions" with the subdivision "displaced." There is no entry for "approximating the whole," although "standing room," "class here" notes and "including" notes are listed. Both "rule of zero" and "zero" with the subdivision "rule of" are included. The "rule of zero" is really all you need to know about Dewey (p. 122):

Something which can be useful if you are really stuck is to consider the possibilities one digit at

a time, and never put 0 if you can put something more specific.

Be as specific as possible, but if you can't say something good, say nothing. This slim volume clearly follows this advice.

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