

The Case of the Clunky Classification: The Elusive Graphic Novel

Location: The Dewey Decimal Classification Library

Mission: Analyze the Dewey Decimal classification for graphic novels

Agent Duo Dessmal reporting for duty here. Operation Classy Affair is underway. Notes so far: the Dewey Decimal Classification is a general knowledge organization tool built on principles of meaningful notation, well-developed hierarchies, and organized by disciplines or fields of study. Our mission: **analyze how effectively this scheme represents graphic novels for patrons in public libraries.**



Reading here, I see that graphic novels are classed in 741.59xx, which puts them with books about drawing and graphic design under 741, "Drawing and Drawings," the superordinate of the hierarchy. However, from my cursory glance, this classification scheme **doesn't seem to take into account** the fact that graphic novels are a **format, not a genre**, and that graphic novels are **complex narratives** dealing with fiction and non-fiction. Maybe we should look closer at exactly what Dewey has to say.



Sure, boss. I think Agent Elsie and Inspector Carde are down there right now. I'll have them take a look.



741.59 is the DDC classification for **Collections of cartoons, caricatures, and comics.** Auxiliary tables add greater specificity to the class numbers. In this case, **collections are further specified by specific continents, countries, and localities.** Collections by individual artists are classed at country level only. So, graphic novels from the United States are classified as 741.5973 whereas graphic novels from Japan are classified as 741.5952.

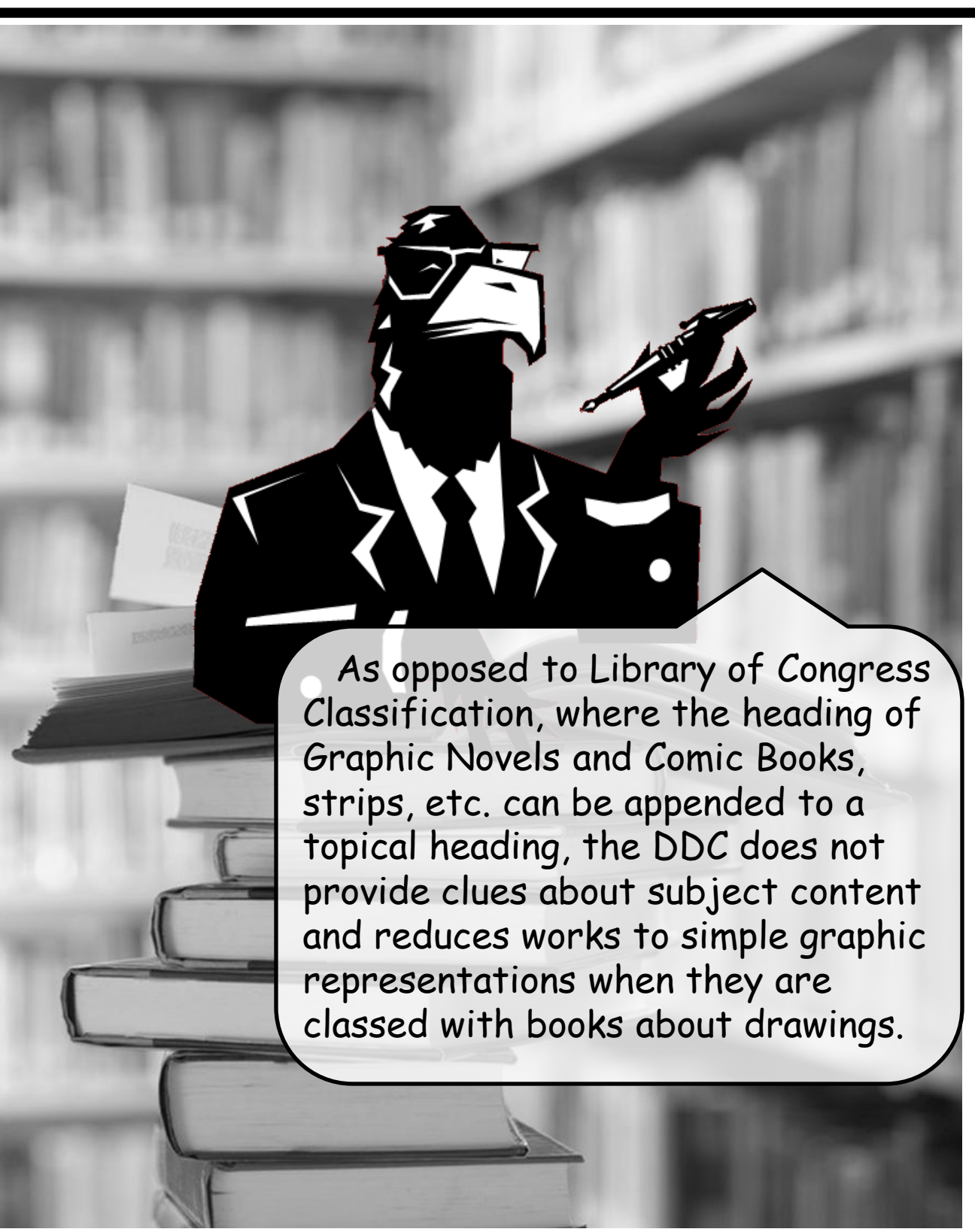
Hmm, yes, you're right it does. Let's check with Agent Eagle Eye for more details.

Wait, but superhero graphic novels and comics are often written by different artists across the world. Does this mean that Superman might not all be classed together?



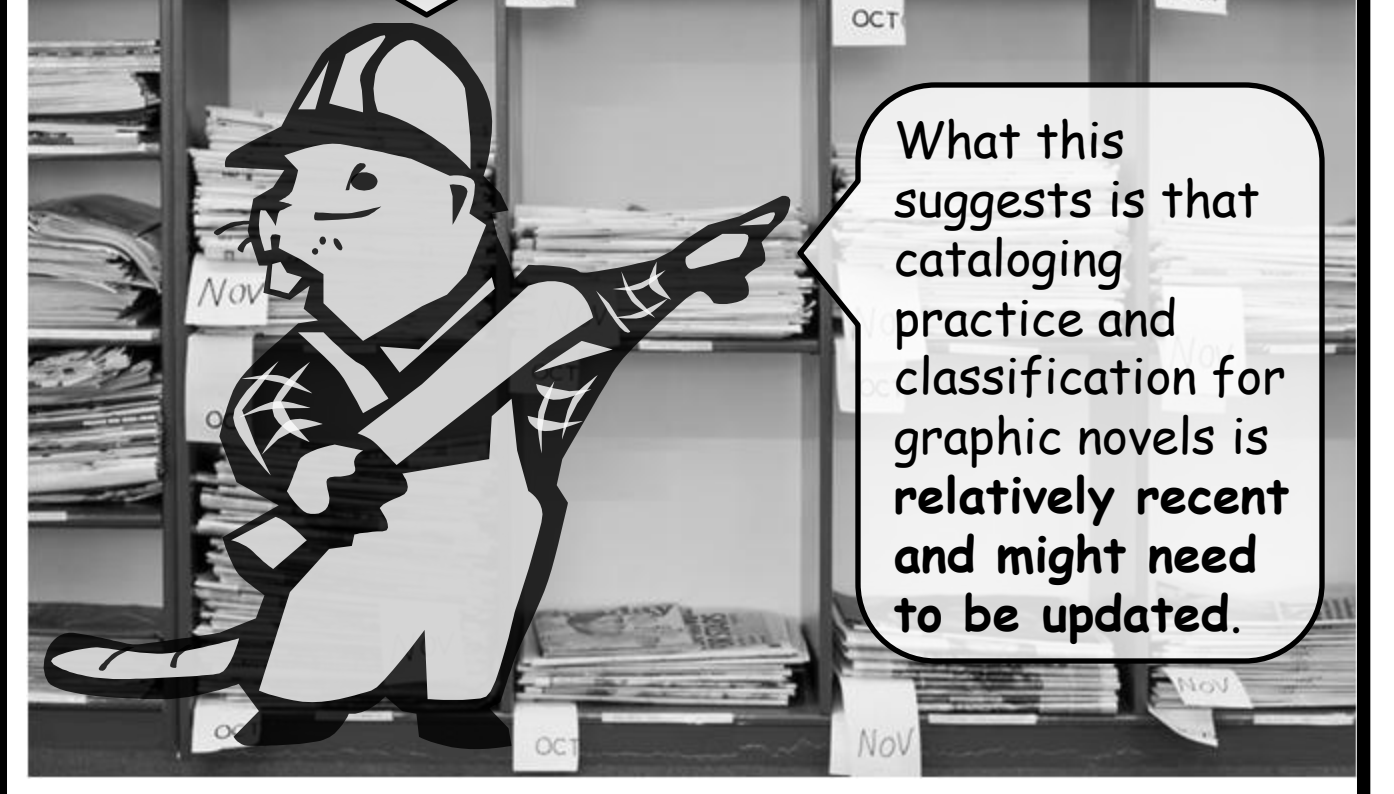
741.59

As opposed to Library of Congress Classification, where the heading of Graphic Novels and Comic Books, strips, etc. can be appended to a topical heading, the DDC does not provide clues about subject content and reduces works to simple graphic representations when they are classed with books about drawings.



Agent Anita Gūd Book down here in archives. What I've found is that historically, while there was an explosion of comic book publishing in the 1930s, **comic books were viewed pretty negatively by libraries and were sort of a nightmare for serial catalogers** since there were often frequent changes in title, character, creator, and even publisher. As for graphic novels, while they've been around for a while, the publishing has only recently within the last 20 years changed to one of the **fastest growing areas in book publishing.**

What this suggests is that cataloging practice and classification for graphic novels is **relatively recent and might need to be updated.**

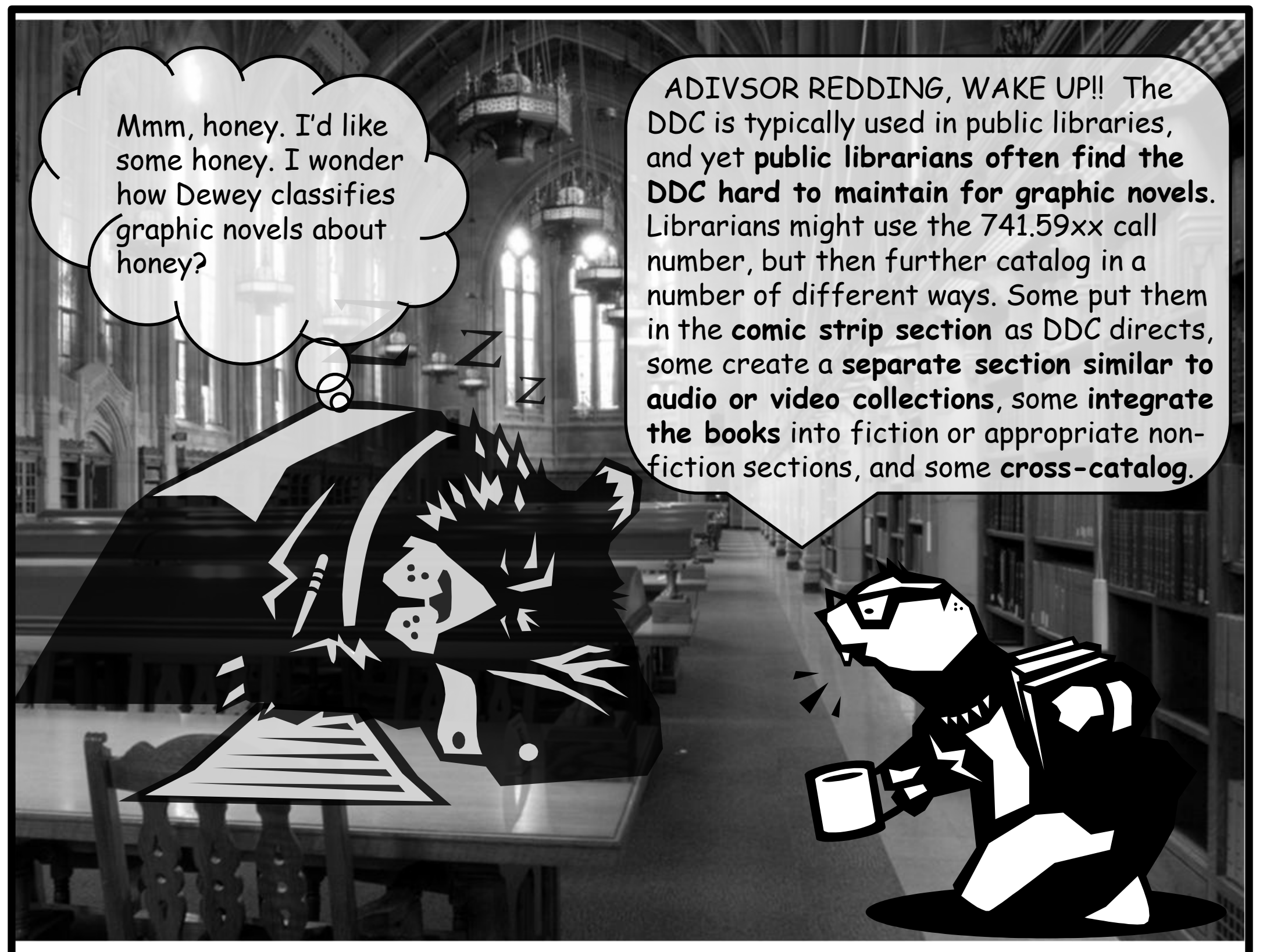


We know that indexing is the analysis of a document for its significant characteristics in order to represent information in some system for some user using some tools. If we're talking about the public library patron using the Dewey Decimal Classification to search and find graphic novels, the **classification scheme does not seem adequate as the scope of graphic novels expands** to include such genres as fantasy, superheroes, biography, on-the-ground journalism, manga, and non-fiction. The DDC currently does not seem to be mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive for graphic novels as a classification scheme should be.



Mmm, honey. I'd like some honey. I wonder how Dewey classifies graphic novels about honey?

ADVISOR REDDING, WAKE UP!! The DDC is typically used in public libraries, and yet **public librarians often find the DDC hard to maintain for graphic novels.** Librarians might use the 741.59xx call number, but then further catalog in a number of different ways. Some put them in the **comic strip section** as DDC directs, some create a **separate section similar to audio or video collections**, some **integrate the books** into fiction or appropriate non-fiction sections, and some **cross-catalog.**



To summarize, here are the challenges from the current Dewey Decimal Classification for graphic novels: **First**, how do we represent graphic novels as a format not a genre? **Second**, the current system is not user-friendly for patrons. **Third**, the only definite rule is to classify graphic novels in 741.59xx and break-down by country of creator. **Fourth**, there are no clues given about the subject of graphic novels. **Fifth**, the DDC finds no good place to break the continuum of single-frame caricatures to comic books to graphic novels.

The most current DDC is aware of these challenges. They **acknowledge that comic strips are significantly different from graphic novels and comic books**, but since graphic novels share characteristics with comic books, separating out graphic novels would be **difficult for classifiers to do consistently.** There was a proposal to divide material into two categories: graphic works with narratives longer than jokes and anecdotes and jokes and anecdotes. But is that sufficient?

Now that we've done a preliminary analysis of the DDC for graphic novels, we have some recommendations.

We agree with the most current DDC with the proposal to **improve the development at 741.5** rather than relocate graphic novels to another set of numbers.

However, we suggest that graphic novels not be sub-arranged by country of origin of the creator, but rather by **the language in which a work was written.**

We also suggest to **further sub-divide the work by the genres fiction, non-fiction, science fiction, and manga.** Professionals should look at how the DDC sub-arranges literature for clues.

Finally, in future DDC revisions, graphic novels should continue to be reviewed and reconsidered.

