

# From Code to Plain Text

- the implementation of a new shelfmark system at the Biomedical Library, Gothenburg University Library, Sweden  
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## Why?

In spring 2012 Gothenburg University Library was going to leave the Swedish SAB system as classification and shelfmark system in order to implement Dewey.

Since Dewey is not, in our opinion, a user friendly system for medical libraries, the Biomedical Library looked for an alternative. We identified a need for a completely new shelfmark system in plain language, easy to understand for our users. We wanted a flexible system, adaptable to growth and change.

Since our primary users – scholars, students and teachers at the medical, the odontological and the health and care sciences departments – are already familiar with the MeSH terminology, there was an obvious gain to relabel the book collection using a terminology based on MeSH.



## How the work was done...

It was a big project. All the books on open shelves were relabeled. Almost all the library staff were engaged in the relabeling and were scheduled in the project.

The project called for careful planning, including the development of a new shelfmark term list based on MeSH and a conversion chart between the old SAB codes and the new plain text subject categories.

When choosing shelfmark subject categories we tried to select terms with a broad coverage of the subject, close to the root in the MeSH tree structure.

We relabeled 16 600 books.

We used up 1,5 km (1 494 m) marking tape for the book spines.

Conversion Chart	SAB	MeSH
Sexuellt överförda sjukdomar	Vebaa	Infectious Diseases
Bristsjukdomar	Vebb	Nutrition and Food
Ämnesomsättningsjukdomar	Vebe	Nutritional and Metabolic Diseases
Förgiftningsjukdomar	Vebg	Toxicology
Psykosomatiska sjukdomar	Vebl	Psychophysiological Disorders
Immunologiska sjukdomar Allergier	Vebr	Immune System Diseases
Blodet och de blodbildande organen Hematologi	Ved	Hematology
Nervsystemet (neurologi)	Vef	Neurology; Mental Disorders
Demens	Vefa	Dementia
Epilepsi	Vefb	Epilepsy
Smärta	Vefc	Pain
Stroke	Vefd	Stroke
Sömn och sömnrörningar	Vefe	Sleep and Sleep Disorders
Cirkulationsorganen Kardiologi Angiologi	Veh	Cardiology
Andningsorganen Pneumologi -hit luftvägarna och lung	Vei	Pulmonary Medicine
Gastroenterologi	Vej	Gastroenterology



## ... and what it resulted in

One of the results was fewer and more condensed subject categories on the open shelves in the library. The number of shelfmarks decreased from 289 (SAB) to 162 (MeSH).

The new shelfmark system based on MeSH is considered to be simple, clear, easy to understand and adapted to our users needs.

The project turned out to be fun, welded together the colleagues and ended with a party!

## After 3 years, results of a follow-up survey

After three years of MeSH, users and colleagues had their say in a follow-up survey. The result was really gratifying. The main opinion seem to be that the new system is easier to understand and explain. Both users and staff appear to be happy and our colleagues think the great effort to update the catalogue and relabel all the books was worth the trouble.

### Staff opinions

- The shelfmark system is considered logic, simple and easy to explain.
- Since our users are already familiar with the MeSH terminology it is a gain to use MeSH as a shelfmark system.
- Uncomplicated to add new subjects and remove old ones.
- Easy to find books, easy to reshef books, easy to find misplaced books.
- No letter codes or numerical codes to try to understand and remember.

### User opinions

- Easy to find books and to browse the shelves.
- Better with terms than codes.
- Almost all users search books by browsing the shelves on "their subject categories".
- English terminology works well since students are used to English.

**Logical and clear!**

**Code divides – MeSH connects!**

**Easy to understand and easy to explain to our users.**

**Plain text rules!**

**No more cryptic codes and mess, with us you only have to know your MeSH!**

**Spies speak in code – librarians in plain language**

**Better with terms than codes!**

**What a mess – we'll need some MeSH!**

**Plain text survives any code!**

**Think it's clearer now!**

**Take home message:**  
Do it yourself!  
Make it simple!  
Plan carefully!