

# ON FILING REPRINTS

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From time to time communications have been published on the filing of reprints. Indeed, so many articles have been offered on this subject that one journal of science has been obliged to "close the case." This perennial problem will always be with us, but certain of the more recent suggestions for its solution bring to mind the comment of a colleague, who declines permission to use his name, that scientists can be divided into two classes,

those who file reprints, and those who work. This provocative remark was not designed to insult people who worry perhaps more than they should about the means at the expense of the end, but to caution students infected with reprint fever and its inevitable complications. This is a virulent disease, and its prognosis is uncertain. There are cases which have never been cured; others are recurrent, like malaria.

An examination of the various pub-

lished notes on reprint filing systems leads to the conclusion that these systems resemble similar schemes for beating the ponies or breaking the bank at Monte Carlo, and are perhaps as efficacious. However, there are certain basic types of systems. A brief classification may not be altogether a waste of time. It follows herewith:

A. Visible filing (Under this division are included systems which use labelled boxes, drawers, or whatnot, often without benefit of a card index).

1. *By subject.* Probably the most common and practical system. For this type of filing one gathers various sizes of stationery boxes, preferably bright orange in color, and labels them according to phylum or whatever group is warranted by the supply of reprints. In my own specialties, the papers are subfiled more or less by author, in both octavo and folio formats. For those groups which are not well represented, one box may take care of several, e.g., "Protozoa-Porifera-Bryozoa," and "Vermes and Radiata." The subject system gives full scope to such categories as "Theoretical," "General," and "Miscellaneous," without which no filing system can flourish or long endure. One colleague who uses this system employs old manila envelopes, ruthlessly folding outsized papers to fit. 2. *By author.* This is also a common system. It usually requires a cross index to subject, since papers on birds, mammals, teredos, and isopods may find themselves in the same place.

B. Blind filing (systems in this division make use of numbers, key letters and similar devices, and require completely cross-indexed card catalogues. To the casual visitor, such a reprint library is as interesting as so much wall paper, and it does have the advantage of discouraging snoopers and borrowers.)

1. By subject or author. There is at least rhyme and reason in this subdivision, although some of the elaborate call number devices, with decimals or exponents, must be the despair of the secretary who has to keep such a system from chaos.

2. In order of acquisition. The index card indicates the accession number, which may or may not be the location number on the shelf.

3. By size. This is a satisfactory and efficient method of burying reprints, since devotees of the size school are apt to favor permanent binding. In one library of the author's acquaintance several hundred reprints are bound in volumes by size without any regard for subject matter whatever, and the volumes numbered in order of binding. A card catalogue, cross-indexed down to subspecies, is to be prepared "someday." Although the author has no information on which filing system was favored by Darwin, it is obvious that his habit of tearing up books for the sake of relevant chapters or passages and sewing the remains together would gain him few friends among the permanent binding school.

This brief survey leads us to the inevitable conclusion that there will never be a standard system for filing reprints, and that each individual best understands and uses his own system. I venture to suggest, however, that systems which favor haphazard or even orderly browsing whilst a paper is being sought, are the best for the advancement of science. The chance association of ideas is a universally recognized stimulus to creative thinking, and those unimaginative souls who can go immediately to the precise and only reprint desired after one flip into a card catalogue have sacrificed most of the joy of using a collection of reprints on the uncomfortable altar of efficiency, if that indeed is the Goddess they serve.