INDEX TO THE U.S. PATENT CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

U.S. Patent and Trademark Office
Office of Classification Support

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Preface

The *Index to the U. S. Patent Classification System*, referred to hereafter as the Index, is intended as an initial means of entry into the classification system. The Index should be particularly useful for those lacking experience in using the classification system and those unfamiliar with the particular technology under consideration. It is an alphabetical list of subject headings referring to specific classes and subclasses of the classification system.

There are continual changes to the classification system. New classes and subclasses are established due to new developments in science and technology, and old classes and subclasses are abolished when rendered obsolete by technological advances. In addition, changes to classes and subclasses may result from an effort to streamline and update the definitions.

To locate a field of search:

1. The user should look in the Index for the term that best represents the subject matter of interest. If a match is not found, the user should look for terms of approximately the same meaning, for terms of either broader or narrower scope, or for terms that represent a different approach to the subject; i.e., the essential function or effect of the device or the use or application to which the device or composition of matter is put.

2. On finding the identifying numbers of possibly pertinent classes and subclasses in the Index, the user should refer to the appropriate classification schedules and ascertain from among the existing choices the precise classification (that is, the class) of the subject of interest.

3. After selecting the desired class, the user should

    - start with the first "mainline" subclass; i.e., any subclass depicted without indents and presented in all capitals, in the selected class, and proceed from one mainline subclass to another until the first one is found that appears to include the subject matter being investigated;
    - scan all of the subordinate subclasses indented one place to the right under the selected mainline until the first one is found that indicates inclusion of the subject matter being investigated; and
    - scan the subclasses indented one additional place to the right under the previously identified subordinate subclass until no further levels of indentation are available.

    Whenever doubt arises as to the proper subclass choice, the user should consult the classification definition for the class under study. The classification definitions supplement the classification schedules in that

they contain detailed definitions and illustrations of the kind of subject matter that can be found in each class and subclass, the lines of distinction among classes and subclasses, and references to other classes and subclasses having related subject matter.

Subject headings in the Index are not an alphabetical inversion of the subclass titles found in a classification schedule. They are a subjective determination of relevant terms, phrases, synonyms, acronyms, and occasionally even trademarks that have been selected over the years as the best identifying description of products, processes, and apparatus of patent disclosures.

The Index contains product-related entries, whereas classification schedules are descriptive or nonspecific. For example, the Index entry for phonograph record molding apparatus is reflected in the classification schedule as a “press forming apparatus having opposed press members.” Some effort has been made to index current vocabulary usage when the classification system may contain technically general language; e.g., "water bed or "air mattress" for the concept “fluid-containing mattress.”

The Index is arranged alphabetically with subheadings that can have four levels of indentation. A complete reading of a subheading includes the title of the most adjacent higher heading, and so on until there are no more higher headings. Some headings will reference other related or preferred entries with a "(see...)" phrase. They may reference the notes to classification definitions when these notes are particularly detailed or lucid on important distinctions not easily captured in the abbreviated entries of the Index.

The following symbols and abbreviations are used in this Index:

A. . .Z — An alpha designation (i.e., one or two alphabetic characters following the numeric designator of a subclass) identifies a subclass as an “alpha” subclass. alpha subclasses are created to provide a logistically quick place for examiners to classify “hot art” (i.e., art where application filing activity is increasing). Usually, the initial patents used to populate an alpha subclass when it is created come primarily from a single existing subclass. That “parent” subclass then receives the alpha designator “R” to indicate that it is now the residual subclass for patents that did not go into the alpha subclass. Except for the residual subclass, alpha subclasses have no definitions (the definition for the residual subclass is listed in numerical order, without the “R”, along with other subclass definitions for the class). For example, in Class 29, Metal Working, subclass 34R is the residual subclass for apparatus to forge metal combined with apparatus for bending, cutting, or punching not classifiable in subclasses 34A through 34D, which came out of 34R.

Ctg — “Containing” may be abbreviated “ctg” in long chemical phrases.

D — A class number preceded by the letter D identities a Design class.

DIG.	The letters DIG. followed by a number identify an unofficial collection of patents based on a concept that relates to a class but not to any particular subclass of that class. For example, 123 DIG. 12 is a collection of hydrogen-fueled engines in Class 123, Internal-Combustion Engines. Digests have been created over the years by examiners to facilitate their searches within the arts under their jurisdiction.
PLT	The letters PLT identify the Plant class.
+	The plus sign following a subclass indicates that the entry includes that subclass and all subclasses indented thereunder.
X-art	Cross-Reference Art Collections may be described in the text as “X-art” collections. These are digests for which written definitions have been provided.
*	A subclass number followed by an asterisk identifies a Cross-Reference Art Collection.

Preface

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