FINDING BOOKS BY TOPIC — MAKING LIBRARY CATALOGUES WORK FOR YOU

iSkills Workshop
Inforum, Faculty of Information

Nalini K. Singh
Fall 2019
What are subject headings and where do they come from?

► Subject headings = metadata to help people find documents, books, etc. by topic.

► Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) is a widely-used subject indexing system used to describe the topics (subjects) of books, videos, journals, etc., in library catalogues.

► This complex controlled vocabulary system is administered by the Library of Congress.

► LCSH = most common subject access system in the world, widely used by most academic & public libraries around the world, and national libraries, e.g., Library & Archives of Canada, British Library.

► Subject headings summarize the overall SUBJECT content of the book, etc., so that people can search in databases (such as library catalogues) by topic. They are equivalent to the subject tags (subject descriptors, subject terms) used in article databases to describe the topics of articles

► LCSH covers all of knowledge – > 340,000 subject headings! Until recently, the headings were tabulated in a 6 volume set that is revised annually*. LCSH is also available online. Headings have increased over the years, e.g. 2006 = 280,000 headings in 5 volumes.

► There is an accompanying manual (4 volumes) that governs the creation of subject headings, called the Subject Heading Manual. The related texts and websites can be found at the end of this handout. There are also many cataloguing textbooks that discuss subject headings and their use and issues. Look in the UTL catalogue for SUBJECT= subject headings, library of congress and also Subject cataloging 😊

► Subject headings are assigned for topics that make up at least 20% of the book’s content. This means that minor topics are NOT given subject headings.

► Operates with the concept of LITERARY WARRANT – the terminology comes from the professional literature of the particular subject discipline

► The system has controls for synonyms, variant spellings e.g. Use the term information retrieval instead of data retrieval

*LCSH is no longer published in paper. The 35th edition (2013) was the last paper compilation. Updates are published in the e-resource, Classification Web.
Where in the catalogue are subject headings found?

**SUBJECT INFORMATION FOR A SINGLE ITEM**

Look in the DETAILED RECORD not in the results list

---

**UTL CATALOGUE: DETAILED RECORD WITH ONE SUBJECT HEADING**

---

**UTL CATALOGUE: DETAILED RECORD WITH MULTIPLE SUBJECT HEADINGS**

---

iSkills workshops (Fall 2019) – Finding books by topic: Making library catalogues work for you handout – Nalini K. Singh, Faculty of Information
TPL CATALOGUE: DETAILED RECORD WITH 2 SUBJECT HEADINGS

2 SUBJECT INFORMATION WHEN MANY ITEMS ARE FOUND

Most catalogues have a SUBJECT FACET area, where groupings of subject headings common to the items found in the search are shown. Look for this feature to the left/right of the search result list (HIT LIST). Use this info to search efficiently & discover valid subject headings for your topics.

UTL CATALOGUE SEARCH RESULTS FOR AN ANYWHERE SEARCH = “Subject headings”

Search results = 1454 items

SUBJECT FACET, listing common subject headings found in this hit list of 1454

The most common heading found in this list of search results is ‘subject headings’ (1048 items out of the total 1454 hits have this heading)

Now you know a subject heading for the topic!

TPL CATALOGUE SEARCH RESULTS FOR SUBJECT = ‘book talks’

SUBJECT FACET, showing that 37 items in this list of search results have the subject heading of ‘book talks’

Notice that the subject headings of each book DO NOT appear in the list of search results.

iSkills workshops (Fall 2019) – Finding books by topic: Making library catalogues work for you handout – Nalini K. Singh, Faculty of Information
Structure of LC subject headings

- An LC subject heading may consist of a main term alone, or a main term with one or more subdivisions attached to the main term—this is called a subject string.

MAIN TERM -- SUBDIVISION -- SUBDIVISION

- One string may express a complete topic of the book, or the complete topic may be expressed in a combination of two or more headings.

- There are different categories of subject headings, different types of main terms, and different types of subdivisions

Some categories of subject headings

- Personal names — e.g., for books ABOUT a person, e.g., biography of Nelson Mandela
- Corporate names — e.g., for books ABOUT an organization, e.g., history of U of T
- Topical subject headings — e.g., books about knitting, or books about the theory of knowledge

Some types of main term

Single concept headings

- Single words
  Librarians
  Visualization

- Phrase heading
  Online social networks

- Terms with qualifiers
  Planes (Crabs)
  Planes (Hand tools)

Multiple concept headings

- e.g., Ones that express interrelations between separate concepts
  Infants switched at birth
  Librarians in literature
  Painting as therapy

- e.g., subjects often treated together
  Good and evil
  Books and reading
  Publishers and publishing
Some types of subdivisions

► Subdivisions express various aspects about the main topic.
  
  ◦ **TIME:**
    Printing press--History--17th century
  
  ◦ **PLACE / GEOGRAPHY:**
    Sound archives--United States
    Music--Ontario--Toronto
  
  ◦ **ASPECT/TOPICAL** – describes a specific focus of the main term:
    Collective bargaining--Library employees
    Wildfires--Prevention and control
    Internet--Political aspects
  
  ◦ **FORM/FORMAT:**
    Library science--Encyclopedias
    Philosophy--Dictionaries
    Cataloging--Handbooks, manuals, etc.
  
  ◦ **ALL OF THE ABOVE!**
    English literature--18th century--History and criticism--Congress

► There are many rules governing the use of subdivisions. You cannot just add them to main terms as you like. Instructions about how to use subdivisions come from the 6 volumes of *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, the 4 volumes of the *Subject Headings Manual*, and *Free-Floating Subdivision: An Alphabetical Index*, and their online equivalents.

How many headings are used per book?

► 2-4 headings to cover the topic of the work as a whole
► More headings to cover other aspects as necessary
► Usually no more than 8 or so
► Some books may only need 1 heading

Subject specificity

Works are subject catalogued to their level of specificity

► If a book is about golden retrievers only, there most likely will not be a heading for the broader concept of dogs.

► Subject headings are assigned for topics that make up at least 20% of the item’s content. This means that minor topics are not given subject headings. If a book is about representations of slavery in general (in books, film, museums, popular culture) with only one chapter or essay on museum exhibitions, then the term ‘museums’ will likely NOT be in a subject heading for that book.
Various techniques for subject searching

Recommendation: Use #1 with caution. I recommend that you start with #2. Methods 5 and 6 are not very commonly used for reference desk work, or end-user searching.

1. Pick the SUBJECT field, then type in your subject search terms
2. Broad searching (e.g. anywhere/all fields), then probe search results for valid subject headings, THEN do a search for subjects in the SUBJECT FIELD.
3. Use the SUBJECT FACET (grouping of subjects common to your search results) usually on the left side of your search results, to find useful subject headings for your topic.
4. Browse a list of all subject headings in the catalogue if available
5. Look up subject headings in the 6 volume set of LCSH—025.33 U58SA35 2013 REFERENCE
6. Look up online at: [http://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects.html](http://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects.html) (search box approach) or [http://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeLCSH/freelcsh.html](http://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeLCSH/freelcsh.html) (free flat files in PDF format)

MORE DETAILS ABOUT SUBJECT SEARCH TECHNIQUES

1. Pick the SUBJECT field, then type in your subject search terms
   - Search this way when you already know what valid subject headings exist for your search topics
   - The danger in relying only on subject searching, is that many times, you will not know what the valid LC subject headings are, so you will not be very successful in finding books on your topic.

In the UTL catalogue

- SUBJECT is one of the listed searchable FIELDS in the drop-down menu next to a search box.
- Entering words here will search the subject heading fields of the catalogue records.
- Available in SIMPLE and ADVANCED search
- Slavery in museum exhibits is an actual subject heading

In the TPL catalogue

- SUBJECT search is only available in the advanced search mode.
- Knitting is an actual subject heading
2/3. Broad (anywhere/all) search & then probe for subject headings

► A broad (ANYWHERE or ALL FIELDS) search looks for subject headings plus author, title, etc.
► Example topic: Evaluating information found on the web

Advanced search mode in UTL catalogue: ANYWHERE = evaluat* web information

RESULTS:

A useful-looking title shows up at the top of the search results. Look at the full details for this book to see subject headings

Full details show these subject headings

Subject facet showing relevant subject headings from the 411 search results. Look in MORE.

► Look at a few more records from this hit list, or the FULL list (Click on MORE) of subjects from the subject facet to see headings like evaluation, internet, web

► Run a Boolean search using these valid subject words

Option 2: Boolean Search

Search for: evaluation and (internet or web)

4. Browse a list of all subject headings in the catalogue

TPL OLD CATALOGUE: EXACT SEARCH FOR SUBJECT HEADING ‘book talks’
TPL CATALOGUE:  SUBJECT BROWSE DISPLAY AVAILABLE IN THE OLD CATALOGUE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our Newest Titles</th>
<th>Search Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Award Winners and</td>
<td>Book talks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Sellers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find It Fast!</td>
<td>see related headings for:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book talks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book talks--France.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book talks--Handbooks, manuals, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book talks--Periodicals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book talks--United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book talks--United States--Juvenile literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book talks--United States--Periodicals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UTL CATALOGUE: ‘BROWSE SEARCH’ THEN SEARCH IN THE SUBJECT FIELD

From the catalogue simple search page choose BROWSE search mode

Choose SUBJECT search field & type in your subject term e.g. ‘motion pictures’

Browse through the list of subject terms that appear in alphabetical order. Hits with only the main term are followed by hits with the main term PLUS subdivisions.
Caution: Most but not all items in the catalogue have subject headings!

- Some older periodicals may not have been catalogued with subject headings.
- Some electronic resources, such as e-journals, have only brief cataloguing information. These may be system-generated or ‘turned on’ via Serials Solution/360 MARC system, i.e. the only record available to be imported.
- Other online items in the catalogue, such as some e-books (e.g., *Historic house museums: A practical handbook for their care, preservation and management*) or documents on websites, or PDF documents may have NO SUBJECT HEADINGS at all.

**SEARCH TIP:**
When searching for books on topics **DO NOT DO SUBJECT SEARCHING ONLY**—mix it up with ANYWHERE searching also.

**EXAMPLE:**
MAIN TOPIC OF THE BOOK – digital activism – CANNOT BE EXPRESSED WITH LCSH

This set of subjects headings attempt to get at the topic with a combination of LCSH closest to the topic.

- **Activism** – expressed by ‘Protest movements’ and ‘Social movements’
- **Digitality** – expressed by ‘Cyberspace’; ‘Information technology’ and ‘Internet’
- **Subdivision** ‘–Political aspects’ adds more information to the ‘root’ headings.
LCSH RESOURCES

► For books about LCSH and its uses, do a search in the UTL catalogue for:
  o Subject = Subject headings, Library of Congress

► For books about subject cataloguing in general, for there are other systems of subject headings:
  o Subject = subject cataloging

FOR A GOOD OVERVIEW


LIBRARY OF CONGRESS SUBJECT HEADINGS


LIBRARY OF CONGRESS SUBJECT HEADINGS MANUAL

  NOTE: The 2008 version was the last paper publication of the manual. It is now available online for free, and also as part of Cataloger’s Desktop


FREE FLOATING SUBDIVISIONS: AN ALPHABETICAL INDEX

  NOTE: The 23rd ed. was the last paper publication of the free-floating subdivisions. It is now available online for free, and also as part of Cataloger’s Desktop


–Revised September 2019