J 110
Assigning Genre/Form Terms

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Background
This instruction sheet contains general practices followed by the Library of Congress for assigning
genre/form terms to individual resources being cataloged.

*LC Genre/Form Terms can be assigned in addition to LC subject headings. Consult the Subject Headings Manual (SHM) for guidelines on assigning LC subject headings. The Subject Heading Manual (SHM) instruction sheets may be freely downloaded from LC’s web site at https://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeSHM/freeshm.html* 

*LC genre/form terms should be placed in fields after the subject headings fields and precede genre/form terms fields from other vocabularies. Examples of the coding for genre/form terms assigned in bibliographic records and in authority records for works are provided in J 105.*

*Please note: the examples given in this instruction sheet are adapted from existing bibliographic records.*
Revision history
Updated in July 2023.

(1) General rule
Assign genre/form terms only as they come readily to mind after an initial review of the resource being cataloged.

(2) Cataloging treatment
Assign genre/form terms that correspond to the cataloging treatment of the resource. If cataloging a continuing resource such as a periodical, a monographic series, or a collected set, assign terms that characterize the resource as a whole. If cataloging such works as an analytic, assign terms that characterize the single part.

Some resources will require the use of an LCSH heading and its corresponding genre/form term. For example, if a resource contains both a text and commentary on the text, assign terms that represent the text, the commentary, or both.

Example 1
Title: Poets on street corners: portraits of fifteen Russian poets.
Subject: Russian poetry–20th century–History and criticism.
Term: Poetry.
Term: Literary criticism.

[Contains poems by Russian poets along with critical commentary.]

Assign terms based on analysis of the resource being cataloged. Genre/form terms do not need to be justified by descriptive cataloging elements.

(3) Specificity
Assign terms that are as specific as the genres and forms exemplified in a resource. For example, a seemingly broad term like Poetry is specific when it is assigned to an anthology that consists of many poetic forms.

Follow the hierarchical reference structure built into LCGFT authority records (see J 186) to find as close a match as possible between the genre(s) and form(s) of the resource and the term(s) that exist to express them in LCGFT. In situations where a needed term is not established, see J 120 for general guidelines on establishing new genre/form terms.

Assign a term that is broader or more general than the genre or form needed for the resource in hand in the following situations:

(1) when it is not possible to establish a precise term,

(2) when several terms are needed to express the genre or form (e.g., Science fiction, Romance fiction, and Novels assigned to a science fiction romance novel), or
(3) when the assignment of a more general term is required by special instructions in this manual.

If a compilation consists of a predominant genre or form but includes works that would be assigned another term in the hierarchy, it is permissible to assign both a broader and a narrower term. For example, Limericks is a narrower term of Humorous poetry. If a collection primarily contains limericks, but also contains a significant proportion of other types of humorous poetry, the terms Limericks and Humorous poetry may both be assigned.

Note: Catalogers should take the intent of the resource into account and display good judgment when assigning terms from multiple levels of the hierarchy in this manner.

(4) Number of terms

a. General rule

Assign to the resource being cataloged genre/form terms that describe the resource as a whole. The number of terms required varies with the resource being cataloged. Sometimes one term is sufficient, while at other times a complement of terms is necessary. Do not assign a genre/form term to works that do not have an identifiable genre or form.

Example 1

Title: The World Book encyclopedia.
Term: Encyclopedias.

Example 2

Title: A butterfly in winter : a novel.
Terms: Romance fiction.
        Novels.

Example 3

Title: American crucible : race and nation in the twentieth century.

[A historical study that does not display an identifiable genre or form. Genre/form term(s) are not assigned.]

b. Resource containing separate parts

In the case of a resource containing separate parts, for example, a narrative text plus an extensive bibliography or a section of maps, or a book with accompanying materials such as a DVD, also assign separate terms for the individual parts or materials if they are judged to be significant.
Example 1

Title: Solkattu manual: an introduction to the rhythmic language of South Indian music.

[A textbook for students of Solkattu that includes two DVDs containing performances of all of the lessons, and full performances of the outlined small-ensemble pieces.]

Terms: Textbooks.

   Carnatic music.

   Filmed performances.

   Educational films.

   [The first term reflects the textual portion of the resource, while the second, third, and fourth reflect the accompanying DVD.]

See J 105 sec. 1.b for the MARC 21 coding used to indicate to which part a particular term applies.

(5) Additional terms

Because of the complex nature of certain resources, or special practices that have been developed for genres and forms in particular disciplines, additional terms may be required. Consult the appropriate instruction sheets in this manual and scope notes in LCGFT for guidance on handling those situations. For example, special provisions exist for literature (J 235).

(6) Objectivity

Avoid assigning terms that express personal value judgments about resources being cataloged. Individual cataloger knowledge and judgment inevitably play a role in assessing the significance of a resource, but terms that reflect a cataloger’s opinion about a resource should not be assigned. Consider the intent of the author or publisher, and if possible assign terms for this orientation.

(7) Subdivision of genre/form terms

Genre/form terms are not subdivided, either topically, geographically, chronologically, or by form.