

## **“Multiple” Subdivisions to be Cancelled from Library of Congress Subject Headings**

**November 7, 2018**

In order to better support linked-data initiatives, the Library of Congress’ Policy and Standards Division will cancel “multiple” subdivisions from *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (LCSH) beginning in December 2018. This announcement defines “multiple” subdivision, briefly describes the benefits and drawbacks of the subdivisions, and provides project details along with instructions for catalogers.

### **Definition and Background**

The phrase *multiple subdivision* has two meanings in LCSH. It can describe the use of two or more subdivisions in a heading string (e.g., **Motion pictures—United States—History**). It also refers to a special type of subdivision that automatically gives free-floating status to analogous subdivisions used under the same heading. In the example **Computers—Religious aspects—Buddhism, [Christianity, etc.]**, the multiple subdivision is **—Buddhism, [Christianity, etc.]**. The second meaning is the topic of this announcement.

There are over 2,200 multiple subdivisions established in LCSH, and they can be identified by the presence of square brackets. They generally appear in LCSH itself, as in the headings **Computers—Religious aspects—Buddhism, [Christianity, etc.]** and **Subject headings—Aeronautics, [Education, Latin America, Law, etc.]**. Some appear in lists of free-floating and pattern subdivisions, such as the subdivisions **—Personal narratives, American, [French, German, etc.]**, used under wars; **—Eruption, [date]**, used under individual volcanoes; and **—Annexation to [ . . . ]**, used under names of countries and other jurisdictions.

The multiples permit catalogers to “fill in the blank” and substitute any word, phrase, or other information that fits the instruction. For example, catalogers can create **Computers—Religious aspects—Hinduism** and **Subject headings—Science**, based on the multiples **Computers—Religious aspects—Buddhism, [Christianity, etc.]** and **Subject headings—Aeronautics, [Education, Latin America, Law, etc.]**, respectively, because Hinduism is a religion, just as Buddhism and Christianity are, and science is a discipline, as are law and education. By using the subdivision **—Eruption, [date]**, the complete heading string **Kilauea Volcano (Hawaii)—Eruption, 2018**, can be created.

### **Benefits and Drawbacks of Multiple Subdivisions**

Multiple subdivisions were devised as a way to save the time of catalogers and of the policy specialists who maintain LCSH, because it is not necessary to separately propose and approve every heading string assigned. In the past, they also helped to constrain the number of pages in the printed volumes of LCSH. Those benefits are now outweighed by the problems that the multiple subdivisions cause in linked data.

- Headings with multiple subdivisions are treated as fully authorized heading strings, although they are not. The presence of square brackets is the only indication that a subdivision is a multiple and that the heading string is not authorized for use as-is. While programmers can write code to find the brackets, the inconsistent placement of the brackets makes it problematic.

- In linked data it is difficult to indicate that an authorized heading is not in fact authorized for use. When data is machine-matched to create triples, therefore, these unauthorized “headings” are used as if they were authorized.
- The use of multiples to generate free-floating lists under individual headings exacerbates two problems: heading strings without identifiers, and heading strings that cannot be machine-validated.

In order to better support linked-data projects, the Library of Congress will cancel the multiple subdivisions from LCSH.

### **Project Plan**

Staff in the Policy and Standards Division will cancel the multiple subdivisions from LCSH and create individual authority records for each valid, complete, heading string that was created based on a multiple subdivision. PSD wishes to be as comprehensive as possible when making authority records based on heading strings used in bibliographic records; OCLC Research will assist in this effort by providing to PSD lists of the headings used in bibliographic records in OCLC.

The authority records generated by this project will be added to LCSH in batches beginning no earlier than December 1, 2018. The records will be distributed through the MARC Distribution Service Subject-Authorities product. Subject-Authorities subscribers should expect that some weekly distributions may total over 1,000 records.

In a limited number of cases, authority records will not be created for complete heading strings that were based on multiples. Instead, the policy on subdivision for that heading (or group of headings, in the case of free-floating subdivisions) will be changed. Those changes will be announced in monthly summaries of decisions (available at <http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/cpsod/cpsoeditorial.html>) and on the Multiples Cancellation Project web page, <http://www.loc.gov/aba/cataloging/subject/multiplescancellationproject.html>.

This project is expected to take at least one year to complete. PSD will keep the community informed of its progress by periodically updating a spreadsheet that will be posted on the Multiples Cancellation Project web page (<http://www.loc.gov/aba/cataloging/subject/multiplescancellationproject.html>).

### **Interim Instructions for Catalogers**

As of July 1, 2018, PSD stopped approving proposals for new multiple subdivisions. The following instructions on using existing multiple subdivisions and making proposals for new headings will remain in force until the project is completed.

- Existing multiple subdivisions should continue to be used as usual. For example, a work on Jainism in relation to computers should be assigned the heading **Computers—Religious aspects—Jainism**, which is based on the existing multiple **Computers—Religious aspects—Buddhism, [Christianity, etc.]**. The heading is free-floating. *No proposal should be submitted.*
- If there is not an existing multiple for the concept, or the existing multiple has been deleted, then a proposal should be made for the heading string that is needed. For example, a work on Methodist views on anger should be assigned the heading **Anger—Religious aspects—Methodist Church**. The multiple **Anger—Religious aspects—Baptists, [Catholic Church, etc.]**

does not exist. *A proposal should be made for **Anger—Religious aspects—Methodist Church**.*

*Subject Headings Manual* instruction sheet H 1090, Multiple Subdivisions, reflects this interim policy. The most current version of H 1090 may be found in Cataloger's Desktop and on the ABA website at <http://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeSHM/H1090.pdf>. Other instruction sheets that refer to multiple subdivisions (e.g., H 1998, Religious Aspects of Topics) have also been revised. The lists of pattern and free-floating subdivisions (H 1095-H 1200) will be revised as the multiple subdivisions are removed from LCSH.

Questions and comments may be addressed to Janis L. Young at [jayo@loc.gov](mailto:jayo@loc.gov).