

Decision regarding the proposed revision to the hierarchies of moving image genre/form headings

April 9, 2010

On January 8, 2010 the Policy and Standards Division (PSD) of the Library of Congress issued a discussion paper entitled “[Proposed Revision to the Hierarchies of Moving Image Genre/Form Headings](#),” which broached the idea of explicitly placing many of the LC moving image genre/form headings into either a fiction or a nonfiction hierarchy. PSD would like to thank all those who provided comments on this issue.

PSD has decided not to move forward on its proposal at this time since the comments it received displayed no consensus but were evenly split into three groups: those who were in favor of the proposal; those who were in favor of the proposal but questioned the categorization of one or more of the headings; and, finally, those who were not in favor of the proposal. Those who were against explicitly placing headings in the fiction or nonfiction hierarchies stated that most of the headings can be used for both fiction and nonfiction works.

Whether they were in favor of the proposal or not, most responders wanted to continue the current policy of always applying one of the four fiction or nonfiction headings (**Fiction films**, **Nonfiction films**, **Fiction television programs**, and **Nonfiction television programs**) to every bibliographic record (see *Subject Headings Manual H* 1913). Applying one of those headings in conjunction with other headings that are explicitly fiction or nonfiction would be redundant in most cases.

The comments made it evident that there are very different approaches to the assignment of LC genre/form headings for moving images. While some catalogers make distinctions between what a work is *about* versus what it *is*, not all do. Whatever the cause of the different approaches – lack of comfort with making such distinctions, differences in philosophical approach, and the lack of “example records” have all been posited as possible causes – this lack of consistency in application of the headings has negative implications for shared cataloging.

Genre/form headings are intended to describe what a work *is*, while subject headings describe what a work is *about*. For example, *True Grit* starring John Wayne *is* a western; it would be assigned the genre/form headings **Western films** and **Fiction films**. If classified, it could be placed in PN1997.A2-.Z8 (fictional motion pictures produced through 2000). *John Wayne—The Duke: Bigger than Life* is a nonfiction study of Wayne’s life and work and includes excerpts from many of Wayne’s westerns. It *is* a biographical documentary *about* Wayne and the western film genre. It would be assigned the genre/form headings **Biographical films**; **Documentary films**; and **Nonfiction films** along with the subject headings **Wayne, John, 1907-1979**; **Motion picture actors and actresses—United States—Biography**; and **Western films—United States—History**

and criticism. It would be classified in PN2287.A-Z (biography of American actors) or PN1995.9.W4 (history and criticism of western films).

To carry this example a bit further and analogize to literature: The genre/form heading **Detective and mystery stories** would not be assigned to a work such as *G is for Grafton: the World of Kinsey Milhone*, since it is not a detective story, but *about* detective stories by Sue Grafton. Adding the genre/form heading **Western films** to *John Wayne—The Duke* would be equally inappropriate.

It is noted that there are some moving image genre/form headings that describe only the form, and not the genre (e.g., **Short films, Animated television programs**) and may be applied to either fiction or nonfiction works. PSD and staff in LC's Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division (MBRS) will revise the reference structure of any form headings that are currently in either the nonfiction or fiction hierarchy.

The Library of Congress and libraries everywhere have a vested interest in a common agreement on the meaning of the genre/form headings, since the system of record sharing and copy cataloging cannot function without such agreement. PSD continues to investigate ways to make the fiction/nonfiction distinction clear to catalogers and users alike and is open to suggestions on the best way to accomplish that goal. Suggestions may be sent to Janis Young, LC genre/form coordinator, at jayo@loc.gov.