Library of Congress Subject Headings

Module 2.5
Broader Term and Narrower Term References

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In earlier modules we learned that LCSH includes three types of hierarchical relationships.

Librarians are a kind of Library employee.

Your heart is part of your circulatory system.

The Mediterranean Sea is an instance of a sea.
LCSH uses the notations BT and NT to represent hierarchical relationships.

BT is the broader term and NTs are the narrower terms. In other words, NTs are more specific than BTs.

The general rules for hierarchical references in LCSH are contained in Subject Headings Manual instruction sheet H 370.

In this module we will further investigate LCSH policies on hierarchical relationships.
Every BT and every NT in LCSH is an authorized heading in its own right.

Any BTs for a heading are listed in the entry for that heading, and if there are any NTs, they are listed in the entry, too.
In this example, **Floor coverings** has the broader terms **Flooring** and **Interior decoration**.

Floor coverings are therefore a type of flooring and they are a component of interior decoration.
The narrower terms – or more specific types – of Floor coverings are Carpets, Linoleum, and Rugs.
In Classification Web, I can click on any of the BTs or NTs and see the full entry.

It is vitally important that you do that whenever you are assigning headings.

Seeing the full entry allows you to understand what that heading really means.
Let’s look at some more examples of the three categories of BTs in LCSH before we look at some of the special rules for particular types of headings.

The first main category is Genus/species.
Veterinary dentistry is a kind of Dentistry, and Equine dentistry is a kind of Veterinary dentistry.
Zoom lens photography is a kind of Photography.
The second main category is Whole/Part.

Leaves are a part of the whole, Plants.
Roots are also a part of Plants.
And so are **Thorns**.

Each of those headings – **Leaves**, **Roots**, and **Thorns** – has the BT **Plants**.

**Thorns** also has another BT, **Plant defenses**, because thorns are a kind of plant defense.
The headings for each of those parts is listed as one of the many NTs for Plants.
The final category reflects an Instance relationship.

The iPad, Microsoft Surface, and Nexus 10, among others, are individual instances of tablet computers, and have the BT **Tablet computers**.
The houses of Anjou, Aquitaine, and Bourbon, among others, are instances of ruling houses in France.
When a heading is in the form of [Topic A] and [Topic B] and refers to the reciprocal relationship between the topics, a BT reference is made for Topic B.

In this example, Television and literature, the concept in the position of Topic B is Literature, so that is the BT.

Why? Well, the thinking is that in a card catalog or browse index, Television and literature would be filed after the heading Television, so Television is not needed as a BT.
Likewise, if the heading is a prepositional phrase, the BT reflects the part following the preposition.
Therefore, Pollen as food has the BT Food.

That makes sense when you think about it, because Pollen as food is a subset of the heading Food – it’s the genus/species relationship.
Ethnicity on television refers to the depiction of ethnicity in television programming, so the BT Television also makes sense.
But Chess for the blind has the BT Blind, and does not fit into the genus/species, or whole/part, or instance relationship. Chess for the blind is not a subset of Blind.

This type of BT is an example of a compromise that was made several decades ago when hierarchy was added to LCSH.

The idea was to alert library users who were looking under the heading Blind that there was a more specific heading that might be of interest.
Exceptions to this rule are sometimes made, but only when there is a very clear pattern.

If we were to look in LCSH, we would see that all of the headings for individual sports for children have the BT *Sports for children* instead of just the heading *Children*, which we would expect if we were following the general rule.
Headings that have specifically established topical subdivisions often have a BT that corresponds to the subdivision.

Sometimes the subdivision and the BT are an exact match, as in **Cruise missiles—Aerodynamics**, which has the BT **Aerodynamics**.
Specific Situations

- Headings with topical subdivisions
  - The heading that corresponds to the subdivision is the BT

Cruise missiles—Aerodynamics
  BT Aerodynamics

Labor supply—Effect of foreign exchange rates on
  BT Foreign exchange rates

Other times, the BT might be a particular phrase from the subdivision.

**Foreign exchange rates** is the heading that most closely corresponds to the subdivision — **Effect of foreign exchange rates on**.
Other times, the BT might look very different from the subdivision, but the meaning is the same.

Diseases—Causes and theories of causation has the BT Pathology because pathology is the study of the causes of diseases.
The major exception to this rule relates to free-floating subdivisions.

Headings with free-floating subdivisions are rarely established in LCSH. Sometimes they are, though, due to special circumstances. When that happens, a BT corresponding to the subdivision is not made.
For instance, —Etymology free-floats under headings for languages, so a heading for a language subdivided by —Etymology would not normally be established in LCSH.

Instead, a cataloger would simply make up the heading Italian language—Etymology according to the rules. It was specifically established, though, because it was needed as a BT for headings for individual words in the Italian language. Italian language—Etymology does not have a BT.
Other subdivided headings were established before some subdivisions became free-floating in the 1970s, such as this heading for the alluvial plain of the Mississippi River. Because these headings would not be established today, they do not have BTs, either.
Specific Situations

- Headings with topical subdivisions
  - The heading that corresponds to the subdivision is the BT
  - Exception 1: subdivisions that are normally free-floating but are established because of special circumstances
  - Exception 2: sometimes there is not a heading to correspond to the subdivision

Burns and scalds—Complications

The other major exception is when there is not a heading that corresponds to the subdivision, such as –Complications.
Most headings in LCSH have at least one broader term, and they may have up to four.

A broader term is made only for the next level of hierarchy. Ethnobotanists and Women scientists can both be BTs of Women ethnobotanists because Ethnobotanists and Women scientists are neither broader nor narrower than each other.

There are a very few exceptions to this rule about making BTs for only one level of hierarchy, such as headings for languages and language groups. Those exceptions are made according to well-established patterns.
Some headings do not have parent terms, or BTs.

Logically enough, they are called orphans.

They include the following categories of headings.
Top terms such as *Science* and *History*. Unless LCSH had a heading for “entire world of knowledge,” there is no BT to assign.
Geographic regions. Although it would be logical for Eastern Europe to be considered an NT of Europe, by policy geographic headings for regions do not have BTs.
Number of BTs

- Some headings are orphans
  - Top terms
  - Geographic regions
  - Family names

Family names are established in LCSH when they are needed as subjects. Those headings do not have BTs.
Neither do fictitious characters, such as the Hardy Boys.
Another category consists of some prepositional phrases.

As we discussed earlier, general policy is to assign a BT for the part of the heading following the preposition.

In the example Flowers in literature, that would be Literature. There are literally thousands of headings in the form [topic] in art, [topic] in literature, and [topic] in whatever, and it was not practical to provide a BT for each one of them.

The list of NTs under Art and under Literature would be pages and pages – or screens and screens – long, and would be unmanageable, so this exception to the general policy was made.
Inverted headings that are qualified by a language, nationality, ethnic group, or time period also do not have BTs.

The idea here is that Maxims, Irish would file directly after Maxims, which would have been its BT.

In a browse list, the BT would not serve a useful purpose because the headings are collocated anyway.
Now that we know some of the rules for making BTs in LCSH, we need to ask why we do this at all.

The purpose of BTs – that is, hierarchical references – is to collocate headings into broad categories. Doing so organizes knowledge; without that organization, we would have a jumble of headings.

In a vocabulary the size of LCSH, it would be very difficult to find anything without BTs. By categorizing headings in a systematic way we can help users find the best heading to suit their needs.

Let’s look at an example.
Let’s say that I enjoy baking cookies, and I want to find information on other types of baked goods to try. I can start by searching for the known concept: **Cookies**.

The entry has a nice list of NTs – types of cookies. Looking at them, I think that the entry for **Fortune cookies** looks promising.
I had never thought about making fortune cookies! I can click the NT to find the entry for Fortune cookies. But I decide that I want to broaden my horizons, not narrow them. I can click on the BT Cookies and get right back where I started.
I had no idea that cookies are a type of cake. What if I click the BT to see what is listed under Cakes?
There are all sorts of cakes to choose from, from dessert bars to coffee cakes to doughnuts and tea cakes, not to mention wedding cakes.

But I decide that I would like to explore further. What would happen if I click on the BT **Baked products**?
Now, this is broad! It lists bread, biscuits, crackers, muffins, and more! I’d like to try my hand at making bread, so I can click the NT and see what types of bread there are to choose from.
There is a list of over a dozen specific types of bread, and I might find library materials under any one of these headings.

But what if I want to go back to where I started? It’s easy!
On **Bread**, I can click on **Baked products**.
On **Baked products**, I can click on **Cake**.
Now I can click on **Cookies**.
And I’m back where I started!

In this way, catalogers and users can go up and down the hierarchies to find the heading that best fits their needs.