Library of Congress Subject Headings: Module 5.2

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Module 5.2
Principles of Heading Assignment, Part 2

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In the previous module we discussed the general principles of heading assignment including the 20 percent rule, the need for objectivity, using titles as a guide to contents, as well as other general topics.

In this module we will cover specific rules pertaining to the number and kinds of headings to be assigned to a resource. As before, all of the concepts in this module can be found in Subject Headings Manual instruction sheet H 180.

First we will discuss the principle of specificity.
Headings should be as specific as the topics they cover.

Although it is tempting to think so, headings at lower levels of the hierarchy are not necessarily “better” in terms of specificity. Instead, specificity here refers to the relationship between the heading and the resource being cataloged.
Although a heading may seem broad, in the context of a particular resource it might actually be quite specific.

For example, a general introduction to biology should be assigned the general heading **Biology**. Nothing more is needed.
On the other hand, a resource about cell control mechanisms, which is a concept in biology, should not be assigned the heading Biology because that would be broader than the resource.

Instead, the heading specific to the topic, Cellular control mechanisms, should be assigned.
Sometimes it is necessary to assign a heading that is broader than the scope of the resource. At times, it may not be possible to establish a precise heading, for various reasons. When that happens, it is often necessary to assign multiple headings to describe the contents of a resource.

Specificity

- Assign a heading that is broader than the topic it is intended to cover when ...
- it is not possible to establish a precise heading.
- it is necessary to assign an array of headings.
The resource in this example is about soccer fans that are called ultras. They are “super fans” and often become violent at games.

LCSH does not include headings that refer to the relative dedication of fans. Instead, the general heading for Soccer fans, subdivided by Great Britain, is assigned, along with the headings Soccer hooliganism and Violence in sports, in order to bring out the violence that is associated with ultras.
Finally, sometimes the rules and guidelines in the SHM require that a more general heading be assigned.

Specificity

• Assign a heading that is broader than the topic it is intended to cover when ...  
  • it is not possible to establish a precise heading.  
  • it is necessary to assign an array of headings.  
  • the SHM requires that a more general heading be assigned.
For example, H 1334.5 indicates that resources about the architecture of a particular type of building in a city should be assigned a heading for the type of building, along with a more general heading for buildings in the city.

Rise of the New York skyscraper, 1865-1913.
Skyscrapers—New York (State)—New York—History.
New York (N.Y.)—Buildings, structures, etc.
The intent of cataloging is to summarize the contents of a resource, not to index every concept that is mentioned. Therefore, if a resource discusses several topics that are subsets of a more general topic, we assign the heading for the general topic.

Depth of Indexing

• If a resource discusses several subtopics of a general topic, assign the heading that corresponds to the general topic.
Let’s say that a resource discusses both bicycle and pedestrian traffic, as well as the speed of automobile traffic, in its analysis of traffic congestion in Tokyo.
Rather than assigning headings for each of those concepts, the more general heading Traffic flow—Japan—Tokyo is assigned.
Sometimes resources discuss a general topic but they also emphasize a subtopic, or they illustrate a principle with a very specific example. In that case, headings for both the general and the specific aspects of the resource are assigned, as long as the subtopic or the example constitutes at least 20 percent of the resource.

Remember that 20 percent rule!
This title discusses local public finances in general, but emphasizes revenue services – in other words, taxation.

As you can see, Taxation is a narrower term of Finance, Public.

We normally would not assign both a BT and an NT in the same record, but in this case it is okay because the more specific topic Taxation is at least 20 percent of the resource.
This resource focuses on the 2008 summer Olympics in Beijing, but also covers all of the other summer Olympics since 1988.

Strictly speaking, the heading for the Beijing Olympics is not an NT of Olympics because it is a name heading, but it is an instance of the Olympics in general.

According to the scope note for the heading Olympics, it is used for, “Comprehensive works on the Olympics, as well as general works on the summer Olympics.”
Two or Three Related Headings

- Some resources discuss two or three related subtopics.
- Assign the two or three specific subtopics, unless...
  - a single heading exists that covers exactly the same content as the two or three individual headings.

If a heading exists, or can be established, that represents the two or three topics discussed in a resource, and that heading includes no other topics within its scope, we will assign that one heading instead of two or three narrower headings.
The heading Teenage parents has three narrower terms, two of which are subsets of Teenage parents: Teenage fathers and Teenage mothers.
A resource about teenage mothers and fathers should not be assigned the two headings *Teenage fathers* and *Teenage mothers*. Instead, *Teenage parents* should be assigned.
But, according to the Rule of Three, if a general topic includes in its scope more than three subtopics, and the resource being cataloged includes only two or three of them, assign the two or three headings instead of the broader heading.
Let’s go back to our Traffic flow example.

There are five narrower concepts encompassed by the heading Traffic flow.

These include

- Bicycle traffic flow
- Pedestrian traffic flow
- Right turn on red
- Traffic congestion and
- Traffic speed.
Say that the resource being cataloged discusses only traffic congestion and traffic speed.

Instead of assigning the general heading **Traffic flow**, headings for each of the narrower concepts should be assigned.
This is a collection of poetry about George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, two of the several dozen presidents of the United States.

Instead of assigning the heading Presidents—United States—Poetry, which would be much too broad for this resource, the name headings for Washington and Lincoln are assigned instead, subdivided by —Poetry.

The Rule of Three continues by saying, if more than three of the subtopics are discussed in the resource, assign the broad heading instead, unless the Rule of Four applies.
So what is the Rule of Four?

In certain circumstances it may be preferable to assign headings for four subtopics of a broader concept. If a heading covers a broad range and each subtopic forms only a small portion of that whole range, we can assign the four subtopics instead.

We should absolutely never assign more than four subtopics, though!
Radio programs has a lengthy list of NTs.
Rule of Four

Radio programs (May Subd Geog) □
Here are entered general works on radio programs. Works about individual radio programs are entered in the form of the individual program.
UF Programs, Radio
Radio shows
Shows, Radio
BT Radio broadcasting
RT Radio scripts
NT Book review radio
Cataloging of radio
Children's radio
Christmas radio programs
Detective and mystery radio programs
Documentary radio programs
Experimental radio programs
Horror radio programs
Live radio programs
Magazine format radio programs
Nonfiction radio programs
Radio adaptations
Radio addresses, debates, etc.
Radio comedies
Rule of Four

Radio programs (May Subd Geog)

Here are entered general works on radio programs. Works about individual radio program.

UF Programs, Radio
Radio shows
Radio series
Shows, Radio

BT Radio broadcasts

RT Radio scripts
Dept.

NT Book review radio

Cataloging of radio
Children's radio

Radio addresses, debate
Radio comedies

Christmas radio programs
Detective and mystery radio programs

Documentary radio programs
Experimental radio programs
Horror radio programs
Live radio programs
Magazine format radio programs
Nonfiction radio programs
Radio adaptations
Radio addresses, debate
Radio comedies

Radio crime shows
Radio game shows
Radio plays
Radio programs, Musical
Radio quiz shows
Radio serials
Radio sermons
Radio stories
Radio talk shows
Science fiction radio programs
Variety shows (Radio programs)
Western radio programs
A resource that discusses the history of mystery, horror, Western, and comedy radio programs should be assigned the four narrower headings.
But if that resource contains a discussion of those four topics, and science fiction as well, we would have to assign the broader heading **Radio programs**, because we cannot assign more than four subtopics.
If a work discusses a complex or compound topic for which a single heading neither exists nor can be practically constructed or established, assign multiple headings to bring out the separate aspects of the topic.

In some cases, established practice dictates assigning a combination of headings that together are coextensive with the topic.
Shaw’s settings is about the appearance of gardens and libraries in Bernard Shaw’s literature.

LCSH does not permit us to make a single heading that encompasses all of those topics, so we must assign three separate headings to bring out the focus of the resource.
Overarching Principle

- Ask yourself:
  
  If a researcher used *that* subject heading to select *that* resource, would he or she be happy with the results?

There is an overarching principle at work here that is not actually included in the SHM.

Many researchers travel great distances to use the Library of Congress. Say that a hypothetical researcher from Germany comes all the way to LC because it looked like we have fifty books on a particular topic. He requests all of them, and they are delivered from the stacks, slowly over several hours. Now he looks at the books, and finds that most of them barely mention his topic. He is understandably and rightfully upset because the trip is a waste. That is not the impression that LC wants to provide. That is the reason for the 20 percent rule, for not cataloging by title, and all of the other guidelines we have covered in these two modules. We want to use our professional judgement as catalogers to objectively tell our researchers what that resource is actually about.

This is an era of shared cataloging, and the records that we create are used in a wide variety of ways by a wide variety of users. Perhaps a parent visits a public library to look for resources to help a child create a science fair project. Or someone who has just been diagnosed with cancer visits the local library to find some authoritative information on the diagnosis. Or a doctoral student is interested in finding information about coincidence theory as it applies to mathematics. The subject headings help all of these users and more find the materials that they need, but in order for that to work, everyone has to catalog according to the same principles.