

1-1-2002

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Recommended Citation

Bowen, Dorothy N., "Changes in the 17th Edition of Sears List of Subject Headings" (2002). *Curriculum and Instruction Faculty and Staff Scholarship*. Paper 20.

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CHANGES IN THE 17TH EDITION OF SEARS LIST OF SUBJECT HEADINGS

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INTRODUCTION

Users coming to our library catalogs are more often looking for materials dealing with particular subjects rather than seeking specific titles or authors. Therefore, when we prepare our catalogs we must take special care to use terminology which will best retrieve this material. We must pay special attention to the "aboutness" of each item in order to select the most precise term.

Librarians may have had someone say to them, "Since most libraries have gone to online catalogs with the capability of searching by key word, aren't subject headings becoming obsolete? Why do we need to continue to use controlled vocabulary?" It is true that key word searches look for words or phrases in the title, subject and notes fields, or in any other field designated by the database, while subject heading searches search only the subject field and will do so only when the exact term is used. It is also true that key word searches often retrieve a larger number of items than do subject searches. However, more of these items may be irrelevant, while a subject heading search has the potential of retrieving a smaller number of items with a higher degree of relevancy. In most online catalogs subject headings appearing in a retrieved record have the added advantage of being hyperlinks which will lead to more records relevant to the topic.

SEARS LIST OF SUBJECT HEADINGS

For nearly eighty years the *Sears List of Subject Headings* (SLSH) has been the list of choice for small and medium-sized libraries. One of its great advantages over the *Library of Congress List of Subject Headings* (LCSH) is the fact that it is contained in one handy volume, while LCSH is now five large volumes. This of course makes SLSH considerably less expensive and easier to use. As stated in its introductory material, SLSH is able to maintain this small size because it is "not intended to be a complete list of subject headings but only a list of many of the most commonly used headings and a pattern for creating other

headings as needed (xxxviii)." For example, the cataloger is provided with a list of categories of headings that s/he may add such as types of plants and animals. "Key" headings are also provided and these serve as examples for adding subdivisions. For example, the cataloger uses **Native Americans** as an example to illustrate subdivisions which may be added to any ethnic group.

SLSH is updated only every three years, while LCSH is updated annually, which may be a disadvantage of using the List. It also must be kept in mind when using SLSH that the headings provided in LC Cataloging-in-Publication (CIP) data must be adapted, for they follow the LCSH format.

SEARS LIST OF SUBJECT HEADINGS, 17TH EDITION

SLSH was originally intended to closely follow LCSH so that if a library wished to switch to LCSH when the collection grew larger, it would be a relatively easy task. However, with each new edition, the differences between the two lists have grown. As stated by Taylor, "...in most recent editions, *Sears* has shown more independence (2000, 388)." An example of this is the use of inverted headings by LCSH. SLSH has eliminated all inverted headings such as **Education, Elementary**, which is still used by LCSH. SLSH uses **Elementary education**.

In the summer of 2000, the 17th edition of SLSH was published and it includes a number of significant changes in format and content. Let us look at these changes.

1. Principles of the Sears List

One of the very helpful features of SLSH for many years has been its "Principles" sections. It has always been set out in a clear and easy-to-read style, which even the most inexperienced cataloger can understand and follow. With the publication of the 17th edition, this is even more evident. Joseph Miller notes that it serves as both an introduction to SLSH specifically and to cataloging in general

(1998, 70). In this new edition this section has been “extensively reorganized and rewritten” (Preface, vii). Topics are clearly laid out with the use of headings and bold print to emphasize subject headings themselves. Perhaps one of the greatest improvements is the section on “Making References,” which includes instructions for making *see* and *see also* references. This section was previously four plus pages. It is now two and one half pages and is much easier to follow and apply.

2. Headings for Native Peoples

A second major change in the 17th edition is the revision of headings for native peoples in the Western Hemisphere. No longer is **Indians of North America** the term that is used to illustrate subdivisions that may be used under names of peoples and linguistic families. The term now used is **Native Americans**, and this term may be subdivided geographically at any level from city to continent. It is now the pattern heading for all ethnic groups. “Subdivisions formerly used under **Indians of North America** for classes of persons, such as *Women* or *Children*, and for things distinctly ethnic, such as *Medicine* or *Music*, have been cancelled in favor of phrase headings, such as **Native American women**, **Native American children**, **Native American medicine**, and **Native American music**. (Preface, vii)”

3. New Subdivisions

A third important change is the addition of many new and very helpful subdivisions. Some examples are *Juvenile drama*, *Juvenile fiction*, *Juvenile poetry*, etc. The presentation of these subdivisions has also been revised. Whereas in earlier editions there was a section entitled “List of Commonly Used Subdivisions,” leaving their use very often to the judgment of the cataloger, now each subdivision has its own entry within the alphabetical List with instructions for its use, and this list has been eliminated. The distinction is now more easily made between subdivisions that are useable under nearly any subject heading and those that are more limited in their application. The following example is the entry for Juvenile fiction:

Juvenile fiction
USE subjects and names with the
subdivision Juvenile fiction,
e.g. **Christmas-Juvenile fiction**
[to be added as needed]

REFERENCES

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4. “May subdiv. geog.” Notes

The fourth major change in this edition of SLSH is the addition of many more “May subdiv. geog.” notes. This note authorizes the cataloger to subdivide the heading geographically whenever appropriate to the individual item and collection. In earlier editions there were often headings where such a subdivision seemed appropriate, but the list did not provide for such a subdivision. Some examples of headings which include this note for the first time are **Homelessness**, **Horses**, **Jewelry**, and **School attendance**.

5. Headings to be Added by the Cataloger

The fifth and final significant change in the 17th edition is the arrangement of the page called “Headings to be Added by the Cataloger.” As noted earlier, one way the List is able to keep to one volume is by listing headings which may be used as a pattern for creating other headings as needed. This page serves as a guide to creating these headings. In previous editions this page was divided into two sections: “Proper Names,” and “Common Names.” Headings to be added are now listed under three categories, (1) “Topical Subjects,” including common things such as food, musical instruments, etc., plants and animals, names of organs and regions of the body, names of languages, etc; (2) “Geographic Headings,” including names of political jurisdictions, groups of states, countries, and alliances and names of geographic features, such as rivers, and (3) “Names,” which includes personal names, corporate names and uniform titles.

CONCLUSION

We have looked at the benefits of subject searches over keyword searches and also the advantages of using SLSH for a small or medium-size library. We have also looked at the helpful changes which SLSH has incorporated into its newly-published 17th edition.

It is a good practice to purchase each new cataloging tool as it is published in a new edition. Some libraries do not purchase every new edition, but rather purchase only alternate editions, for example. Whatever your practice is, if you use SLSH in your library, the 17th edition is a very worthwhile resource for you to add to your cataloging tools.

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TITLE: Changes in the 17th edition of Sears list of subject headings

SOURCE: Kentucky Libraries 66 no2 Spr 2002

WN: 0210502001007

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