Subject Headings and Subdivisions

Subject headings are words or phrases that describe the content of a book or periodical. All books are assigned subject headings and these are searchable using the online catalog.

A divided subject heading is one that has *subdivisions*, which help make the heading more precise. Critical works on the Middle Ages can be found by looking under “Middle Ages—Bibliography.” Look under “Middle Ages—Encyclopedias” for an encyclopedia covering medieval history.

Headings can be quite lengthy. For example, a picture book on Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello has the heading “Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826—Homes and Haunts—Virginia—Albemarle County—Pictorial works.”

When you are doing research in the online catalog, make a note of subject headings and their subdivisions. You can also do keyword searches on your topic and a narrower word to find precisely the content you want. For example, if you want material on all of Jefferson’s homes, do a keyword search under “Jefferson” and “homes.” Need words on ancient Greece? Combine “Greece” and “Antiquities.” Type “Women,” “Suffrage,” and “Sources” for primary sources dealing with women suffrage. (And don’t forget the subdivisions “diaries” and “correspondence.”)

The following subdivisions are some (not all) of the ones appearing in “Amazing, Magic Searches!” by Becky Kornegay, Heidi Buchanan, and Hiddy Morgan, published in the November 1, 2005, issue of Library Journal <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6277396.html>. The subdivisions are in **boldface** while examples of sample searches are in *italics*.

1. **Economic aspects**—*College sports and economic aspects*
2. **Moral and ethical aspects**—*Wealth and moral and ethical aspects*
3. **Psychological aspects**—*Color and psychological aspects* answers the reference question, “How does color affect my mood?”
4. **Physiological aspects**—*Anger and physiological aspects*
5. **Social aspects**—*Country music and social aspects* will bring up the book *Don’t Get Above Your Raisin*: Country Music and the Southern Working Class.
6. **Personal narratives**—First-person accounts of a variety of topics. *Agoraphobia and personal narratives; Crusades and personal narratives* (remember to make narratives plural).
7. **Case studies**—Finds not only management works, but also real-life stories that illustrate personal qualities. For example, “I need to read about someone who showed courage.”
8. **Early works to 1800**—For individual works written or issued before 1800. This subdivision finds older writings that get lost in a large library collection, especially since search results usually show the reprint date rather than the date of creation. Works well with topics in the sciences and social sciences. “How did people write about child rearing in Colonial times?” or “I need a medieval take on astronomy.”
9. **Sources**—Crucial in the search for the primary documents that historians and genealogists crave! Forget the rigid structure a subject search requires for historical topics and toss sources into a keyword search! Replace *United States—History—Civil War, 1861–1865—Sources* (!) with *Civil War and sources*. Partners include **Diaries** or **Correspondence**.

10. **Pictorial works**—An image search on the web can be fruitless or downright dirty! Try a book instead. Regarding this subdivision, the Library of Congress warns catalogers, “If less than 50 percent of the work being cataloged consists of illustrations, do not bring out the pictorial aspect, regardless of the importance of the illustrations” (*Subject Cataloging Manual: Subject Headings*). **Anatomy and pictorial works** is a safe search.

11. **Attitudes**—Refers to the opinions belonging to a particular group. *Attitudes and cigarette smokers* asks how smokers feel about, well, about anything. For how others feel about the smokers, use **public opinion**.

12. **Public opinion**—The attitudes or opinions toward a group or topic. How do people feel about smokers? *Smokers and public opinion*.

13. **Influence**—Works well with icons: *Elvis and influence* or *Jefferson and influence*.

14. **Cross-cultural studies**—Explores diversity among different cultural and ethnic groups. Best when the topic matters more than the place. *Courtship and cross-cultural studies*; advertising and cross-cultural studies.

15. **Sex differences**—For gender issues relating to individual languages, individual organs and regions of the body, etc. Perfect for those Mars/Venus questions. *Communication and sex differences*; brain and sex differences.

16. **Social life and customs**—Everyday life! What do Southerners eat? What did the Puritans do for fun? This one has saved many a reference librarian as the study of history has shifted from kings to commoners.

17. **Description and travel**—Excellent for finding more information about a place than just hotel and restaurant rankings. Adding this phrase often yields more relevant results than a search on the place name alone. *Everglades and description and travel*; *Vatican and description and travel*. Also useful: **Guidebooks**.

18. **Legal status**—Applies to people (laborers, prisoners, mail order brides). Its partner, **Law and legislation**, goes with things (endangered species, prisons, sports). Great for patrons who are not quite ready to tackle the technical language of statutes and codes.

19. **Antiquities**—This is a real “Who knew?” subdivision. Antiquities can be relics such as potshards and buildings, but they also describe customs or events, especially those of ancient times. Results can be surprising: a keyword search for *New York City and antiquities* finds *Unearthing Gotham: The Archaeology of New York City*. Try it with your home state!