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# Library of Congress Subject Headings

Module 2.4  
Scope Notes

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Policy and Standards Division  
Library of Congress  
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### General Description

- Scope notes define, and sometimes compare, headings
- Help users determine whether a heading covers the material they seek
- Help catalogers maintain consistency in the way headings are assigned

Scope notes are definitions that limit the application of a heading. They help users know whether they will find information pertinent to their needs under a heading.

They also help catalogers assign headings consistently, which in turn helps the catalog fulfill one of its main missions, to collocate like materials.

General information on scope notes is found in *Subject Headings Manual* instruction sheet H 400.

### General Description

- LCSH includes three types of scope notes
  - Definition of a single heading
  - Contrast between or among two or more headings
  - Special instructions for assignment

LCSH includes three types of scope notes.

- The first defines a single heading.
- The second shows the contrast between or among two or more headings.
- And the third provides special instructions for the assignment of the heading.

We will examine each in turn.

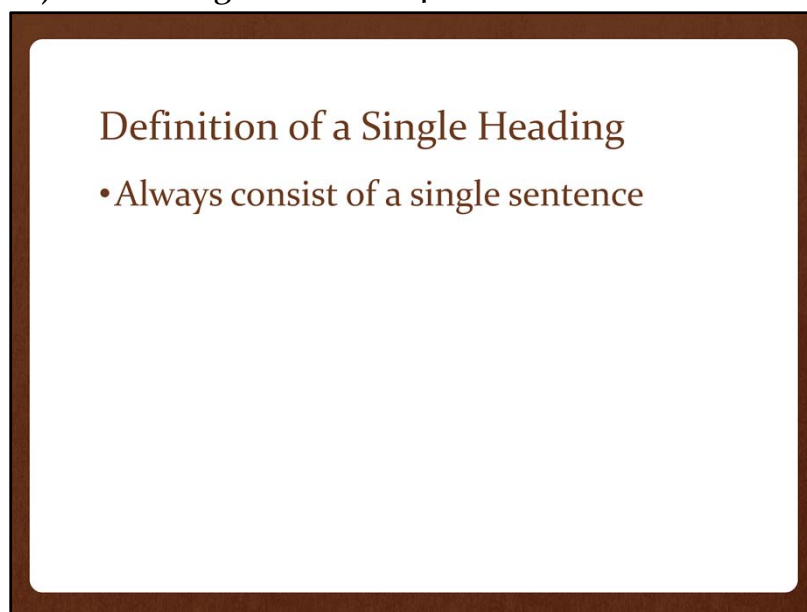
### Definition of Single Heading

- Included when
  - There is no dictionary definition for a heading
  - Reference sources do not agree on a meaning
  - General usage of the word or phrase is inconsistent

Sometimes scope notes define a single heading.

The heading may be for a general topic that is not defined in dictionaries, or perhaps dictionaries do define it, but they do not agree on the definition. When that happens, a scope note is provided in order to show what the heading means in LCSH.

Other times, general usage of a word or phrase is so inconsistent, that a scope note is necessary to help everyone understand the heading in the same way.



Definitions of a single heading always consist of a single sentence.

## Definition of a Single Heading

- Always consist of a single sentence

**Mental calculators** (May Subd Geog)   
Here are entered works on persons capable of  
executing rapid mental mathematical calculations.

The sentence always begins with the phrase “Here are entered works”.

Let’s look at a few examples.

You might not know what a **Mental calculator** is without the scope note.

As you can see, it does not refer to an electronic device. Instead, the heading refers to people who can do mathematical calculations quickly.

## Definition of a Single Heading

- Always consist of a single sentence

**Mental calculators** (May Subd Geog)

Here are entered works on persons capable of

**Europe, Western**

Here are entered works on the region that includes Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Monaco, Portugal, Spain, and Italy, and is sometimes expanded to include Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria.

Sometimes headings for geographic regions also have scope notes. It is particularly important because various people might define geographic regions differently.

The general American perspective of Western Europe is that it consists of Scandinavia as well as the Netherlands, Belgium, and several other countries, but also sometimes includes Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria.

By reading the scope note, you will know whether the resource you are cataloging covers Western Europe – as defined by LCSH – or some other part of Europe.

**Definition of a Single Heading**

- Always consist of a single sentence

**Mental calculators** (May Subd Geog)   
Here are entered works on persons capable of

**Europe, Western**   
Here are entered works on the region that includes  
Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Belgium,  
Luxembourg, France, Monaco, Portugal, Spain, and

**Success in motion pictures** (Not Subd Geog)   
Here are entered works on the depiction of success in a.  
motion pictures.

This scope note for **Success in motion pictures** defines what we mean by that phrase.

It refers to the depiction or portrayal of success in motion pictures, and not, for example, to motion pictures that are successful.



### Contrasting Scope Notes

- Define two or more headings that may otherwise be confused
  - Are reciprocal
  - Each definition appears in a separate sentence

Contrasting scope notes define two or more headings that are so close in meaning or wording that they may be confused without the note.

Each definition appears in its own sentence, and the notes are reciprocal.

## Contrasting Scope Notes

- Define two or more headings that may otherwise be confused

**Felt work** (May Subd Geog)   
[TT849.5]  
Here are entered works on the use of felt in handicraft.  
Works on the process of felt making are entered  
under Felting.

These scope notes also start with the phrase “Here are entered works”.

The first sentence defines the heading we are looking at.

The second sentence contains the definition of the contrasting heading and begins with the phrase “Works on,” provides the definition, and then concludes with the phrase “are entered under” and the other heading.

So, the scope note under **Felt work** reads, “Here are entered works on the use of felt in handicraft. Works on the process of felt making are entered under **Felting**.”

## Contrasting Scope Notes

- Define two or more headings that may otherwise be confused

**Felt work** (May Subd Geog)

[\[TT849.5\]](#)

Here are entered works on the use of felt in handicraft.

Works on the process of felt making are entered under Felting.

**Felting** (May Subd Geog)

[\[TS1830.F44\]](#)

Here are entered works on the process of felt making.

Works on the use of felt in handicraft are entered under Felt work.

The entry for **Felting** includes the same information, but in the reverse order:

Here are entered works on the process of felt making. Works on the use of felt in handicraft are entered under **Felt work**.

In this way, users and catalogers will know the best heading to use, regardless of which heading they search first.

## Contrasting Scope Notes

- Define two or more headings that may otherwise be confused

**Women in mass media** (Not Subd Geog)   
Here are entered works discussing the portrayal of women in the mass media. Works discussing women's employment in the mass media are entered under **Women in the mass media industry**. Works discussing all aspects of women's involvement in the mass media are entered under **Mass media and women**.

This scope note for **Women in mass media** defines three headings:

Here are entered works discussing the portrayal of women in the mass media. Works discussing women's employment in the mass media are entered under **Women in the mass media industry**. Works discussing all aspects of women's involvement in the mass media are entered under **Mass media and women**.

## Contrasting Scope Notes

- Define two or more headings that may otherwise be confused

**Women in the mass media industry** (May Subd Geog)   
Here are entered works discussing women's employment in the mass media. Works discussing all aspects of women's involvement in the mass media are entered under Mass media and women. Works discussing the portrayal of women in the mass media are entered under Women in mass media.

There is a reciprocal scope note in each of the headings referred to, and the sentences are rearranged accordingly. **Women in the mass media industry** first defines what is meant by *that* heading, and then defines other two.

## Contrasting Scope Notes

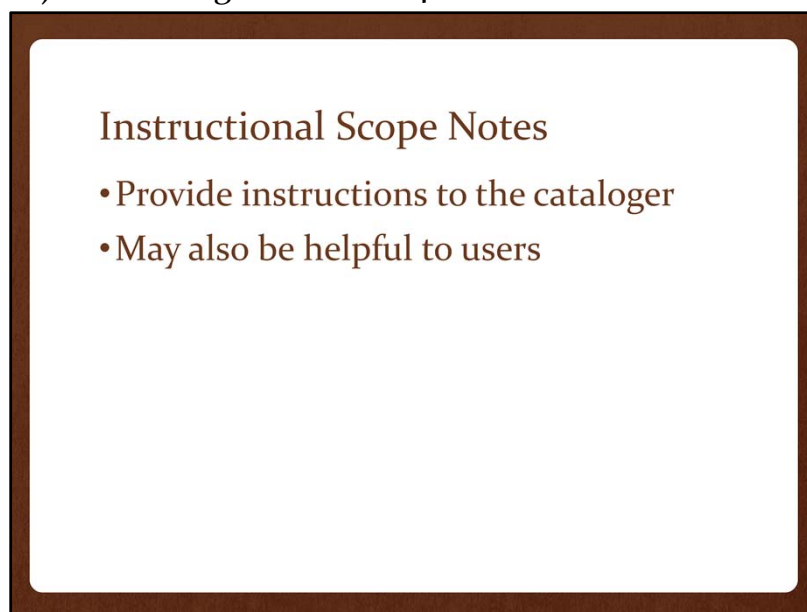
- Define two or more headings that may otherwise be confused

**Mass media and women** (May Subd Geog)

[\[P94.5.W65\]](#)

Here are entered works discussing all aspects of women's involvement in the mass media. Works discussing women's employment in the mass media are entered under Women in the mass media industry. Works discussing the portrayal of women in the mass media are entered under Women in mass media.

And the scope note on **Mass media and women** defines *that* heading first.



The third type of scope note does not usually provide a definition.

Instead, it gives instructions on assigning complements of headings, or adding subdivisions, or on some other special provision.

## Instructional Scope Notes

- Provide instructions to the cataloger
- May also be helpful to users

**Prisoners of war** (May Subd Geog)

[[KZ6490-6500](#) (International law)]

[[UB800-805](#) (General)]

When subdivided by place, the name of the place may designate either the current location of prisoners of war, or the place of origin. For prisoners of war of a particular nationality held in another country, two headings are assigned: 1. Prisoners of war—[country of nationality]. 2. Prisoners of war—[place where held].

This scope note for **Prisoners of war** indicates that when geographically subdivided, the geographic subdivision could mean one of two things: either the current location of the prisoners (for example, prisoners held in Germany), or the place where the prisoners are from.

If the resource is about prisoners from a particular place held in another particular place, two headings are assigned, according to the scope note.



**Instructional Scope Notes**

- Provide instructions to the cataloger
- May also be helpful to users

**African diaspora** (Not Subd Geog)

Here are entered works dealing with the movement of Black Africans to countries outside of the African Continent. For works on Black Africans who have settled outside Africa, an additional heading is assigned to designate the place where they have settled, e.g., Africans—Germany; Blacks—Central America.

Sometimes definitions are combined with instructions.

This scope note defines what is meant by the **African diaspora**, and then explains that an additional heading is assigned when the resource being cataloged is about Africans who have settled in a particular place outside Africa.

The scope note reads:

Here are entered works dealing with the movement of Black Africans to countries outside of the African Continent. For works on Black Africans who have settled outside Africa, an additional heading is assigned to designate the place where they have settled, e.g., **Africans—Germany; Blacks—Central America.**

So **African diaspora** is assigned to resources on the process of moving from Africa, while resources about people who have moved and are now settled elsewhere are assigned headings like **Africans—Germany, Blacks—Central America**, and so forth.

## Summary

- Scope notes
  - Define a heading
  - Show the difference between or among headings
  - Provide special instructions
- Always read the scope note!

To sum up, scope notes may

- define a heading,
- show the difference between or among headings, or
- provide special instructions to the cataloger.

It is vitally important that you always read the scope notes that are provided.

Doing so will help you assign headings consistently.