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# Library of Congress Subject Headings

Module 4.2  
Chronological Headings

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Policy and Standards Division  
Library of Congress  
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### Chronological Aspects of Resources

- Brought out in a variety of ways
  - Headings representing general time periods
  - Headings that are inherently or implicitly chronological
  - Headings with chronological qualifiers
  - Headings qualified by a date or date span
  - Chronological subdivisions

LCSH provides numerous ways to express the chronological focus of resources:

There are general headings for time periods,  
and headings that are inherently chronological because of the topic they express.

There are also headings with chronological qualifiers expressed in words,  
and headings with date qualifiers.

Finally, there are chronological subdivisions that can be added to topical, geographic, or form headings to bring out the time period discussed in the resource.

In this module, we will discuss the characteristics and application of chronological headings, but to do that we will have to mention chronological subdivisions occasionally. We will discuss the various styles of chronological subdivisions and their assignment in Unit 6 on subdivisions.

This module is based on SHM instruction sheets H 620 Chronological Headings and Subdivisions, and H 1592 Events, and we recommend that you read them for additional information.

**Chronological Aspects of Resources**

- Refers to the coverage of the resource
  - Not to the date the resource was created, published, printed, etc.
  - The date may be a consideration

Title: *A History of the Middle Ages*  
Publication date: 2010  
Subject: **Middle Ages.**

When we discuss chronological aspects in subject headings, we are referring to time periods reflected in the content of the resource. We are not referring to the publication date of the resource.

For example, if we have a book titled *A History of the Middle Ages* that was published in 1980, we do not bring out 1980 in the subject headings.

Instead the heading for this resource would be **Middle Ages.**

**Chronological Aspects of Resources**

- Refers to the coverage of the resource
  - Not to the date the resource was created, published, printed, etc.
  - The date may be a consideration

Title: *Iran in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*  
Publication date: 2002

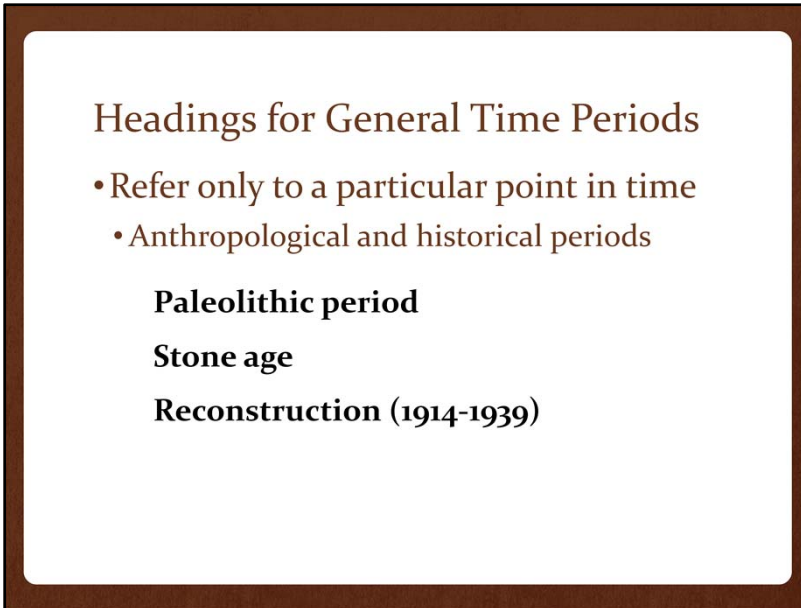
~~✗~~ **Iran—History—21st century.**  
✓ **Iran—History—1997-**

The date can be important in helping us assign headings, though.

A history of Iran in the 21st century, published in 2002, is not really a history of Iran in the 21st century, since it covers only two years of the century, if that.

The heading assigned is **Iran—History—1997-** . That date span will be closed eventually, probably long before the end of the 21st century.

Let's talk about the types of headings that can be assigned to bring out the chronological focus of resources.



**Headings for General Time Periods**

- Refer only to a particular point in time
  - Anthropological and historical periods

**Paleolithic period**

**Stone age**

**Reconstruction (1914-1939)**

The first type that we want to discuss is general headings for time periods. These headings are clearly about a specific point in time.

They include broad anthropological and historical periods such as the Paleolithic period and the Stone age, and the period of reconstruction after War I.

### Headings for General Time Periods

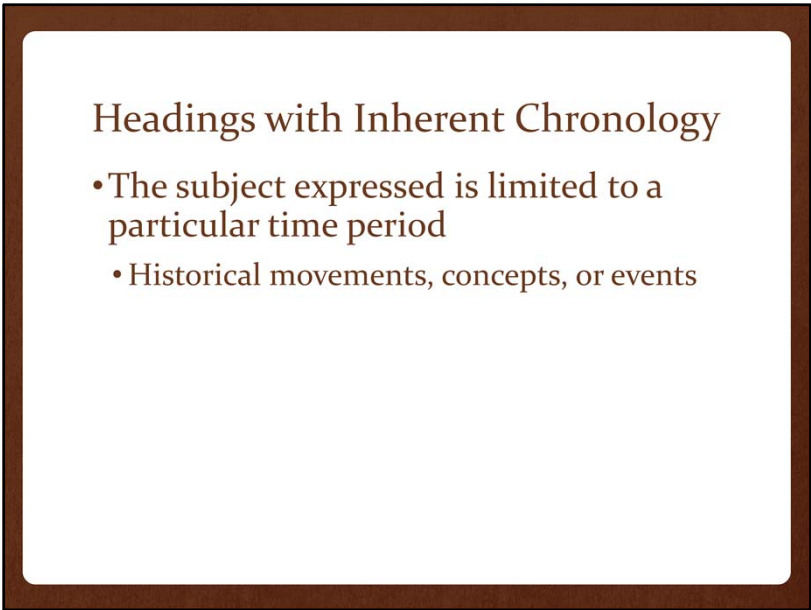
- Refer only to a particular point in time
  - Centuries, decades, and years

**Nineteenth century**

**Eighteen fifties**

**Eighteen fifty-nine, A.D.**

They also include general headings that refer to a particular century, decade, or year.



Headings with Inherent Chronology

- The subject expressed is limited to a particular time period
  - Historical movements, concepts, or events

The next type of chronological heading is those that have inherent or implied chronology.

This means that the subject they express can only, or did only, exist during a particular period.

Common examples are headings for historical movements, concepts, and events.

Headings with Inherent Chronology

- The subject expressed is limited to a particular time period
  - Historical movements, concepts, or events

**Counter-Reformation**

The heading for the Counter-Reformation does not include any dates, but it is inherently chronological because the Counter-Reformation occurred during a particular time in history.



**Headings with Inherent Chronology**

- The subject expressed is limited to a particular time period
  - Historical movements, concepts, or events

**Counter-Reformation**

**Underground Railroad**

**Dragonnades**

The Underground Railroad was not an actual railroad, but an underground network that helped slaves escape to freedom in the United States in the 19th century.

The Dragnnades were the policy of quartering troops in the households of French Protestants during the 18th century in order to bring about conversion to the Catholic Church.

Both the Underground Railroad and the Dragnnades occurred during a particular point in history and are therefore inherently chronological.

Headings with Inherent Chronology

- The subject expressed is limited to a particular time period
  - Artistic styles and intellectual movements

**Tapestry, Byzantine**

**Postmodern theology**

Artistic styles and intellectual movements are also implicitly chronological.

The heading **Tapestry, Byzantine** is implicitly chronological because by definition Byzantine tapestries could only have been made during the Byzantine Empire, which fell in the middle of the 15th century.

**Postmodern theology** may seem like an odd fit, but postmodernism is an intellectual movement of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The heading therefore cannot be used to describe theology of any other time period.

Headings with Inherent Chronology

- The subject expressed is limited to a particular time period
- Technological developments

**Cylinder recordings**

Finally, technological developments also have an implied or inherent chronology because the development happened at a particular time in history.

Cylinder recordings were invented by Thomas Edison in the late 19th century and became the first commercially available medium for recording and reproducing sound. By the early 1900s they were superseded by records.

Headings with Inherent Chronology

- The subject expressed is limited to a particular time period
- Technological developments

**Cylinder recordings**  
**Smartphones**

A much more modern example is the heading **Smartphones**, which refers to a cellular phone that performs many of the functions of a computer, typically having a touchscreen interface, Internet access, and an operating system capable of running downloaded applications.

Smartphones became well known only in the 21st century.

Headings with Inherent Chronology

- The subject expressed is limited to a particular time period
  - Technological developments

**Cylinder recordings**  
**Smartphones**  
**Aeronautics**  
**Television**

Other examples might be **Aeronautics** and **Television**.

As you can see, the concept does not need to be outdated to be chronological.

The heading just has to allow us to place the concept within a particular time period.

Headings with Chronological Qualifiers

- Inverted headings qualified by a word or phrase denoting a time period

**Furniture, Etruscan**

**History, Modern**

**Latin language, Medieval and modern**

The chronological aspects of resources may also be brought out with inverted headings that are qualified by a word or phrase indicating a time period.

Examples include:

**Furniture, Etruscan;**  
**History, Modern;** and  
**Latin language, Medieval and modern.**

### Headings with Date Qualifiers

- Event headings qualified by a date
  - Date appears at the end of the heading

**Great Fire, London, England, 1666**

**Influenza Epidemic, 1918-1919**

**Thirty Years' War, 1618-1648**

**Typhoon Haiyan, 2013**

**Watergate Affair, 1972-1974**

Finally, event headings are qualified by date and are also chronological because the event happened, or is happening, at a particular point in time.

These headings include any of the events established in LCSH, including wars, battles, epidemics and famines, natural disasters, fires, scandals, and massacres, among others.

Now that we have described the ways that chronology is brought out by subject headings, let's talk about the rules for assigning those headings.

### Assignment of Chronological Headings

- Headings representing general periods
  - May be assigned only when the resource does not have a topical or geographical focus

Headings that reflect general time periods should almost never be assigned, because they can be used *only* when the resource has absolutely no geographic or topical focus.



Assignment of Chronological Headings

- Headings representing general periods
  - May be assigned only when the resource does not have a topical or geographical focus

✓ Title: *The 1980s*  
**Nineteen eighties.**

Here is an example of a typical resource to which a general heading may be assigned. This resource, titled *The 1980s* broadly describes the world during the 1980s, including a discussion of:  
the political, social, military, and historical events of that decade,  
the pop culture trends,  
the natural or man-made disasters,  
the economy,  
the scientific and medical advances of the decade,  
and so forth.

The point is that there is absolutely no geographic focus or topical focus in the resource.

That is the only type of resource to which these headings can be assigned.

Assignment of Chronological Headings

- Headings representing general periods
  - May be assigned only when the resource does not have a topical or geographical focus

*Rule of thumb: Do not assign a heading representing a general time period if the resource can be assigned another heading.*

*If assigned, the general time period should be the only subject heading in the record.*

The rule of thumb is that if you can assign any other subject heading, you should not assign a heading for a general time period.

If you do assign a heading for a general time period, it should be the only subject heading in the record because it is the only possible subject heading to assign.

Assignment of Chronological Headings

- Headings representing general periods
  - May be assigned only when the resource does not have a topical or geographical focus

Title: *The United States in the 1980s*

✓ **United States—History—1969-**

✗ **Nineteen eighties.**

Applying that rule of thumb, a resource like *The United States in the 1980s* cannot be assigned the heading **Nineteen eighties** because we can assign the heading **United States—History—1969-** which brings out the geographic focus.

Assignment of Chronological Headings

- Headings representing general periods
  - May be assigned only when the resource does not have a topical or geographical focus

Title: *Education in the 1980s*

✓ **Education—History—20th century.**

✗ **Nineteen eighties.**

Likewise, a resource about a topic during the nineteen eighties – say, education – cannot be assigned the heading **Nineteen eighties**. A heading for the topic should be assigned with an appropriate chronological subdivision.

You may be asking yourself why is it against the rules to assign general headings to resources that have a topical or geographic focus.

In the previous example, *The United States in the 1980s*, the heading was for the United States since 1969.

In the example on your screen now, the heading is for the history of education in the twentieth century, not education in the 1980s.

Those headings appear to be imprecise; it seems like it would be a good idea to somehow indicate that the resource is only about the 1980s.

Assignment of Chronological Headings

- Headings representing general periods
  - May be assigned only when the resource does not have a topical or geographical focus
    - To satisfy the principle of specificity
    - To collocate the most general resources

We have not yet discussed the principles of heading assignment – we cover that in the next unit – but one of the foremost principles is that of specific entry. The headings assigned should be as specific as the contents of the resource, to the extent possible given the rules governing the assignment of headings. A resource about education in the 1980s is not about the 1980s in general.

Recall that the purpose of the catalog – and therefore of the subject headings – is to collocate like materials.

By restricting the use of the general headings for time periods, we can bring together all of the very general resources about those time periods.

Most resources do in fact have a chronological focus, and if we assigned a general heading for the time period to every one of them, they would soon overwhelm the general resources, which would then become very difficult for users to find.

For collocation purposes, it is better to assign a topical or geographic heading with a chronological subdivision that is a bit broader than the period covered in the resource. Think of it this way: Have you ever heard someone say, I'm interested in education in the 1980s, but have absolutely no interest in looking at any resource that includes 1979 or 1990 in its scope? Probably not.

Assignment of Chronological Headings

- No restrictions on the assignment of headings
  - Headings with an implicit or inherent chronology
  - Inverted headings qualified by a time period
  - Headings qualified by date

Unlike headings for general time periods, there are not any specific restrictions on the assignment of headings that have an inherent or implicit chronology, or headings qualified by date, or inverted headings qualified by a time period.

If the resource is about Postmodern theology, or the Underground Railroad, or the Thirty Years' War, or whatever, you can assign the appropriate heading according to the general principles that we will discuss in Unit 5.

Assignment of Chronological Headings

- Restrictions on the use of subdivisions
  - Do not use the subdivision **-History** in most cases
  - ✗ **Counter-Reformation—History.**
  - ✗ **Furniture, Etruscan—History.**

There are some restrictions, though, on the way that these headings can be subdivided.

We will talk in more depth about the restrictions in the unit on subdivisions, but we will briefly mention them there.

First, since the headings are inherently or implicitly historical, the subdivision **-History** should not usually be added.

It would be redundant to assign *Counter-Reformation—History*, or *Furniture, Etruscan—History*, or example.

Assignment of Chronological Headings

- Restrictions on the use of subdivisions
  - Do not use the subdivision **-History** in most cases
  - ✗ **Counter-Reformation—History.**
  - ✗ **Furniture, Etruscan—History.**
  - ✓ **Counter-Reformation—Encyclopedias.**
  - ✓ **Furniture, Etruscan.**

The headings can be subdivided other ways, just not with **-History**, as you can see in the example **Counter-Reformation—Encyclopedias**.

Or, they may remain un-subdivided, as in the final example on the screen.



Assignment of Chronological Headings

- No restrictions on the assignment of headings
- Restrictions on the use of subdivisions
  - Never use a chronological subdivision with a topic that is limited to a single century

~~✗~~ **Underground Railroad—History—19th century.**

~~✗~~ **Dragonnades—History—18th century.**

The second restriction is that topics limited to a particular century should not be assigned a century subdivision.

Since the Underground Railroad existed only in the 19th century, it is unnecessary to assign the subdivision **–19th century** to bring out the chronological focus of the resource, and it is unnecessary to subdivide **Dragonnades** by **–18th century**.

Further, since both are inherently historical, the subdivision **–History** is not necessary, either.