
Library of Congress Subject Headings

Module 5.1
Principles of Heading Assignment, Part 1

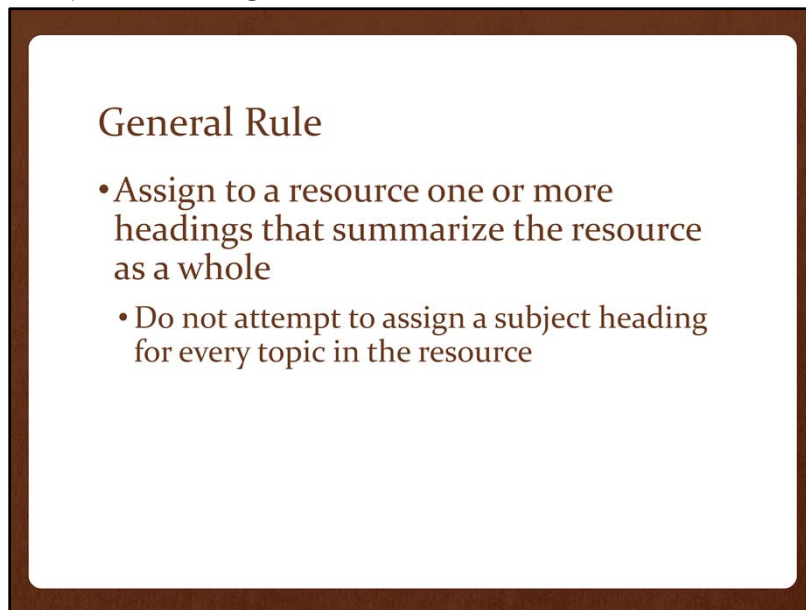
Policy and Standards Division
Library of Congress
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Intent of this Unit

- To introduce the fundamental principles of subject heading assignment, e.g.,
 - Depth of indexing
 - Cataloging treatment
 - Number of headings
- To discuss the order of headings
- To provide practical examples

This unit will introduce you to the fundamental principles of subject heading assignment, which are all contained in *Subject Headings Manual* instruction sheet H 180. This unit will also explain the rules governing the order of headings when two or more headings are assigned to a resource. In addition to the principles themselves, we will provide numerous practical examples.

The unit will answer questions about how deeply resources should be indexed, how many headings can or should be assigned, and many other topics.



General Rule

- Assign to a resource one or more headings that summarize the resource as a whole
- Do not attempt to assign a subject heading for every topic in the resource

The general, or overarching, rule is to assign headings that summarize the resource as a whole. In LCSH, we do not attempt to provide a heading for every topic presented in a resource.

Put simply, we are interested in summarizing the content, rather than in-depth indexing.

General Rule

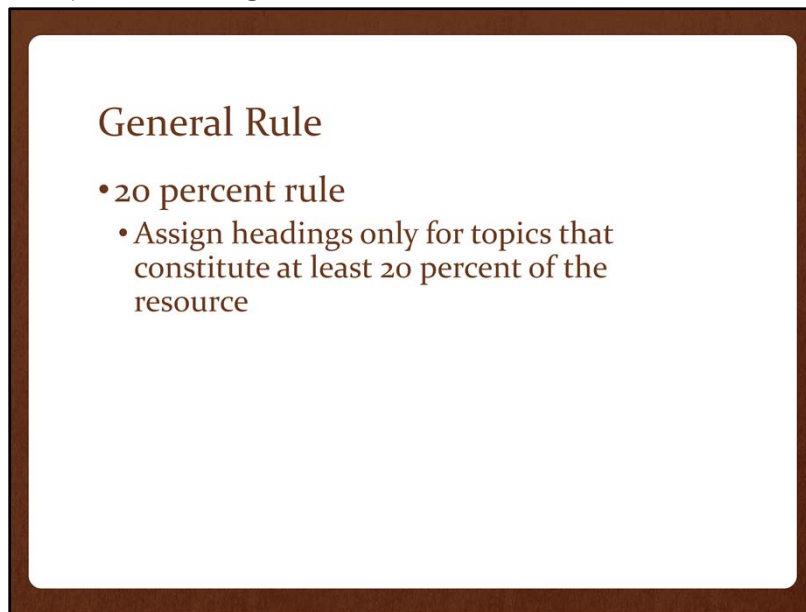
- Assign to a resource one or more headings that summarize the resource as a whole
- Do not attempt to assign a subject heading for every topic in the resource

The causes of six wars of the 20th century
War—Causes—History—20th century.

For example, a resource might cover the causes of six wars of the twentieth century: the two World Wars, of course, along with the Spanish Civil War, the Korean War, the Indochinese War, and the Italian-Ethiopian War of 1935-1936.

We would not assign a heading for all six of those wars.

Instead, we assign a single, more general heading: **War—Causes—History—20th century.**



General Rule

- 20 percent rule
 - Assign headings only for topics that constitute at least 20 percent of the resource

That does not mean that we can NEVER assign headings for specific topics in resources.

We can do just that if the topic represents at least twenty percent – that is, one fifth – of the resource.

Let's look at some simple examples.

General Rule

- 20 percent rule
 - Assign headings only for topics that constitute at least 20 percent of the resource

Cats or rabbits as pets?
Cats.
Rabbits.

If we have a resource that compares the relative benefits of cats and rabbits as pets, and the coverage is pretty much 50/50, we would assign a heading for each type of animal.

General Rule

- 20 percent rule
 - Assign headings only for topics that constitute at least 20 percent of the resource

Cats or rabbits as pets?
Cats.
Rabbits.

Cats, rabbits, or goldfish as pets?
Cats.
Rabbits.
Goldfish.

But what if the resource covers the merits of cats, rabbits, and goldfish?

That is three types of animals, so each constitutes 33 percent of the resource.

Each would have a heading.

General Rule

- 20 percent rule
 - Assign headings only for topics that constitute at least 20 percent of the resource

Cats or rabbits as pets?
Cats.
Rabbits.

Cats, rabbits, or goldfish as pets?
Cats.
Rabbits.
Goldfish.

Seven types of animals as pets
Pets.

Now let's consider a resource that discusses seven types of animals, cats, rabbits, goldfish, snakes, myna birds, hermit crabs, hamsters, and ferrets as pets.

Because – assuming equal coverage – none of those animals individually constitutes twenty percent, we assign a heading that covers the resource as a whole, not a heading for each type of animal.

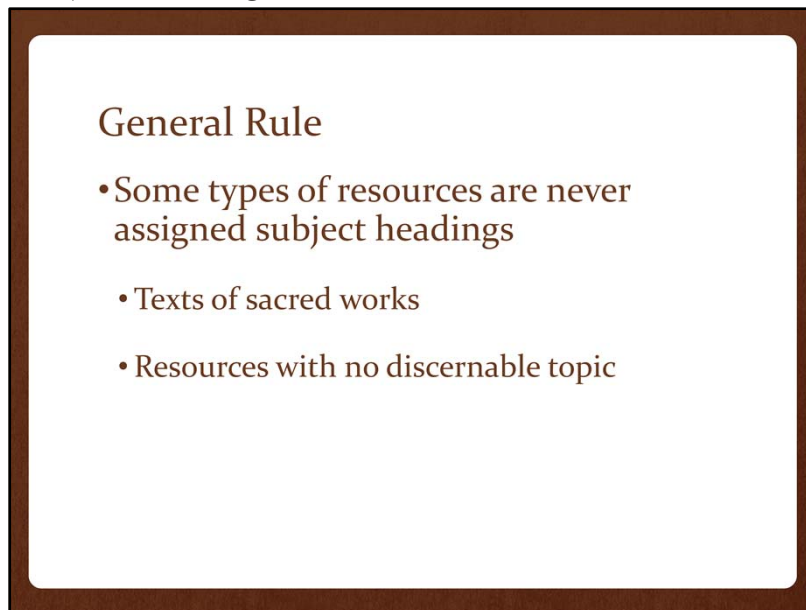
General Rule

- Some types of resources are never assigned subject headings
 - Texts of sacred works
 - Bible, Qur'an, Vedas, etc.

Not every resource is eligible for subject headings, though.

Texts of sacred works, such as the Bible, the Qur'an, the Vedas, and so forth, are not assigned subject headings to cover the topics within them.

I'm actually not even sure how you would do that!



General Rule

- Some types of resources are never assigned subject headings
 - Texts of sacred works
 - Resources with no discernable topic

Some resources do not have a discernable topic, and they are not assigned subject headings, either.

These are the resources that you look at and cannot determine their purpose. Or maybe it is a book of essays on random topics that do not have an overarching theme.

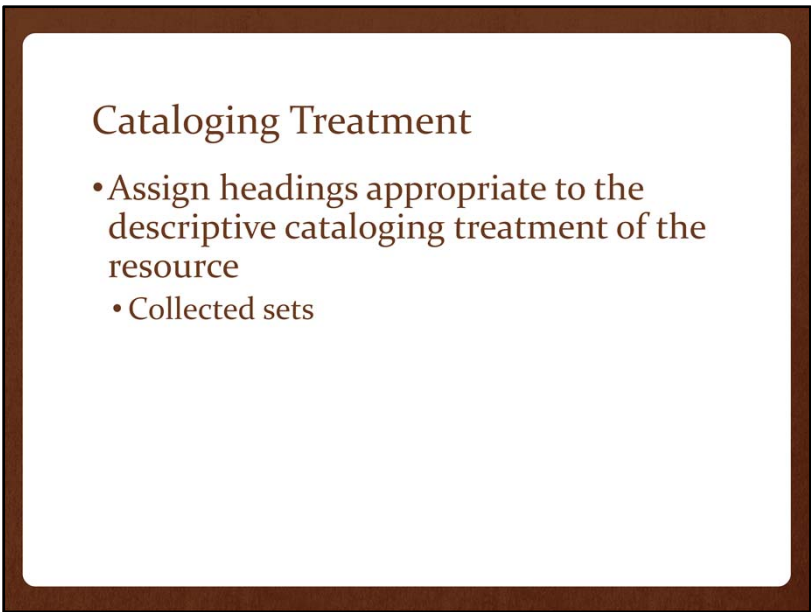
Or newspapers like the *London Times*, and the *Washington Post*.

General Rule

- Some types of resources are never assigned subject headings
 - Texts of sacred works
 - Resources with no discernable topic
 - Individual literary works that do not have an identifiable theme or form

Finally, subject headings are often omitted from individual literary works.

The rules for cataloging literary works are covered in several instruction sheets, and are too extensive to explain here.



Cataloging Treatment

- Assign headings appropriate to the descriptive cataloging treatment of the resource
 - Collected sets

The cataloging treatment also needs to be considered. Cataloging treatment refers to the way that the resource is cataloged descriptively.

Let's explain that with an example. If we have a set of three DVDs, we could catalog it as a single unit, or, we could catalog each disc individually.

That decision has an impact on how we view and describe the resource's aboutness.

Here are some further examples.

Cataloging Treatment

- Assign headings appropriate to the descriptive cataloging treatment of the resource
- Collected sets

The 50 U.S. states (cataloged as a set)
U.S. states.

Let's say that there is a set of books about the 50 states of the United States, and each state is covered in its own volume.

If it is cataloged as a set, it would be assigned a heading for the states as a whole.

Cataloging Treatment

- Assign headings appropriate to the descriptive cataloging treatment of the resource
- Collected sets
 - The 50 U.S. states (cataloged as a set)
U.S. states.
 - The 50 U.S. states (volumes cataloged separately)
Each volume is assigned the heading appropriate to the volume

But what if each volume were cataloged separately?

Each volume would receive the heading appropriate for the coverage.

The volume on Ohio would have the heading **Ohio**.

The volume for Arizona would have the heading **Arizona**, and so on.

Cataloging Treatment

- Assign headings appropriate to the descriptive cataloging treatment of the resource
 - Serials

Periodicals and serials are assigned headings that reflect their entire coverage, even if they have theme issues.

Cataloging Treatment

- Assign headings appropriate to the descriptive cataloging treatment of the resource
- Serials

The Journal of Finance.
Finance—Periodicals.

The Journal of Finance does not publish theme issues and is assigned the heading that corresponds to the overall topic covered, **Finance—Periodicals.**

Cataloging Treatment

- Assign headings appropriate to the descriptive cataloging treatment of the resource
- Serials

The Journal of Finance.

Cataloging & Classification Quarterly.

Cataloging—Periodicals.

Classification—Periodicals.

Cataloging and Classification Quarterly publishes theme issues occasionally, but the headings reflect the topic of the periodical as a whole.

Cataloging Treatment

- Assign headings appropriate to the descriptive cataloging treatment of the resource
- Serials

The Journal of Finance.

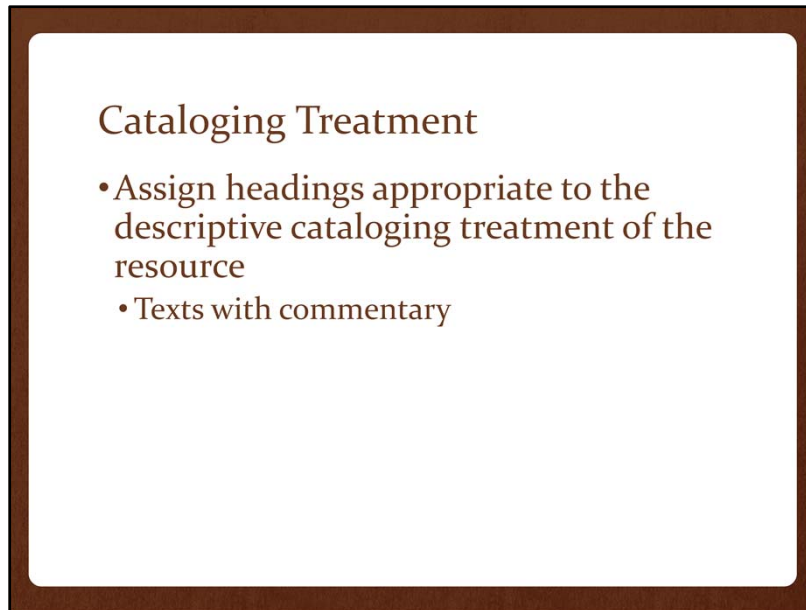
Cataloging & Classification Quarterly.

Teaching with Primary Resources.

Teaching—Aids and devices—Periodicals.

Teaching—Methodology—Periodicals.

Every issue of *Teaching with Primary Sources* is a theme issue, but it again is cataloged with general headings appropriate to the entire run of the periodical.



Cataloging Treatment

- Assign headings appropriate to the descriptive cataloging treatment of the resource
 - Texts with commentary

Sometimes texts with commentary are cataloged as text, and the commentary is secondary. Other times, the commentary is the basis for cataloging, and the text is secondary.

The subject treatment should match the descriptive cataloging decision.

Cataloging Treatment

- Assign headings appropriate to the descriptive cataloging treatment of the resource
- Texts with commentary

Text is the basis of the description
Subject headings reflect the text

If the text is the basis for the description, the subject headings reflect the text.

Cataloging Treatment

- Assign headings appropriate to the descriptive cataloging treatment of the resource
- Texts with commentary
 - Text is the basis of the description
Subject headings reflect the text
 - Commentary is the basis of the description
Subject headings reflect the commentary

If the commentary is the basis for the description, the subject headings reflect the commentary.

Cataloging Treatment

Darwin, Charles, 1809-1882.
[On the origin of species.]
Charles Darwin's On the origin of species : text and commentary / William Jones.
Evolution (Biology)
Natural selection.

Take for example a resource by William Jones that includes the text of *On the Origin of Species*, along with Jones' commentary about it.

The cataloger in this case decided that the text was the more important aspect, and cataloged it as an edition of *On the Origin of Species*.

The subject headings reflect the coverage of that resource.

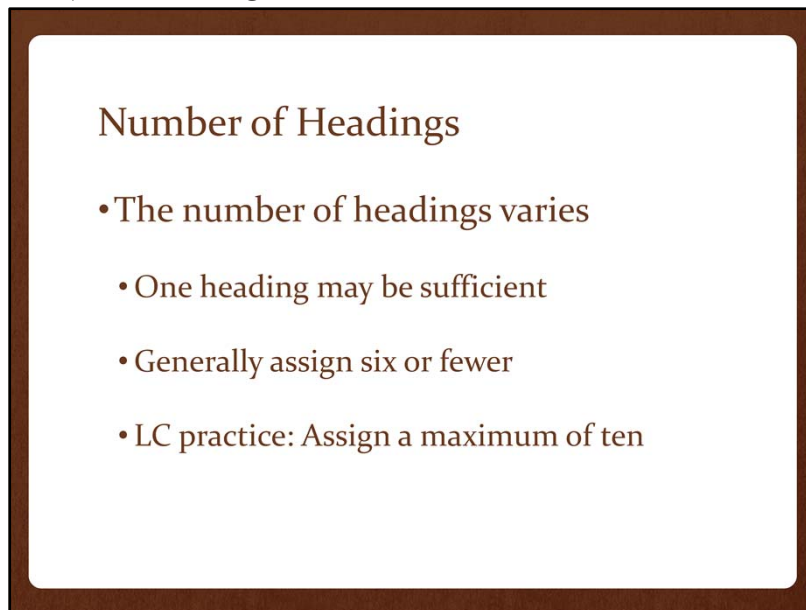
Cataloging Treatment

Darwin, Charles, 1809-1882.
[On the origin of species.]
Charles Darwin's On the origin of species : text and commentary / William Jones.
Evolution (Biology)
Natural selection.

Jones, William.
Charles Darwin's On the origin of species : text and commentary / William Jones.
Darwin, Charles, 1809-1882. On the origin of species.
Evolution (Biology)
Natural selection.

What if the cataloger decided that it would be better to catalog the resource as a commentary, as in this example?

The subject headings are assigned according to the guidelines for cataloging commentaries, which say that a subject heading is assigned for the resource being discussed, along with the headings that were assigned to the original resource.



Number of Headings

- The number of headings varies
 - One heading may be sufficient
 - Generally assign six or fewer
 - LC practice: Assign a maximum of ten

You may have noticed that some of the examples in this presentation have one subject heading, and others have more.

There is no “perfect” number of headings for every resource.

As we have already seen, some resources, such as sacred texts, are never assigned headings. At other times, one heading is sufficient to describe the contents of the resource.

Generally speaking, six or fewer headings is sufficient. At the Library of Congress, resources are assigned a maximum of ten. Excluded from that stricture, though, are special or rare materials, which may be assigned more than ten headings.

The diagram consists of a large dark brown rectangular frame with rounded corners. Inside the frame, at the top, is the text "Number of Headings" in a dark brown serif font. Below this, centered, is a smaller light brown rectangular box with a thin dark border. Inside this box, the text is as follows: the first line is "*We remember WWII.*" in an italicized serif font; the second line is "World War, 1939-1945—Personal narratives," in a bold serif font; and the third line is "American." in a bold serif font.

Let's look at two similar resources and see how their cataloging differs.

The first is titled *We remember World War II*. It is a compilation of several Americans' recollections of the war.

One heading indicating that is composed of personal narratives by Americans is sufficient.

Number of Headings

We remember WWII.
World War, 1939-1945—Personal narratives,

World War II as I saw it.
**Butz, William C. (William Christie), 1919-
United States. Army. Armored Division, 6th.
World War, 1939-1945—Campaigns—Western
Front.
Ardennes, Battle of the, 1944-1945—Personal
narratives, American.
World War, 1939-1945—Personal narratives,
American.
Soldiers—United States—Biography.**

The second is titled *World War II as I saw it*. It is the recollections of a single American who participated in the war. He served in the 6th Armored Division of the Army on the Western Front. There is a lengthy description of the Battle of the Bulge. It also includes also a significant amount of autobiographical information about the author.

The difference between these two resources can be summarized this way.

The only common element in the first resource is the fact that it consists of personal narratives by Americans. The people featured in it served in different branches of the Armed Forces and in different theaters of the war. Therefore, only one heading is assigned.

On the other hand, the second resource is about a single person, who provided numerous specific details about his experiences. Each of the topics constitutes at least 20 percent of the resource, and can be represented, therefore, in the subject headings.

Number of Headings

Hitchcock's America.
“Hitchcock's American films are not only some of the most admired works of world cinema; they also offer some of our most acute responses to the changing shape of American society in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. ...”

Hitchcock, Alfred, 1899-1980—Criticism and interpretation.
National characteristics, American, in motion pictures.
United States—In motion pictures.

Here is another example, *Hitchcock's America*. The description says,

Hitchcock's American films are not only some of the most admired works of world cinema, they also offer some of our most acute responses to the changing shape of American society in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s...

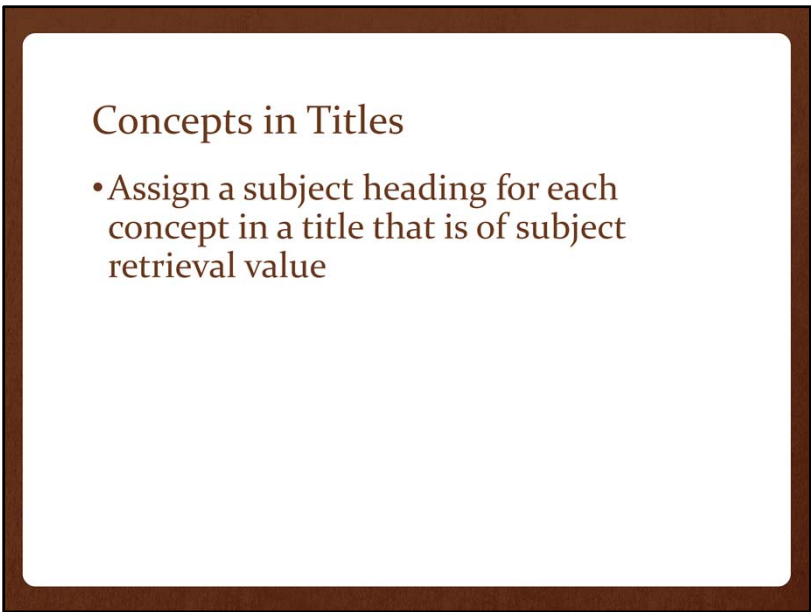
The contents of the resource can be described with three headings.

- The heading for Hitchcock, himself, subdivided by **–Criticism and interpretation**
- **National characteristics, American, in motion pictures**
- And **United States—In motion pictures.**

Number of Headings

Hitchcock's America.
“The cinema of globalization : a guide to films about the new economic order.”
Globalization in motion pictures.
Changing shape of American society in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. ...”
Hitchcock, Alfred, 1899-1980—Criticism and interpretation.
National characteristics, American, in motion pictures.
United States—In motion pictures.

On the other hand, this title on cinema is sufficiently cataloged with only one heading.



Concepts in Titles

- Assign a subject heading for each concept in a title that is of subject retrieval value

The title of a resource is an important source of information when assigning subject headings.

Each concept in a title that is indicative of the subject should be assigned a heading.

Catalogers, however, should be thoughtful about including title concepts, because some titles are meant to be humorous, ironic, or even cryptic.

Concepts in Titles

- Assign a subject heading for each concept in a title that is of subject retrieval value

Madness in post-1945 British and American fiction.

Mental illness in literature.

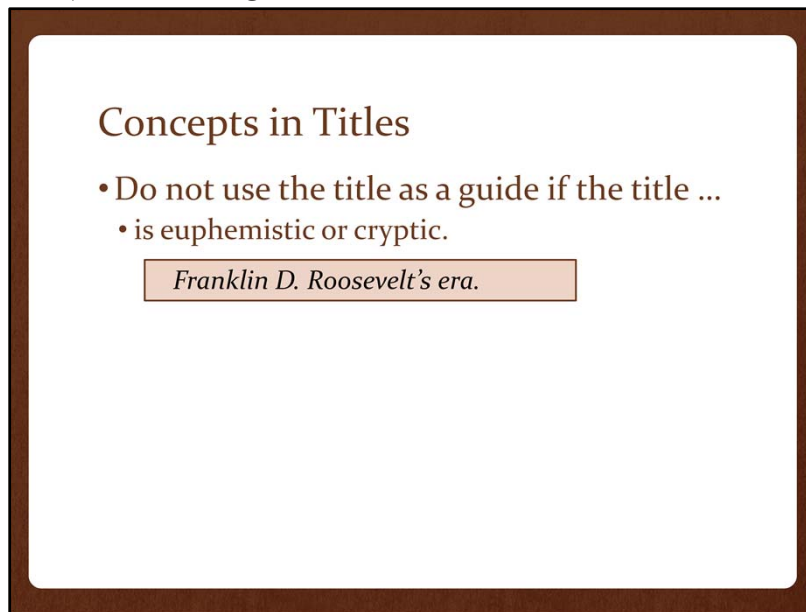
English fiction—20th century—History and criticism.

American fiction—20th century—History and criticism.

Each of the words in this title except “in” and “and” are important.

The concept of madness in literature is assigned **Mental illness in literature**.

While LCSH will not permit us to assign headings specific to the postwar period in literary history, we can assign **English fiction** and **American fiction**, each subdivided by **20th century** and **History and criticism**.



Concepts in Titles

- Do not use the title as a guide if the title ...
 - is euphemistic or cryptic.

Franklin D. Roosevelt's era.

Let's look at a few examples where titles may not be helpful.

First, if the title is euphemistic or cryptic, it should not be represented in the subject headings.

The *title Franklin D. Roosevelt's era* could mean numerous things. Is it about his presidency in general? Is it about World War II? Or the Great Depression and the country's recovery? Or maybe it refers to his entire lifetime?

Roosevelt's name heading should not be assigned automatically.

The contents of the resource should be examined to determine whether a heading for Roosevelt would be appropriate, or not.

Concepts in Titles

- Do not use the title as a guide if the title ...
 - is euphemistic or cryptic.
Franklin D. Roosevelt's era.
- consists of topics that by policy are not represented in headings.
A history of Seattle in the 1990s.
Seattle (Wash.)—History—20th century.

Sometimes titles include topics that by policy cannot be brought out by subject headings. In the title “A history of Seattle in the 1990s,” we can bring out the concept of Seattle history, but not the time period. The history of local places can generally be subdivided only to the century level.

Concepts in Titles

- Do not use the title as a guide if the title ...
 - is general but the resource is more specific.
 - is more like a table of contents.

Diseases and pests of apple, pear, cherry, fig, lemon, lime, and orange trees.
Fruit—Diseases and pests.

Third, sometimes the title is general but the resource is more specific. *Franklin D. Roosevelt's Era* also falls into this category.

And finally, the topics in a title that is more like a table of contents should not be brought out as subject headings.

For example, all of the individual fruit trees listed in *Diseases and pests of apple, pear, cherry, fig, lemon, lime, and orange trees* should not be assigned subject headings. Instead, we would assign the more general **Fruit—Diseases and pests**.

Why assign **Fruit—Diseases and pests** instead of **Fruit trees—Diseases and pests**?

Concepts in Titles

- Do not use the title as a guide if the title ...
 - is general but the resource is more specific.
 - is more like a table of contents.

Diseases and pests of apple, pear, cherry, fig, lemon, lime, and orange trees.

Fruit—Diseases and pests.

Fruit—Diseases and pests (May Subd Geog)

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UF Fruit—Pests

Fruit pests

Fruit trees—Diseases and pests

Because *Fruit trees—Diseases and pests* is a UF to **Fruit—Diseases and pests**.

Objectivity

- Do not express your personal values or beliefs about the contents of a resource when assigning subject headings
- Assign headings according to the intent of the author, editor, or publisher

Catalogers should always consider the intent of the author or publisher, and assign headings without being judgmental. We avoid assigning headings that negatively label topics or express personal value judgments regarding topics or materials.

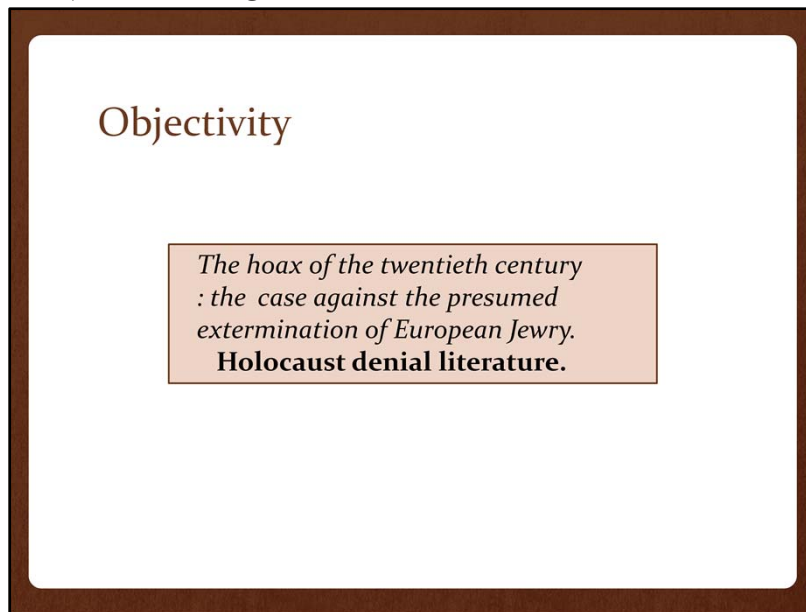
Objectivity

The Great Zapruder film hoax : deceit and deception in the death of JFK.
Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963—Assassination.
Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963—In motion pictures.
Zapruder, Abraham.

Amateur films—Forgeries—United States—History—20th century.
Impostors and imposture—United States—History—20th century.

You may be aware, for example, that there are numerous conspiracy theories about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and that most of them relate to the film recorded by Abraham Zapruder.

The author of this resource believes that the Zapruder film is a hoax. The cataloger may or may not believe that thesis, but it does not matter because the resource was analyzed objectively. Since the author believes that the film is a hoax, headings are assigned to reflect that fact.



In very rare cases, though, there is such widespread disavowal of certain views that LCSH provides a way to bring those views out.

Holocaust denial literature is one of those headings.

The next module will cover more specific guidelines on the number of headings and depth of indexing for resources.