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# Library of Congress Subject Headings

Module 5.2  
Principles of Heading Assignment, Part 2

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Policy and Standards Division  
Library of Congress  
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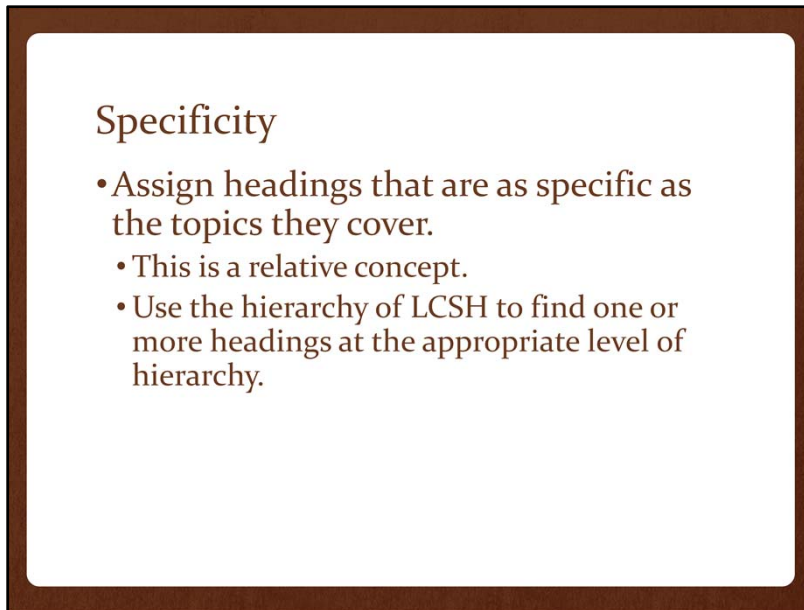
## Recap and Plan

- Previous module
  - General principles of heading assignment
- This module
  - Specific rules on the number and types of headings to be assigned

In the previous module we discussed the general principles of heading assignment including the 20 percent rule, the need for objectivity, using titles as a guide to contents, as well as other general topics.

In this module we will cover specific rules pertaining to the number and kinds of headings to be assigned to a resource. As before, all of the concepts in this module can be found in *Subject Headings Manual* instruction sheet H 180.

First we will discuss the principle of specificity.



**Specificity**

- Assign headings that are as specific as the topics they cover.
- This is a relative concept.
- Use the hierarchy of LCSH to find one or more headings at the appropriate level of hierarchy.

Headings should be as specific as the topics they cover.

Although it is tempting to think so, headings at lower levels of the hierarchy are not necessarily “better” in terms of specificity. Instead, specificity here refers to the relationship between the heading and the resource being cataloged.

**Specificity**

- Assign headings that are as specific as the topics they cover.
- This is a relative concept.
- Use the hierarchy of LCSH to find one or more headings at the appropriate level of hierarchy.

*An introduction to biology.*  
**Biology.**

Although a heading may seem broad, in the context of a particular resource it might actually be quite specific.

For example, a general introduction to biology should be assigned the general heading **Biology**. Nothing more is needed.

**Specificity**

- Assign headings that are as specific as the topics they cover.
- This is a relative concept.
- Use the hierarchy of LCSH to find one or more headings at the appropriate level of hierarchy.

*An introduction to biology.*  
**Biology.**

*Aspects of cell control mechanisms.*  
**Cellular control mechanisms.**

On the other hand, a resource about cell control mechanisms, which is a concept in biology, should not be assigned the heading **Biology** because that would be broader than the resource.

Instead, the heading specific to the topic, **Cellular control mechanisms**, should be assigned.

Specificity

- Assign a heading that is broader than the topic it is intended to cover when ...
  - it is not possible to establish a precise heading.
  - it is necessary to assign an array of headings.

Sometimes it is necessary to assign a heading that is broader than the scope of the resource. At times, it may not be possible to establish a precise heading, for various reasons. When that happens, it is often necessary to assign multiple headings to describe the contents of a resource.

**Specificity**

- Assign a heading that is broader than the topic it is intended to cover when ...
  - it is not possible to establish a precise heading.
  - it is necessary to assign an array of headings.

*March of the hooligans : soccer's bloody fraternity.*  
**Soccer hooliganism—Great Britain.**  
**Soccer fans—Great Britain.**  
**Violence in sports—Great Britain.**

**X** **Ultras (Soccer fans)**

The resource in this example is about soccer fans that are called ultras. They are “super fans” and often become violent at games.

LCSH does not include headings that refer to the relative dedication of fans. Instead, the general heading for **Soccer fans**, subdivided by **Great Britain**, is assigned, along with the headings **Soccer hooliganism** and **Violence in sports**, in order to bring out the violence that is associated with ultras.

Specificity

- Assign a heading that is broader than the topic it is intended to cover when ...
  - it is not possible to establish a precise heading.
  - it is necessary to assign an array of headings.
  - the SHM requires that a more general heading be assigned.

Finally, sometimes the rules and guidelines in the SHM require that a more general heading be assigned.



### Specificity

- Assign a heading that is broader than the topic it is intended to cover when ...
  - it is not possible to establish a precise heading.
  - it is necessary to assign an array of headings.
  - the SHM requires that a more general heading be assigned.

*Rise of the New York skyscraper, 1865-1913.*

**Skyscrapers—New York (State)—New York—History.  
New York (N.Y.)—Buildings, structures, etc.**

For example, H 1334.5 indicates that resources about the architecture of a particular type of building in a city should be assigned a heading for the type of building, along with a more general heading for buildings in the city.

Depth of Indexing

- If a resource discusses several subtopics of a general topic, assign the heading that corresponds to the general topic.

The intent of cataloging is to summarize the contents of a resource, not to index every concept that is mentioned. Therefore, if a resource discusses several topics that are subsets of a more general topic, we assign the heading for the general topic.

**Depth of Indexing**

**Traffic flow** (May Subd Geog)  
[[HE336.T7](#)]  
UF [Traffic volume](#)  
BT [Traffic engineering](#)  
[Traffic surveys](#)  
RT [Highway capacity](#)  
[Traffic density](#)  
NT [Bicycle traffic flow](#)  
[Pedestrian traffic flow](#)  
[Right turn on red](#)  
[Traffic congestion](#)  
[Traffic speed](#)

Let's say that a resource discusses both bicycle and pedestrian traffic, as well as the speed of automobile traffic, in its analysis of traffic congestion in Tokyo.

### Depth of Indexing

<b>Traffic flow</b> (May Subd Geog) [HE336.T7] UF Traffic volume BT <a href="#">Traffic engineering</a> <a href="#">Traffic surveys</a> RT <a href="#">Highway capacity</a> <a href="#">Traffic density</a> NT <a href="#">Bicycle traffic flow</a> <a href="#">Pedestrian traffic flow</a> <a href="#">Right turn on red</a> <a href="#">Traffic congestion</a> <a href="#">Traffic speed</a>	<b>Bicycle traffic flow— Japan—Tokyo.</b> <b>Pedestrian traffic flow— Japan—Tokyo.</b> <b>Traffic speed—Japan— Tokyo.</b> <b>Traffic congestion— Japan—Tokyo.</b>
<b>Traffic flow—Japan—Tokyo.</b>	

Rather than assigning headings for each of those concepts, the more general heading **Traffic flow—Japan—Tokyo** is assigned.

General Topic & Subtopic *or*  
Principle vs. Specific Case

- If a resource discusses a general topic, with special emphasis on a specific subtopic, assign headings for the general topic and the subtopic.
- But only if the subtopic meets the *20 percent rule*
- *Also* applies if a principle is illustrated by a specific case or example

Sometimes resources discuss a general topic but they also emphasize a subtopic, or they illustrate a principle with a very specific example. In that case, headings for both the general and the specific aspects of the resource are assigned, as long as the subtopic or the example constitutes at least 20 percent of the resource.

Remember that 20 percent rule!

General Topic & Subtopic or Principle vs. Specific Case

*Administration of local finances with special emphasis on revenue services.*

**Finance, Public.**  
**Taxation.**

**Taxation** (May Subd Geog)  
[HJ2240-5908]  
UF Duties  
    Fee system (Taxation)  
    Tax policy  
    Tax reform  
    Taxation, Incidence of  
    Taxes  
BT [Finance, Public](#)

This title discusses local public finances in general, but emphasizes revenue services – in other words, taxation.

As you can see, **Taxation** is a narrower term of **Finance, Public**.

We normally would not assign both a BT and an NT in the same record, but in this case it is okay because the more specific topic **Taxation** is at least 20 percent of the resource.

General Topic & Subtopic or Principle vs. Specific Case

*Forward to Beijing! : a guide to the summer Olympics : with a short history of the games and lists of gold medal winners in all Olympic sports from the year 1988.*

**Olympic Games (29th : 2008 : Beijing, China) Olympics.**

**Olympics**   
[\[GV721.18-722\]](#)  
Here are entered comprehensive works on the Olympics, as well as general works on the summer Olympics.

This resource focuses on the 2008 summer Olympics in Beijing, but also covers all of the other summer Olympics since 1988.

Strictly speaking, the heading for the Beijing Olympics is not an NT of Olympics because it is a name heading, but it is an *instance* of the Olympics in general.

According to the scope note for the heading **Olympics**, it is used for, “Comprehensive works on the Olympics, as well as general works on the summer Olympics.”

Two or Three Related Headings

- Some resources discuss two or three related subtopics.
- Assign the two or three specific subtopics, unless ...
  - a single heading exists that covers exactly the same content as the two or three individual headings.

If a heading exists, or can be established, that represents the two or three topics discussed in a resource, and that heading includes no other topics within its scope, we will assign that one heading instead of two or three narrower headings.



### Two or Three Related Headings

**Teenage parents** (May Subd Geog)   
[\[HQ759.64\]](#)  
UF Adolescent parents [Former heading]  
Parents, Adolescent  
School-age parents  
BT [Parents](#)  
NT [Libraries and teenage parents](#)  
[Teenage fathers](#)  
[Teenage mothers](#)

The heading **Teenage parents** has three narrower terms, two of which are subsets of **Teenage parents**: **Teenage fathers** and **Teenage mothers**.

### Two or Three Related Headings

**Teenage parents** (May Subd Geog)   
[[HQ759.64](#)]  
UF Adolescent parents [Former heading]  
Parents, Adolescent  
School-age parents

BT [Parents](#)  
NT [Libraries and teena](#)  
[Teenage fathers](#)  
[Teenage mothers](#)

*The young parenthood program : a guide to helping young mothers and fathers become effective co-parents.*  
**Teenage parents.**  
**✗ Teenage fathers.**  
**✗ Teenage mothers.**

A resource about teenage mothers and fathers should not be assigned the two headings **Teenage fathers** and **Teenage mothers**. Instead, **Teenage parents** should be assigned.

### Rule of Three

- Some resources discuss two or three related subtopics.
- Assign the two or three specific subtopics, if ...
  - the broader topic encompassing them includes more than just those two or three subtopics.

But, according to the Rule of Three, if a general topic includes in its scope more than three subtopics, and the resource being cataloged includes only two or three of them, assign the two or three headings instead of the broader heading.

**Rule of Three**

**Traffic flow** (May Subd Geog)  
[\[HE336.T7\]](#)  
UF [Traffic volume](#)  
BT [Traffic engineering](#)  
[Traffic surveys](#)  
RT [Highway capacity](#)  
[Traffic density](#)  
NT [Bicycle traffic flow](#)  
[Pedestrian traffic flow](#)  
[Right turn on red](#)  
[Traffic congestion](#)  
[Traffic speed](#)

Let's go back to our **Traffic flow** example.

There are five narrower concepts encompassed by the heading **Traffic flow**.

These include

- **Bicycle traffic flow**
- **Pedestrian traffic flow**
- **Right turn on red**
- **Traffic congestion** and
- **Traffic speed.**

**Rule of Three**

**Traffic flow** (May Subd Geog)  
[HE336.T7]

- UF Traffic volume
- BT [Traffic engineering](#)  
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- RT [Highway capacity](#)  
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[Right turn on red](#)  
[Traffic congestion](#)  
[Traffic speed](#)

Traffic congestion.  
Traffic speed.  
**X** Traffic flow.

Say that the resource being cataloged discusses only traffic congestion and traffic speed.

Instead of assigning the general heading **Traffic flow**, headings for each of the narrower concepts should be assigned.

**Rule of Three**

*Washington and Lincoln in poetry*

**Washington, George, 1732-1799—Poetry.**  
**Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865—Poetry.**  
**X Presidents—United States—Poetry.**

This is a collection of poetry about George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, two of the several dozen presidents of the United States.

Instead of assigning the heading **Presidents—United States—Poetry**, which would be much too broad for this resource, the name headings for Washington and Lincoln are assigned instead, subdivided by **—Poetry**.

The Rule of Three continues by saying, if more than three of the subtopics are discussed in the resource, assign the broad heading instead, unless the Rule of Four applies.

**Rule of Four**

- Some resources discuss four or more related subtopics.
- Assign the four specific subtopics, if ...
  - the broader topic encompassing them includes more than just those four subtopics.
- Never assign more than four subtopics!

So what is the Rule of Four?

In certain circumstances it may be preferable to assign headings for four subtopics of a broader concept. If a heading covers a broad range and each subtopic forms only a small portion of that whole range, we can assign the four subtopics instead.

We should absolutely never assign more than four subtopics, though!

## Rule of Four

**Radio programs** (May Subd Geog)

Here are entered general works on radio programs. Works about individual radio programs are entered under the title of the program.

UF Programs, Radio  
Radio shows  
Shows, Radio

BT [Radio broadcasting](#)

RT [Radio scripts](#)

NT [Book review radio programs](#)  
[Cataloging of radio programs](#)  
[Children's radio programs](#)

**Radio programs** has a lengthy list of NTs.



## Rule of Four

**Radio programs** (May Subd Geog)   
Here are entered general works on radio programs. Works about individual radio programs are entered under the program.

UF Programs, Radio shows, Radio Shows, Radio Shows, Radio Shows, Radio Shows

BT [Radio broadcasts](#) [Live radio programs](#)

RT [Radio scripts](#) [Magazine format radio programs](#)

NT [Book review radio programs](#) [Nonfiction radio programs](#)

[Cataloging of radio programs](#) [Radio adaptations](#)

[Children's radio programs](#) [Radio addresses, debates, etc.](#)

[Radio comedies](#)

## Rule of Four

**Radio programs** (May Subd Geog)

Here are entered general works on radio programs. Works about individual radio programs are entered under the heading of the program.

UF Programs, Radio

Radio shows

Shows, Radio

BT [Radio broadcasts](#)

RT [Radio scripts](#)

NT [Book review radio programs](#)

[Cataloging of radio programs](#)

[Children's radio programs](#)

[Christmas radio programs](#)

[Detective and mystery radio programs](#)

[Documentary radio programs](#)

[Experimental radio programs](#)

[Horror radio programs](#)

[Live radio programs](#)

[Magazine format radio programs](#)

[Nonfiction radio programs](#)

[Radio adaptations](#)

[Radio addresses, debates](#)

[Radio comedies](#)

[Radio crime shows](#)

[Radio game shows](#)

[Radio plays](#)

[Radio programs, Musical](#)

[Radio quiz shows](#)

[Radio serials](#)

[Radio sermons](#)

[Radio stories](#)

[Radio talk shows](#)

[Science fiction radio programs](#)

[Variety shows \(Radio programs\)](#)

[Western radio programs](#)

### Rule of Four

**Radio programs** (May Subd Geog)   
Here are entered general works on radio programs. Works about individual radio programs are entered under the heading for the program.

- UF Programs, Radio shows
- BT [Radio broadcasts](#)
- RT [Radio scripts](#)
- NT [Book review radio programs](#)
- [Cataloging of radio programs](#)
- [Children's radio programs](#)

- [Christmas radio programs](#)
- [Detective and mystery radio programs](#)
- [Documentary radio programs](#)
- [Experimental radio programs](#)
- [Horror radio programs](#)
- [Live radio programs](#)
- [Magazine format radio programs](#)
- [Nonfiction radio programs](#)
- [Radio adaptations](#)
- [Radio addresses, debates](#)
- [Radio comedies](#)
- [Radio crime shows](#)
- [Radio game shows](#)
- [Radio plays](#)
- [Radio programs, Musical](#)
- [Radio quiz shows](#)
- [Radio serials](#)
- [Radio sermons](#)
- [Radio stories](#)
- [Radio talk shows](#)
- [Science fiction radio programs](#)
- [Variety shows \(Radio programs\)](#)
- [Western radio programs](#)

A history of mystery, horror, Western, and comedy radio programs

A resource that discusses the history of mystery, horror, Western, and comedy radio programs should be assigned the four narrower headings.



### Multi-Element Topics

- Some resources discuss complex or compound topics.
- Often, it is not possible to construct a single subject heading string to fully describe the topic.
- Assign multiple headings to bring out the separate aspects.
  - Sometimes patterns in LCSH require it.

If a work discusses a complex or compound topic for which a single heading neither exists nor can be practically constructed or established, assign multiple headings to bring out the separate aspects of the topic.

In some cases, established practice dictates assigning a combination of headings that together are coextensive with the topic.

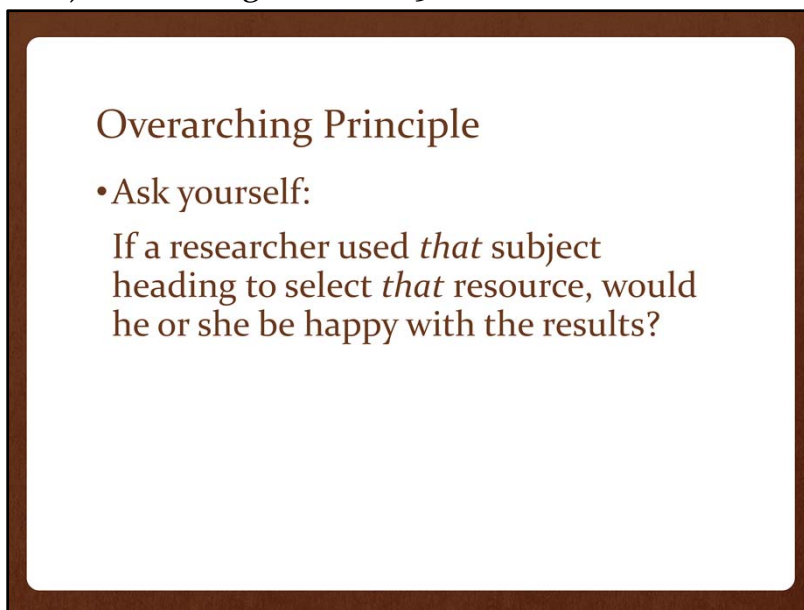
**Multi-Element Topics**

*Shaw's settings : gardens and libraries.*

**Shaw, Bernard, 1856-1950—Criticism and interpretation.**  
**Libraries in literature.**  
**Gardens in literature.**

*Shaw's settings* is about the appearance of gardens and libraries in Bernard Shaw's literature.

LCSH does not permit us to make a single heading that encompasses all of those topics, so we must assign three separate headings to bring out the focus of the resource.



Overarching Principle

- Ask yourself:  
If a researcher used *that* subject heading to select *that* resource, would he or she be happy with the results?

There is an overarching principle at work here that is not actually included in the SHM.

Many researchers travel great distances to use the Library of Congress. Say that a hypothetical researcher from Germany comes all the way to LC because it looked like we have fifty books on a particular topic. He requests all of them, and they are delivered from the stacks, slowly over several hours. Now he looks at the books, and finds that most of them barely mention his topic. He is understandably and rightfully upset because the trip is a waste. That is not the impression that LC wants to provide. That is the reason for the 20 percent rule, for not cataloging by title, and all of the other guidelines we have covered in these two modules. We want to use our professional judgement as catalogers to objectively tell our researchers what that resource is actually about.

This is an era of shared cataloging, and the records that we create are used in a wide variety of ways by a wide variety of users. Perhaps a parent visits a public library to look for resources to help a child create a science fair project. Or someone who has just been diagnosed with cancer visits the local library to find some authoritative information on the diagnosis. Or a doctoral student is interested in finding information about coincidence theory as it applies to mathematics. The subject headings help all of these users and more find the materials that they need, but in order for that to work, everyone has to catalog according to the same principles.