Library of Congress Subject Headings

Module 6.1
Overview of Subdivisions

Policy and Standards Division
Library of Congress
March 2017

In this unit, we will discuss the purpose and assignment of subdivisions. In LCSH, subdivisions provide context by indicating whether the resource discusses a subject in relation to a particular subtopic, a place, or a time period. Subdivisions are also used to indicate that a resource is of a particular form.

There are therefore four types of subdivisions. Topical subdivisions limit the heading to a particular subtopic, for example, **Painting—Appreciation**.

Geographic subdivisions limit the heading to a particular place, as in **Painting—Indonesia**.

Chronological subdivisions limit the heading to a particular time period, as in **Painting—16th century**.

And form subdivisions indicate the type of resource, for example, **Painting—Encyclopedias**.
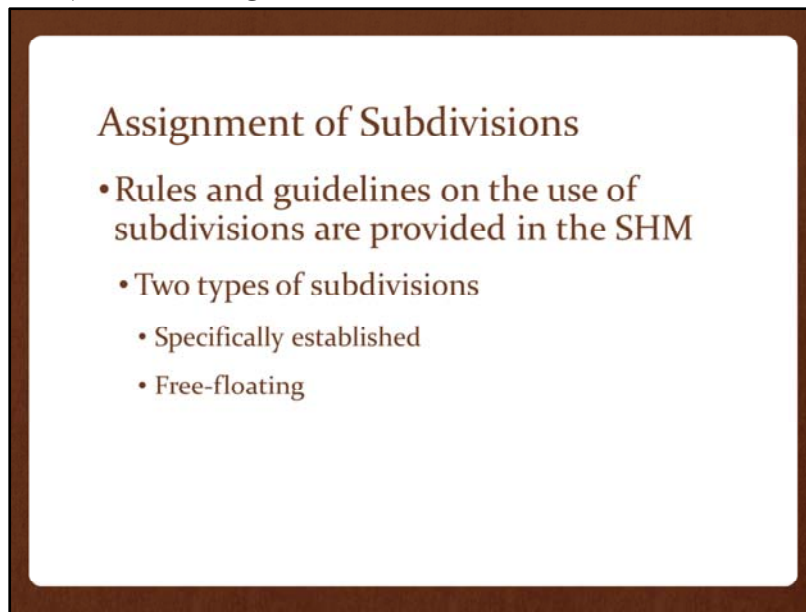
This is a very small portion of the browse index in the Library of Congress catalog, but even with this small group, you can see the benefit of subdivisions.

There are 77 bibliographies of 20th century American fiction, 19 bio-bibliographies (that is, resources that have both biography and bibliography in them), and 44 dictionaries.

Can you imagine what would happen if we did not break those out specifically? They would be combined with the 563 examples of 20th century American fiction. It would be almost impossible to find the bibliographies, the bio-bibliographies, or dictionaries.

Now imagine what would happen if all of the 17th, and 18th, *and* 19th, *and* 20th, *and* 21st century American fiction, and every resource *about* American fiction, were cataloged with the heading **American fiction**, without any subdivision. That would be many thousands of resources for library users to sort through to find the 19 bib-bibliographies of 20th century American fiction.

Subdivisions therefore serve the important discovery function of the catalog.
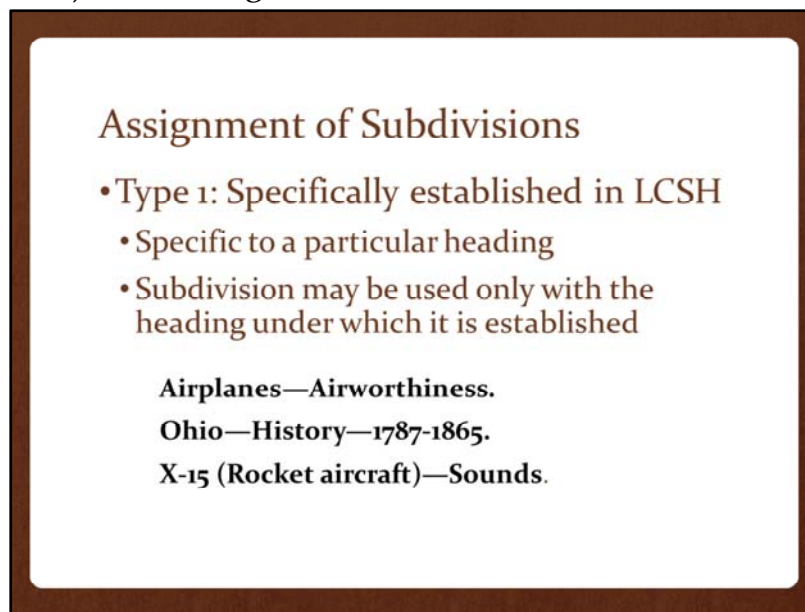
Assignment of Subdivisions

- Rules and guidelines on the use of subdivisions are provided in the SHM
  - Two types of subdivisions
    - Specifically established
    - Free-floating

The *Subject Headings Manual* provides instructions on the use of subdivisions.

There are two basic types of subdivisions – they may be specifically established, or they may be free-floating.

Assignment of Subdivisions

- Type 1: Specifically established in LCSH
  - Specific to a particular heading
  - Subdivision may be used only with the heading under which it is established

    Airplanes—Airworthiness.
    Ohio—History—1787-1865.
    X-15 (Rocket aircraft)—Sounds.

Subdivisions that are specifically established are proposed by catalogers as they are needed for resources that are being cataloged.

The three headings that you see on this slide are all specifically established, so someone cataloged a resource that discusses the sounds that the X-15 rocket makes, and proposed the third heading on the screen.

Someone else cataloged a resource about the airworthiness of airplanes, and so on.

Those proposals go through an editorial process, in which specialists on LCSH maintenance and development determine whether the subdivision is appropriate for the heading.

Assignment of Subdivisions

- Type 1: Specifically established in LCSH
  - The same subdivision may be established under many headings (provides consistency for users)

    Airplanes—Airworthiness.

    Helicopters—Airworthiness.

Where possible, the same subdivision is used in several places. That helps users know what to expect, because it provides predictability.

They know that if they found resources about the airworthiness of airplanes under **Airplanes—Airworthiness**, and now they want information about the airworthiness of helicopters, they could try **Helicopters—Airworthiness** with some confidence.

There are many thousands of specifically-established subdivisions in LCSH, but they constitute the minority of subdivisions that are actually assigned.

Assignment of Subdivisions

- Type 2: Free-floating subdivisions
  - Not generally printed in LCSH
  - Added to main headings on-the-fly by catalogers, who follow the rules and guidelines in the *Subject Headings Manual* (SHM)
  - Used if appropriate for the resource and if no conflict exists

Motion picture industry—United States— History—20th century—Encyclopedias.

Many more subdivisions are assigned on a free-floating basis, meaning that the heading is established in LCSH, and the subdivision is established in the list of possible subdivisions, and catalogers match them up with each other. Catalogers do this by following the rules and guidelines in the *Subject Headings Manual* (or the SHM).

A combination of a particular heading with a particular subdivision is possible:

- if the subdivision can be used with that type of heading;
- if the combination is appropriate for the resource (that is, it reflects the topic of the resource); and
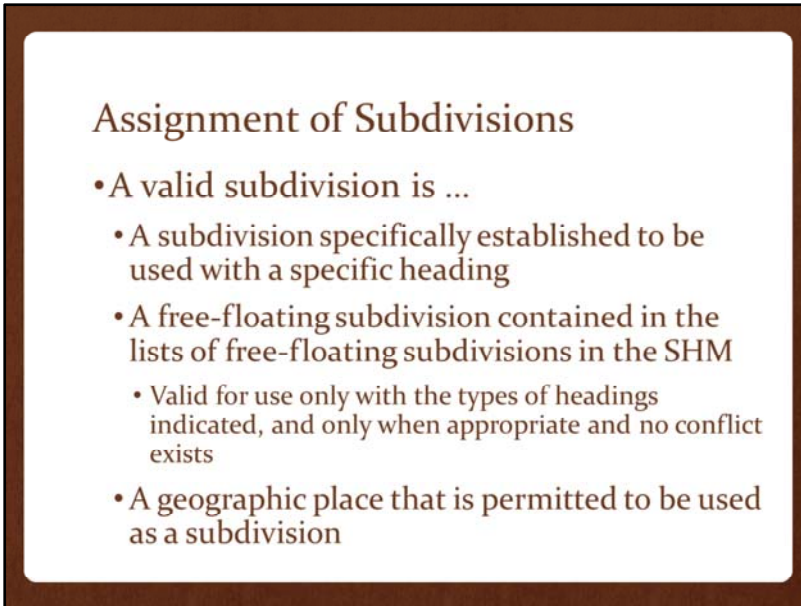- if no conflict exists in LCSH.

The final consideration is that the heading and subdivision together cannot make a redundant heading string.

Take a look at the example on the screen. No matter how hard you look, you will never see **Motion picture industry—United States—History—20th century—Encyclopedias** printed in LCSH. You will find the main heading**, Motion picture industry**, there, but that is it. All of those subdivisions are added according to rules found in the SHM. **United States** is the geographic subdivision, **—History—20th century** is a free-floating chronological subdivision, and **Encyclopedias** is a free-floating form subdivision.

Now, I remember being new to cataloging and being daunted by all of the rules for subdivision. How will I ever understand this, I thought.

Not to worry. The manual is always there for you to consult, and we are going to talk in depth about each of these types of subdivision and how to use them.

Plus, some of the rules become second-nature because you will be applying them on almost everything you catalog.

Assignment of Subdivisions

- A valid subdivision is …
  - A subdivision specifically established to be used with a specific heading
  - A free-floating subdivision contained in the lists of free-floating subdivisions in the SHM
    - Valid for use only with the types of headings indicated, and only when appropriate and no conflict exists
  - A geographic place that is permitted to be used as a subdivision

So to recap…

A valid subdivision could be specifically established in LCSH in order to be used with a specific heading, or it could be a free-floating subdivision that may be assigned if appropriate to the resource and if there is not a conflict in LCSH.

Free-floating subdivisions may be topical, chronological, or form. Geographic places are not free-floating subdivisions per se, but most geographic places can in fact be used as subdivisions.

Assignment of Headings

- A valid subdivision is *not* ...
  - A subdivision specifically established under a similar heading

  ✓ **Gardening—Religious aspects.**
  ✗ **Flower gardening—Religious aspects.**

Now we would like to talk briefly about some common misperceptions about subdivisions.

A common mistake for beginning catalogers is to think that if a subdivision is specifically established under one heading, it can also be used under a similar heading. That is just not so.

In this example, **Gardening—Religious aspects** is an established – and therefore valid – combination. But that fact does not allow the cataloger to "make up" their own combinations, like *Flower gardening—Religious aspects*. In order for that to be used, it would have to be proposed and approved first.

A few moments ago we said that **Airplanes—Airworthiness** and **Helicopters—Airworthiness** are both specifically established heading strings.

Assignment of Headings

- A valid subdivision is *not* ...
  - A subdivision specifically established under a dissimilar heading

  ✓ **Airplanes—Airworthiness.**

  ✓ **Helicopters—Airworthiness.**

  ✗ **Smartphones—Airworthiness.**

The fact that a subdivision has been used before does not mean that you can just add it to any heading and "make up" a string like *Smartphones—Airworthiness*, even if the resource you are cataloging happens to be about how well a smartphone can fly!

Free-floating subdivisions are the only topical subdivisions that can be added to a heading by a cataloger, and I can assure you that **–Airworthiness** is not a free-floating subdivision.

Assignment of Headings

- A valid subdivision is *not* ...
  - A valid heading, if it is not also established as a subdivision

  ✓ World War, 1939-1945.
  ✗ Florida—History—World War, 1939-1945.

The heading for World War II is **World War, 1939-1945**, and resources are certainly written about Florida during the war years. However, you cannot just use the heading for the war as a subdivision on the heading for Florida.

Assignment of Headings

- A valid subdivision is *not* ...
  - A valid heading, if it is not also established as a subdivision

  ✓ World War, 1939-1945.
  ✗ Florida—History—World War, 1939-1945.
  ✓ Florida—History—20th century.

The closest we can get to Florida during the World War II period is **Florida—History—20th century**.
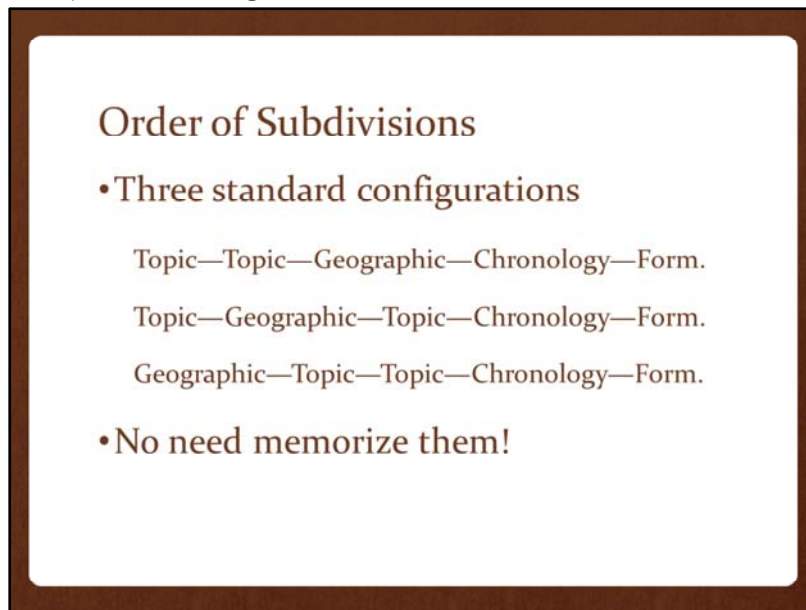
Assignment of Headings

- A valid subdivision is *not* ...
  - A valid heading, if it is not also established as a subdivision

  ✓ World War, 1939-1945.
  ✗ Florida—History—World War, 1939-1945.

  ✓ Florida—History—20th century.
  ✓ United States. Army—History—World War, 1939-1945.

However, **World War, 1939-1945** is specifically established as a subdivision under **United States. Army—History**, so it can be used as a subdivision of that particular heading.

Assignment of Headings

- A valid subdivision is *not* …
  - A valid heading, if it is not also established as a subdivision

  ✓ World War, 1939-1945.
  ✗ Florida—History—World War, 1939-1945.

  ✓ Florida—History—20th century.
  ✓ United States. Army—History—World War, 1939-1945.
  ✓ Germany. Heer—History—World War, 1939-1945.

One concept that we have not discussed yet is pattern subdivisions. For now, just think of pattern subdivisions as a special type of free-floating subdivision. We are going to talk about them in more detail in a later module. But the reason I mention it here is that **United States. Army** is a pattern for all of the military services of the world, so since **United States. Army—History—World War, 1939-1945** is established, we can also use for example **Germany. Heer—History—World War, 1939-1945**, because Heer is Germany's army.

Order of Subdivisions

• Three standard configurations

    Topic—Topic—Geographic—Chronology—Form.

    Topic—Geographic—Topic—Chronology—Form.

    Geographic—Topic—Topic—Chronology—Form.

• No need memorize them!

There are three standard orders of subdivisions in LCSH.

- Topic—Topic—Geographic—Chronology—Form

- Topic—Geographic—Topic—Chronology—Form, and

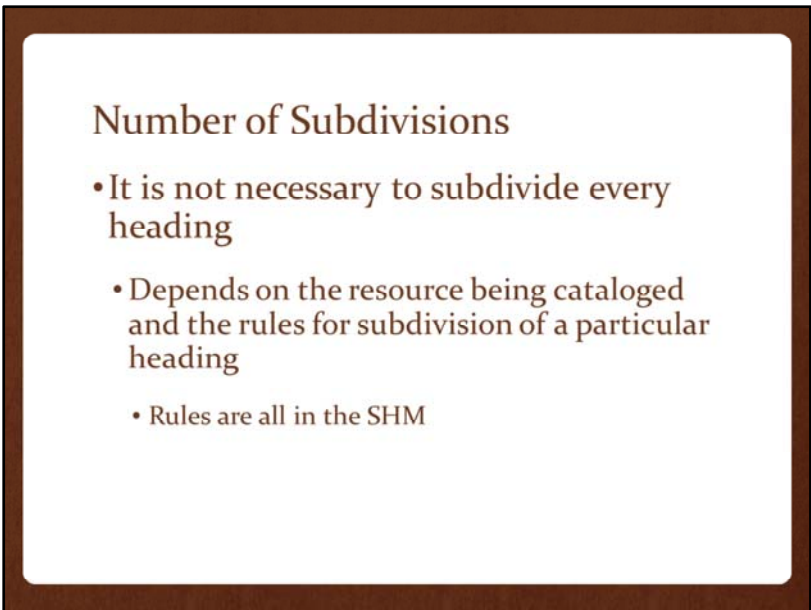- Geographic—Topic—Topic—Chronology—Form.

Note that the chronological and form subdivisions are always at the end of the string, and only placement of the topical and geographic headings and subdivisions shifts.

There are also some other configurations, but they are exceptions rather than the rule.

You do not have to memorize these standard configurations or worry about the exceptions, because if you follow the instructions in the SHM, they will happen naturally.

Number of Subdivisions

- It is not necessary to subdivide every heading

  - Depends on the resource being cataloged and the rules for subdivision of a particular heading

    - Rules are all in the SHM

One day I was walking down the hall at the Library of Congress, and a staff member I know saw me and came up to me in a panic. She said that she was cataloging a book, and had figured out what main headings she should use, but she could not figure out the subdivisions because she did not really need any to describe the contents of the book.

In other words, she wanted to know how to find a subdivision that she did not need to use.

I told her you are *never* required to use subdivisions that you do not need. Sometimes one or more main headings is quite sufficient. On the other hand, you may find that you need four or even five subdivisions for a particular heading. That is fine, as long as you assign them according to the rules.

You never have to assign a subdivision that you do not need.

Number of Subdivisions

• Valid headings with subdivisions
1. Hospitals.
2. Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation—Maine.
3. Hospitals—Employees—Salaries, etc.—Maine—History—21st century.
4. Hospitals—Finance—Periodicals.
5. Hospitals—Maine—Accounting.
6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
8. Hospitals—Maine—Statistics.

Let's analyze some headings with subdivisions to determine the number and types of subdivisions used.

These are all examples of valid heading strings. As you can see, there are different numbers of subdivisions used in each one.

Number of Subdivisions

• Valid headings with subdivisions
1. Hospitals.
2. Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation—Maine.
3. Hospitals—Employees—Salaries, etc.—Maine—History—21st century.
4. Hospitals—Finance—Periodicals.
5. Hospitals—Maine—Accounting.
6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
8. Hospitals—Maine—Statistics.

The first heading does not actually have a subdivision, and the most general resources about hospitals would be found there.

Number of Subdivisions

- Valid headings with subdivisions
  1. Hospitals.
  2. Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation—Maine.
  3. Hospitals—Employees—Salaries, etc.—Maine—History—21st century.
  4. Hospitals—Finance—Periodicals.
  5. Hospitals—Maine—Accounting.
  6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
  7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
  8. Hospitals—Maine—Statistics.

The second and the sixth each have three subdivisions.

Number of Subdivisions

- Valid headings with subdivisions

1. Hospitals.
2. Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation—Maine.
3. <u>Hospitals—Employees—Salaries, etc.—Maine—History—21st century.</u>
4. Hospitals—Finance—Periodicals.
5. Hospitals—Maine—Accounting.
6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
8. Hospitals—Maine—Statistics.

The third has five subdivisions.

Number of Subdivisions

- Valid headings with subdivisions
  1. Hospitals.
  2. Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation—Maine.
  3. Hospitals—Employees—Salaries, etc.—Maine—History—21st century.
  4. Hospitals—Finance—Periodicals.
  5. Hospitals—Maine—Accounting.
  6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
  7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
  8. Hospitals—Maine—Statistics.

And all of the others have two subdivisions each.

Number of Subdivisions

- Valid headings with subdivisions
  1. Hospitals.
  2. Hospitals—<u>Cost control—Law and legislation</u>—Maine.
  3. Hospitals—<u>Employees—Salaries, etc.</u>—Maine—History—21st century.
  4. Hospitals—<u>Finance</u>—Periodicals.
  5. Hospitals—Maine—<u>Accounting</u>.
  6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
  7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
  8. Hospitals—Maine—Statistics.

—Cost control , **—Law and legislation**, **—Employees**, **—Salaries, etc.**, **—Finance**, and **—Accounting** are all topical subdivisions.

Number of Subdivisions

- Valid headings with subdivisions
  1. Hospitals.
  2. Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation—Maine.
  3. Hospitals—Employees—Salaries, etc.—Maine—History—21st century.
  4. Hospitals—Finance—Periodicals.
  5. Hospitals—Maine—Accounting.
  6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
  7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
  8. Hospitals—Maine—Statistics.

Maine is geographic, as is **Maine—Portland**.

Number of Subdivisions

- Valid headings with subdivisions
  1. Hospitals.
  2. Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation—Maine.
  3. Hospitals—Employees—Salaries, etc.—Maine—History—21st century.
  4. Hospitals—Finance—Periodicals.
  5. Hospitals—Maine—Accounting.
  6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
  7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
  8. Hospitals—Maine—Statistics.

The third and sixth have chronological subdivisions. One says **—20th century**, and the other **—21st century**.

Number of Subdivisions

- Valid headings with subdivisions
  1. Hospitals.
  2. Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation—Maine.
  3. Hospitals—Employees—Salaries, etc.—Maine—History—21st century.
  4. Hospitals—Finance—<u>Periodicals</u>.
  5. Hospitals—Maine—Accounting.
  6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
  7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
  8. Hospitals—Maine—<u>Statistics</u>.

—**Periodicals** and —**Statistics** could be either topical or form subdivisions. Most form subdivisions can also be used as topical subdivisions, and you usually cannot tell how they are being used unless you can look at the MARC coding.

Let's say for the sake of this example that they are form subdivisions, so that means that the fourth heading refers to a resource that *is* a periodical. The eighth is statistics about hospitals in Maine.

Number of Subdivisions

- Valid headings with subdivisions
  1. Hospitals.
  2. Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation—Maine.
  3. Hospitals—Employees—Salaries, etc.—Maine—History—21st century.
  4. Hospitals—Finance—Periodicals.
  5. Hospitals—Maine—Accounting.
  6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
  7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
  8. Hospitals—Maine—Statistics.

It is one thing to be able to recognize the types of subdivisions, but how would you read these headings?

Generally speaking, read them backward, but leave the geographic and chronological subdivisions for last.

Number of Subdivisions

- Valid headings with subdivisions
  1. Hospitals.
  2. Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation—Maine.
  3. Hospitals—Employees—Salaries, etc.—Maine—History—21st century.
  4. Hospitals—Finance—Periodicals.
  5. Hospitals—Maine—Accounting.
  6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
  7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
  8. Hospitals—Maine—Statistics.

Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation—Maine is "Law and legislation about cost control in hospitals in Maine."

Number of Subdivisions

- Valid headings with subdivisions
  1. Hospitals.
  2. Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation— Maine.
  3. Hospitals—Employees—Salaries, etc.—Maine— History—21st century.
  4. Hospitals—Finance—Periodicals.
  5. Hospitals—Maine—Accounting.
  6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
  7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
  8. Hospitals—Maine—Statistics.

Likewise, the fifth heading, **Hospitals—Maine—Accounting**, can be read as "Accounting in hospitals in Maine."

Number of Subdivisions

- Valid headings with subdivisions
  1. Hospitals.
  2. Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation—Maine.
  3. Hospitals—Employees—Salaries, etc.—Maine—History—21st century.
  4. Hospitals—Finance—Periodicals.
  5. Hospitals—Maine—Accounting.
  6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
  7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
  8. Hospitals—Maine—Statistics.

Sometimes it actually works better to combine some subdivisions into a single phrase.

Heading 3 can be read as: The salaries of hospital employees in Maine in the 21st century.

Or: The salaries of employees of hospitals in Maine in the 21st century.

Number of Subdivisions

• Valid headings with subdivisions

1. Hospitals.
2. Hospitals—Cost control—Law and legislation— Maine.
3. Hospitals—Employees—Salaries, etc.—Maine— History—21st century.
4. Hospitals—Finance—Periodicals.
5. Hospitals—Maine—Accounting.
6. Hospitals—Maine—History—20th century.
7. Hospitals—Maine—Portland.
8. Hospitals—Maine—Statistics.

When you have a form subdivision, put the form first and insert the word about, so that heading eight can be read as "Statistics about hospitals in Maine."

Heading 4 is "Periodicals about finance in hospitals," or, alternately, "Periodicals about hospital finance."