
Library of Congress Subject Headings

Module 6.16
Chronological Subdivisions Part 3:
Assignment of Chronological Subdivisions

Policy and Standards Division
Library of Congress
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Recap

- Chronological subdivisions
 - May appear in various styles
 - May be either specifically established or free-floating
- Restrictions on the assignment of the subdivision –**History**
 - Important for determining whether a free-floating century can be added to a heading

In module 6.14 we explained that chronological subdivisions are established in various ways. They may or may not include words or phrases, for example. We also covered the fact that some chronological subdivisions are specifically established, while others are free-floating.

Then in module 6.15 we talked about the ways that the free-floating subdivision —**History** can and cannot be used. That was important because until you understand those rules, you cannot know whether a free-floating century can be applied to a particular heading.

Recap

- Three standard configurations

Topic—Topic—Geographic—Chronology—Form.
Topic—Geographic—Topic—Chronology—Form.
Geographic—Topic—Topic—Chronology—Form.

Finally, in the first module of this unit we showed the three standard orders for subdivisions.

The chronological subdivision typically comes after all of the topical and geographic subdivisions, but that order does vary at times. In this module, the examples will all show the standard order.

Now that we have all of that background, we are ready to talk about the principles and rules of thumb for using chronological subdivisions to bring out the temporal focus of resources.

The slide features a dark brown border. At the top, the title 'Principle of Specificity' is centered. Below it is a bullet point: '• Chronological subdivision may not be coextensive with the temporal focus of the resource'. In the center of the slide, there is a smaller white box with a dark brown border containing the text: 'Assign headings that are as specific as the topics they cover.'

Recall the principle of specific entry that we covered in module 5.2.

As the first sentence of H 180 sec. 4 states, we are to assign headings that are as specific as the topics they cover. It seems from this statement that a resource about the history of television in 1951 and 1952 should have a chronological subdivision for those two specific years, but that is very unlikely to happen. It is much more likely that a broader chronological subdivision will be used instead.

Principle of Specificity

- Chronological subdivision may not be coextensive with the temporal focus of the resource

Assign a heading that is broader or more general than the topic that it is intended to cover only when it is not possible to establish a precise heading, when an array of headings is needed to express the topic, or when the assignment of a more general heading is called for by special instructions in the *Subject Headings Manual*.

H 180 sec. 4 continues:

Assign a heading that is broader or more general than the topic that it is intended to cover only when it is not possible to establish a precise heading, when an array of headings is needed to express the topic, or when the assignment of a more general heading is called for by special instructions in the *Subject Headings Manual*.

In other words, when policy says that we should assign two or more headings to represent the focus of a resource, we should do that. When policy says that we should assign a broader heading, we do that.

Policy often decrees that the chronological subdivision we assign is much broader than the temporal focus of the resource. One of the essential points to remember when assigning chronological subdivisions is that the subdivision may not exactly match the temporal focus of the resource.

Principle of Specificity

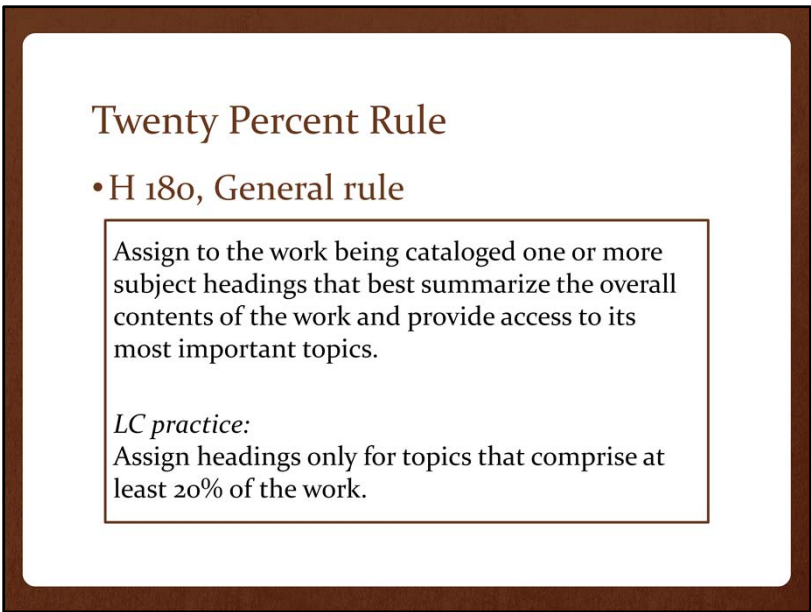
- Chronological subdivision may not be coextensive with the temporal focus of the resource

✗ Television—History—1951-1952.

✓ Television—History—20th century.

A resource about the history of television in 1951 and 1952 would not be assigned the heading *Television—History—1951-1952* because that heading does not exist.

Policy requires us to assign **Television—History—20th century** instead. The heading is much broader than the resource.



Twenty Percent Rule

- H 180, General rule

Assign to the work being cataloged one or more subject headings that best summarize the overall contents of the work and provide access to its most important topics.

LC practice:
Assign headings only for topics that comprise at least 20% of the work.

There is another important principle to remember when assigning chronological subdivisions, and that is the 20 percent rule.

H 180 sec. 1, the General rule, states,

Assign to the work being cataloged one or more subject headings that best summarize the overall contents of the work and provide access to its most important topics.

At the Library of Congress, that means assigning headings only for topics that comprise at least 20 percent of the resource. The 20 percent rule helps us to understand what to do when the temporal focus of a resource is just slightly different from the possible chronological subdivisions.

Twenty Percent Rule

- Consider the predominant coverage and intent of the resource
- Exclude incidental mention of earlier or later periods

Title: *The history of the world since 1989*

✗ **History, Modern—1945-1989.**

✓ **History, Modern—1989-**

We always want to consider the predominant coverage and intent of the resource. Even something as apparently clear-cut as “The history of the world since 1989” probably includes background information about the year or years preceding 1989.

Unless a full 20 percent of the resource is about that earlier period – which is highly unlikely – we ignore it when we are doing subject analysis. Our resource is assigned **History, Modern—1989-** , and not also **History, Modern—1945-1989.**

Twenty Percent Rule

- Consider the predominant coverage and intent of the resource
- Exclude incidental mention of earlier or later periods

Title: A history of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the interwar period

- ✗ **Bosnia and Herzegovina—History—1878-1918.**
- ✓ **Bosnia and Herzegovina—History—1918-1945.**
- ✗ **Bosnia and Herzegovina—History—1945-1992.**

Here is another example. A history of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the interwar period has an introduction that covers the major events in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina through the end of World War I. Approximately 300 pages are then devoted to the interwar years – the years between World War I and World War II, when Bosnia and Herzegovina was part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Finally, an afterward outlines some of the major events from the end of World War II until Yugoslavia dissolved in 1992 and Bosnia and Herzegovina became an independent country.

The introduction and the afterward do not separately or together constitute 20 percent of the resource, so they should be discounted for subject cataloging purposes. We assign only **Bosnia and Herzegovina—History—1918-1945**, not also **Bosnia and Herzegovina—History—1878-1918** to cover the introduction and **Bosnia and Herzegovina—History—1945-1992** to cover the afterward.

Note that the interwar period is actually only 1918-1939, and the assigned heading is for 1918-1945. That is perfectly okay, too, because the period covered in the resource is within the period covered by the heading. The heading is just ever-so-slightly broader than the coverage in the resource.

Twenty Percent Rule

- Consider the predominant coverage and intent of the resource
- Time period discussed in resource may be inexact, or the title may be misleading

Title: *Events surrounding the Dirty War*

- ✗ **Argentina—History—1955-1983.**
- ✓ **Argentina—History—Dirty War, 1976-1983.**
- ✗ **Argentina—History—1983-2002.**

Another point to remember is that the temporal coverage of the resource may have intentionally blurry edges. A resource called *Events Surrounding the Dirty War* may be about the Argentine Dirty War itself, events before it, and/or events after it. We have to examine the resource closely to be sure.

Let's say that upon examination, we find that the resource includes a bit of history about the 1960s and early 1970s in Argentina, and also some about two sieges that happened in the late 1980s, but that 90 percent of it is about the Dirty War itself.

The only heading we assign in this case is **Argentina—History—Dirty War, 1976-1983.**

Twenty Percent Rule

- Consider the predominant coverage and intent of the resource
- Time period discussed in resource may be inexact, or the title may be misleading

Title: *The Mexican economy in the late 20th century*

- ✗ **Mexico—Economic conditions—1970-1982.**
- ✓ **Mexico—Economic conditions—1982-1994.**
- ✓ **Mexico—Economic conditions—1994-**

Now we have the title *The Mexican Economy in the Late 20th Century*.

We have to look into the resource to figure out what the author considers to be the late 20th century because the title is vague. It turns out that the temporal coverage of the resource begins sometime in the early 1980s, but it is difficult to be more specific than that.

We should assign the heading or headings that most closely correspond to the coverage. In this case, we have to assign two, **Mexico—Economic conditions—1982-1994** and **Mexico—Economic conditions—1994-**.

We do not assign the heading **Mexico—Economic conditions—1970-1982** because that period corresponds closely – but not exactly – to the 1970s, and we have determined that the resource is about the 1980s and forward.

Now that we have explained how two of the basic principles of subject assignment relate to chronological subdivisions, we will explore some of the common situations that arise when assigning chronological subdivisions.

Free-Floating Centuries

- Used under names of countries, cities, etc., individual corporate bodies, and under classes of persons, ethnic groups, and topical headings
 - History—16th century
 - History—17th century
 - History—18th century
 - History—19th century
 - History—20th century
 - History—21st century

First we will talk about a common difficulty that catalogers have, which is determining whether they can assign a free-floating subdivision.

As a reminder, these subdivisions may be used under names of countries, cities, etc., individual corporate bodies, and under classes of persons, ethnic groups, and topical headings.

Notice that that the first free-floating century is for the 16th century, that is, the 1500s.

Free-Floating Centuries

- Should I add a free-floating century to the heading?
 - Questions to ask yourself
 1. Is the heading the name of a country, city, etc., an individual corporate body, or a class of persons, an ethnic group, or a topical heading?
 2. If it is a topical heading, can I assign the subdivision **-History**?
 3. Are there any specifically established chronological subdivisions that conflict with the free-floating century?

There are three questions to ask yourself every time you think about using a free-floating century.

1. First, is the heading the name of a country, city, etc., an individual corporate body, or a class of persons, an ethnic group, or a topical heading?

If the answer is “no,” you can stop there because you cannot use a free-floating century. You can use specifically established chronological subdivisions, if there are any. Your other option is to determine whether the heading falls into another free-floating or pattern category. If it does, see if there are any chronological subdivisions on that list.

If the answer is “yes,” the heading *is* the name of a country, city, etc., or an individual corporate body, or a class of persons, or an ethnic group, then you can assign a free-floating century.

2. But if the answer is “yes,” it is a topical heading, you have to ask yourself: Can I use the subdivision —**History**?

We discussed the restrictions on the use of that subdivision in depth in module 6.15.

3. If you have answered those two questions with a “yes,” then you need to ask a third: Are there any specifically established chronological subdivisions that conflict with the free-floating century?

If so, then the specifically established subdivisions take precedence. And we need to explore what we mean by “conflict” in that case.

Free-Floating Centuries

- Specifically established chronological subdivisions that conflict
 - Time periods do not have to match exactly
 - Established subdivision covers *essentially* the same period

Conflict between chronological subdivisions is different from other types of conflict in LCSH.

Normally, a conflict is explicitly expressed by means of a UF reference that tells us to use something else. Do not use *Children—Psychology*, use **Child psychology**, for instance.

Free-Floating Centuries

- Specifically established chronological subdivisions that conflict
 - Time periods do not have to match exactly
 - Established subdivision covers *essentially* the same period

Great Britain—History—16th century
USE [Great Britain—History—Tudors, 1485-1603](#)

You will on occasion find such a UF for a specific heading—chronological subdivision combination, as in:

Great Britain—History—16th century
USE **Great Britain—History—Tudors, 1485-1603,**

but it is very rare.

Instead, think about the relationship between the established chronological subdivision (or subdivisions) and the free-floating century. Do they cover essentially the same time period?

The word *essentially* is really important there. The subdivisions do not have to be an exact match in coverage, and the entry on your screen is a good example of that. The period 1485-1603 is seventeen years longer than the 16th century, but it is equivalent enough.

Free-Floating Centuries

- Specifically established chronological subdivisions that conflict
 - Time periods do not have to match exactly
 - Established subdivision covers *essentially* the same period

Haiti—History—1804-1844

Haiti—History—1844-1915

Sometimes two headings with specifically established chronological subdivisions should be used instead of a free-floating century.

Again, we want the subdivisions to express essentially the same time period as that covered by the free-floating century; they do not have to be exact.

A resource about Haiti in the 19th century should be assigned the headings **Haiti—History—1804-1844** and **Haiti—History—1844-1915**, not *Haiti—History—19th century*, because the two specifically established headings together cover all but the first four years of the 19th century.

You have hopefully noticed that all of the places in the examples so far are countries. Most countries have specifically established subdivisions that are close enough that the established subdivision or subdivisions should be assigned instead of free-floating centuries. There are some instances where that is not true, though, as we see in the next example.

Free-Floating Centuries

- Specifically established chronological subdivisions that conflict
 - Time periods do not have to match exactly
 - Established subdivision covers *essentially* the same period

Andorra—Antiquities
NT [Balma de la Margineda Rockshelter \(Andorra\)](#)

Andorra—Literatures
NT [Catalan literature](#)

As you can see, there not any specifically established chronological subdivisions for **Andorra**. Therefore, any of the free-floating centuries can be safely used under the heading **Andorra**.

Free-Floating Centuries

- Specifically established chronological subdivisions that conflict
 - Time periods do not have to match exactly
 - Established subdivision covers *essentially* the same period

California—History—To 1846

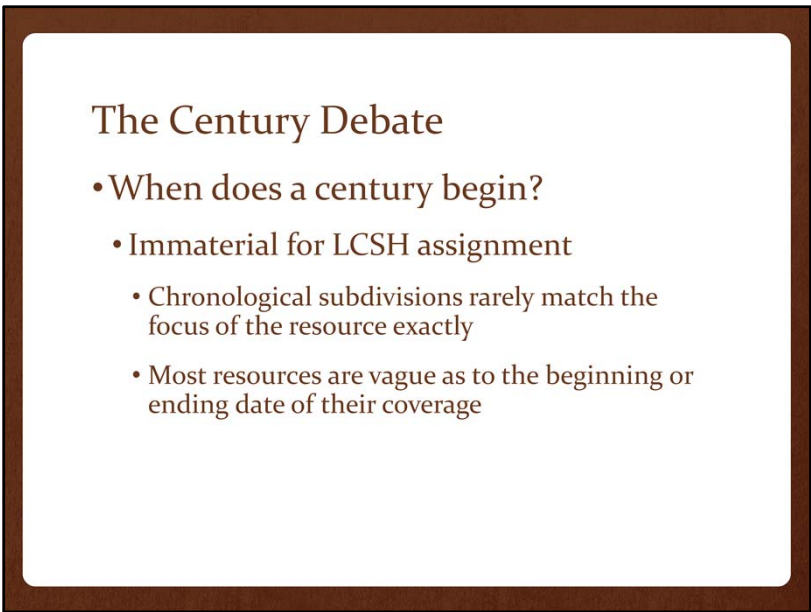
NT [Portolá's Expedition. Calif. 1769-1770](#)

California—History—17th century.

The free-floating centuries were authorized for use with geographic places mostly because places smaller than countries – such as provinces, states, and cities – typically have fewer specifically established subdivisions, if they have any at all. You are therefore much more likely to use the free-floating centuries under places smaller than countries than with the countries themselves.

For example, in this case the time period represented in the specifically established subdivisions for California, a state of the United States, is not close enough in meaning to a free-floating century.

The subdivision —**To 1846** would be much too broad for a history of California in the 17th century, so the free-floating combination **California—History—17th century** should be assigned instead.



The Century Debate

- When does a century begin?
 - Immaterial for LCSH assignment
 - Chronological subdivisions rarely match the focus of the resource exactly
 - Most resources are vague as to the beginning or ending date of their coverage

You may remember that at the beginning of this millennium there was a debate over whether the third millennium began on January 1, 2000 or on January 1, 2001. The debate led to questions about the century subdivisions in LCSH, so we want to mention it in passing.

The debate is immaterial to the assignment of LC subject headings for two reasons. First, chronological subdivisions rarely match the temporal focus of the resource exactly, so the difference of a year does not really matter. Second, few resources indicate their focus to the specific day.

Free-Floating and Pattern Subdivisions

From H 1154, Languages

\$y 18th century
\$y 19th century
\$y 20th century
\$y 21st century

French language—21st century.

We said a few moments ago that if the heading is not the name of a country, city, etc., an individual corporate body, or a class of persons, or an ethnic group, it might fall into one of the other categories of free-floating and pattern subdivisions. Some of those lists of subdivisions also contain chronological subdivisions, just not the free-floating centuries. Let's take a look at two examples.

The heading **French language** can be subdivided by **—21st century**, because **—21st century** is on the list of subdivisions used under languages, H 1154. Note that in this case, the chronological subdivision is not preceded by the subdivision **—History**.

Free-Floating and Pattern Subdivisions

From H 1095, Form and Topical Subdivisions of General Application

Sx **History** Sy **To 1500** (*H 1647*)
Use under topical headings.

Monastic libraries—Europe—History—To 1500.

The heading **Monastic libraries—Europe** can be subdivided by **—History—To 1500**, because H 1095 says that **—History—To 1500** can be used under topics.

Free-Floating and Pattern Subdivisions
From H 1095, Form and Topical
Subdivisions of General Application

Sx **History** Sy **To 1500** (*H 1647*)
Use under topical headings.

- ✗ **Monastic and religious life—History—To 1500.**
- ✓ **Monastic and religious life—History—Early church, ca. 30-600.**
- ✓ **Monastic and religious life—History—Middle Ages, 600-1500.**

We have to be careful when using chronological subdivisions from the free-floating and pattern lists, though, because sometimes they are not appropriate.

Just like the free-floating centuries, these other free-floating and pattern chronological subdivisions cannot be used if one or more specifically established subdivisions cover the same period.

We could assign **Monastic libraries—Europe—History—To 1500** because **Monastic libraries** is a topical heading and there are no specifically established chronological subdivisions.

However, we cannot assign *Monastic and religious life—History—To 1500* because there are two specifically established subdivisions that cover the same period. We would assign one or both of them to resources about ancient and medieval monastic and religious life.

Free-Floating and Pattern Subdivisions

From H 1156, Literatures

\$y Old English, ca. 450-1100
\$y Middle English, 1100-1500
\$y Early modern, 1500-1700
\$y 18th century
\$y 19th century
\$y 20th century
\$y 21st century

Here is a different situation. This is the list of chronological subdivisions that may be used under literatures.

Notice, though, that the first two on the list relate only to literature in the English language.

Free-Floating and Pattern Subdivisions

From H 1156, Literatures

<p><u>\$y</u> Old English, ca. 450-1100</p> <p><u>\$y</u> Middle English, 1100-1500</p> <p><u>\$y</u> Early modern, 1500-1700</p> <p><u>\$y</u> 18th century</p>	<p><u>\$y</u> The listed period subdivisions evolved from English literature practice and should be used only when appropriate for other literatures. If they are inappropriate for specific literatures, special periods should be established where needed under individual literatures and genres.</p>
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There is a statement to that effect in the instruction sheet:

The listed period subdivisions evolved from English literature practice and should be used only when appropriate for other literatures. If they are inappropriate for specific literatures, special periods should be established where needed under individual literatures and genres.

Free-Floating and Pattern Subdivisions
From H 1156, Literatures

\$y Old English, ca. 450-1100	
\$y Middle English, 1100-1500	
\$y Early modern English, 1500-1700	Portuguese literature—To 1500 <input type="checkbox"/>
\$y 18th century	UF Galician literature—To 1500
\$y 19th century	NT Romances, Portuguese
\$y 20th century	Portuguese literature—Classical period, 1500-1700
\$y 21st century	Portuguese literature—18th century <input type="checkbox"/>
	Portuguese literature—19th century <input type="checkbox"/>
	Portuguese literature—20th century <input type="checkbox"/>

Special periods have been established under **Portuguese literature, —To 1500** and **—Classical period, 1500-1700**.

This is a particularly obvious example, but every free-floating and pattern instruction sheet has a statement about conflicts.

Pairing Headings That Have Chronological Subdivisions

- Great Britain—Economic conditions—20th century
- Great Britain—Economic conditions—1918-1945
- Great Britain—Economic conditions—1945-1964
- Great Britain—Economic conditions— 1964-1979
- Great Britain—Economic conditions— 1979-1997
- Great Britain—Economic conditions—1997-

We have already seen some examples in which headings with chronological subdivisions were paired to represent the full scope of the resource, so we know that two headings with chronological subdivisions must be okay.

But how many paired headings should be assigned to any given resource?

There is no easy answer to that question because it depends heavily on cataloger’s judgment and the subdivisions that are available for use with a particular heading.

The list on your screen is an excerpt from the list of chronological subdivisions that are established under **Great Britain—Economic conditions**.

Pairing Headings That Have Chronological Subdivisions

Great Britain—Economic conditions—20th century

- Great Britain—Economic conditions—1918-1945
- Great Britain—Economic conditions—1945-1964
- Great Britain—Economic conditions— 1964-1979
- Great Britain—Economic conditions— 1979-1997
- Great Britain—Economic conditions—1997-

It would not be a good idea to assign all five of the highlighted headings to represent the economic conditions of Great Britain in the 20th century.

Pairing Headings That Have Chronological Subdivisions

Great Britain—Economic conditions—20th century

Great Britain—Economic conditions—1918-1945

Great Britain—Economic conditions—1945-1964

Great Britain—Economic conditions— 1964-1979

Great Britain—Economic conditions— 1979-1997

Great Britain—Economic conditions—1997-

Instead, you would assign the heading **Great Britain—Economic conditions—20th century**.

Pairing Headings That Have Chronological Subdivisions

Great Britain—Economic conditions—20th century

Great Britain—Economic conditions—1918-1945

Great Britain—Economic conditions—1945-1964

Great Britain—Economic conditions— 1964-1979

Great Britain—Economic conditions— 1979-1997

Great Britain—Economic conditions—1997-

But if you were cataloging a resource with a slightly shorter temporal focus, say the economic conditions from the end of World War II to the beginning of the Tony Blair administration in 1997, you could assign the three highlighted headings, because they very clearly represent the focus of the resource.

In other cases, it may in fact be better to assign a free-floating century.

Pairing Headings That Have Chronological Subdivisions

Medical care—Morocco—History—16th century.
Medical care—Morocco—History—17th century.
Medical care—Morocco—History—18th century.
Medical care—Morocco—History—19th century.
Medical care—Morocco—History—20th century.
Medical care—Morocco—History—21st century.

There are times when it makes more sense to assign the subdivision —**History** without further chronological subdivision, because the time period covered in the resource is just very lengthy.

There are no chronological subdivisions specifically established under **Medical care**, but since it is a topical heading that is not inherently historical and is not treated as historical, we can assign the subdivision —**History** and free-floating century subdivisions. That results in the list of headings that you see on the screen.

Pairing Headings That Have Chronological Subdivisions

Medical care—Morocco—History—16th century.

Medical care—Morocco—History—17th century.

Medical care—Morocco—History—18th century.

Medical care—Morocco—History—19th century.

Medical care—Morocco—History—20th century.

Medical care—Morocco—History—21st century.

If the resource were about the history of medical care in Morocco since 1600, we could assign all of these headings, but five separate headings representing five different centuries? That’s just too much.

Pairing Headings That Have Chronological Subdivisions

Medical care—Morocco—History—16th century.

Medical care—Morocco—History—17th century.

Medical care—Morocco—History—18th century.

Medical care—Morocco—History—19th century.

Medical care—Morocco—History—20th century.

Medical care—Morocco—History—21st century.

✓ Medical care—Morocco—History.

Therefore, we should assign **Medical care—Morocco—History**, and you're done.

Topics Specific to a Single Century

- Assign **-History** if applicable, without a chronological subdivision

There is another situation in which the subdivision —**History**, if assigned, should not be followed by a free-floating century subdivision.

That is when the topic in the heading existed in only one century.

Topics Specific to a Single Century

- Assign **-History** if applicable, without a chronological subdivision
- ✓ **Underground Railroad—History.**
- ✗ **Underground Railroad—History—19th century.**

For example, the Underground Railroad was a smuggling operation of the 19th century that helped slaves in the United States escape to freedom.

Assigning the subdivision **—19th century** would be redundant.

Topics Specific to a Single Century

- Assign **-History** if applicable, without a chronological subdivision

✓ **Soviet Union—History.**

✗ **Soviet Union—History—20th century.**

The Soviet Union existed only in the 20th century, so the heading *Soviet Union—History—20th century* is also redundant.

Topics Specific to a Single Century

- Assign **-History** if applicable, without a chronological subdivision
 - ✓ **Soviet Union—History.**
 - ✗ **Soviet Union—History—20th century.**
 - ✓ **Soviet Union—History—1925-1953.**

Note, however, there *are* several more specific subdivisions that can be assigned, such as **—1925-1953**, for the Stalin period.

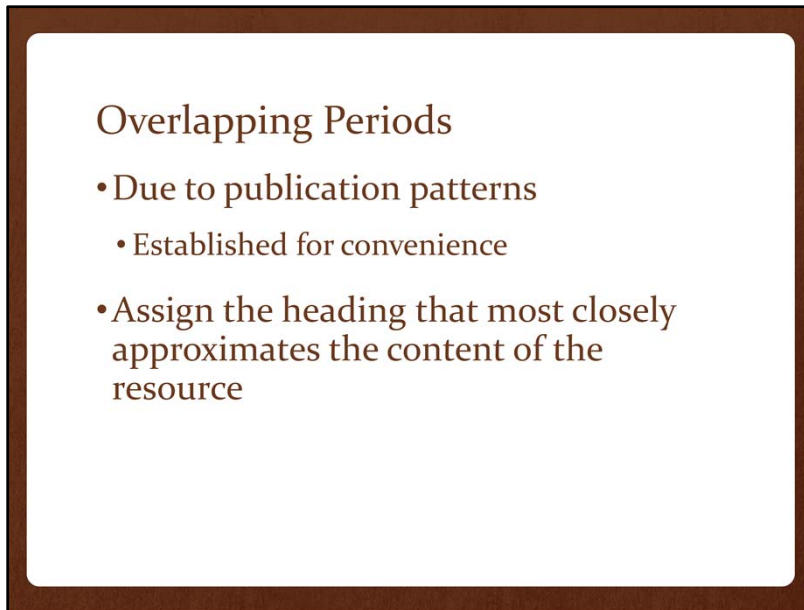
Topics Specific to a Single Century

- Assign **-History** if applicable, without a chronological subdivision

✓ Facebook (Firm)—History.

✗ Facebook (Firm)—History—21st century.

The same rule applies to corporate bodies that existed only in a single century. Facebook was founded in 2004, and thus exists only in the 21st century. It can be assigned with the subdivision — **History**, but not with a chronological subdivision.



Overlapping Periods

- Due to publication patterns
 - Established for convenience
- Assign the heading that most closely approximates the content of the resource

Chronological subdivisions that are specifically established under specific places or topics sometimes overlap. They are established primarily for convenience and are based on commonly discussed periods in the history of that place or topic.

Overlapping Periods

- Finland—Foreign relations (May Subd Geog)
- Finland—Foreign relations—1917-1945
- Finland—Foreign relations—1945-
- Finland—Foreign relations—1945-1981
- Finland—Foreign relations—1981-

There are several overlapping subdivisions in this excerpt from LCSH, and all of them represent significant periods in the history of Finnish foreign relations.

The subdivision —**1945-** should be assigned when the resource covers the entire post-World War II period, up to the present day, while the subdivision —**1945-1981** should be assigned when a resource is limited to that specific period. —**1981-** should be used when the resource is specifically about the post-1981 period.

Why 1981? Finland’s president since 1956 resigned in that year.

Reuse of Subdivisions Established Under Geographic Places

- *Do not* use chronological subdivisions that are specifically established under a geographic place with a topic subdivided by that geographic place

We are going to finish this module with a caution.

It is a relatively common error to think that a chronological subdivision established under a geographic place can be used after a topic that is subdivided by that geographic place.

Recall, though, that in the first module of this unit we said that subdivisions that are specifically established for use with one heading are not valid for use with any other heading.

Reuse of Subdivisions Established Under Geographic Places

- *Do not* use chronological subdivisions that are specifically established under a geographic place with a topic subdivided by that geographic place

United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.

X Transportation—United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.

For example, the heading for the United States has a chronological subdivision that represents the Civil War.

A resource about the history of transportation during the era of the American Civil War cannot be assigned the heading *Transportation—United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.*

Reuse of Subdivisions Established Under Geographic Places

Transportation—History

Transportation—Industrial capacity

✗ Transportation—United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865.

✓ Transportation—United States—History—19th century.

Because there are not any specifically established chronological subdivisions under **Transportation—History**, the string **Transportation—United States—History—19th century** is assigned instead.