Subject Analysis

NHLA - Technical Services Committee

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What is Subject Analysis anyway?

Conceptual analysis to determine….

● What a resource is (physical form)
● What a resource is about (intellectual content, subject matter)
● Aboutness statement

After this process, assign

● Terms/subjects from controlled vocabularies (LCSH, MeSH, LCGFT, etc.)
● Classification notation (DDC, LCC, etc.)

Example: Bake: my best ever recipes for the classics by Paul Hollywood
How to determine what a Work is about

- For most Fiction
  - Read the publisher’s description for ideas.

- For Non-Fiction
  - Look at the table of contents.

- Are you reviewing a whole set of something, or an analytical part?
  - For example: is it a collected works, or a single item from a collection?

- Finally, remember LC does not assign headings to every work without a clear subject due to their nature, such periodicals or sacred works.
Steps to Subject Analysis

- Subject analysis is the process of organizing information.
  - How is that accomplished?
- Can you identify the general category of a work, its major focus?
  - Broad versus narrow headings.
    - For example: Sports
- Can the topic be qualified by geographical location?
  - Sports$z$United States
- Can the topic be further qualified by timespan or language?
  - Sports$z$United States$x$History
- So how many headings are needed?
- If there are multiple topics, are there multiple topics of equal weight?
  - The 60/40 rule.
  - Or use the rule of thirds.
Controlled Vocabularies: 
What are they & Why do we need them?

- “A standardized subject language used to describe the contents of resources” arranged to describe hierarchical relationships. ([Library of Congress Subject Headings: Online Training](http://libraryofcongresssubjectheadings.com/online-training))

- Why do we need them?
  - Committees are used to select “preferred” terminology that is consistent, robust, and well-rounded.

- What about keyword searching?
  - Have benefits, especially when they are specific than associated controlled terms, which may increase search results.
  - Limited in areas of complexity and context.
Controlled Vocabulary features

- Controlled vocabularies:
  - Exist to aid access.
  - Can help focus a search in languages with many synonyms.
  - Provide alternate and related terms for cross-referencing.

- Controlled vocabularies provide tailored terminology
  - In-depth industry terminology [National Library of Medicine (MeSH); Getty Research Institute Art & Architecture Thesaurus (AAT)]
  - Additional language access [Répertoire de têtes-matière de l'Université Laval (RVM)]
  - Access to, and reducing classification scheme bias for, terms not present in LOC or other major vocabularies [Homosaurus; Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada Subject Thesaurus (IST)]
Example

- Accurate subject analysis is important to discovery.
Cataloger’s Judgement and Objectivity

- Recognize that everyone has a point-of-view and bias - we are all human after all!
- Although, subject analysis can be subjective, every cataloger should strive for objectivity
- Questions to keep in mind when analyzing an item:
  - What was the author’s intent?
  - Is this a work of fiction or nonfiction?
  - What is it for?
  - Who is the audience?
Resources

- Basic Subject Cataloging Using LCSH Cataloging Skills (CCT)
- Cataloging and Metadata Management: Using Medical Subject Headings
- Library of Congress Subject Headings: Online Training
- Webjunction ABLE 6 - Introduction to Subject Headings
- Joudrey, Daniel N. The Organization of Information, 4th ed. Chapter 9, Subject Analysis (pp. 437-473)
Questions?

Have more questions? Contact the Technical Services Committee at techservices@nhlibrarians.org.