Discover the Profession's Best-kept Secret...and Protect your Investment in Collections

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DISCOVER THE PROFESSION'S BEST-KEPT SECRET... AND PROTECT YOUR INVESTMENT IN COLLECTIONS

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Abstract:

Your library has already made two enormous investments: the carefully chosen, often pricey items in your collections and the thoughtful cataloging process that describes them. How can you maximize the return on these investments? By making the most of what you already have. Smart searches that use every feature of the catalog record will reacquaint you with your collections and uncover valuable resources whose titles and TOCs lack crisp keywords. This presentation will reveal the amazing power of the catalog's best-kept secret--the unassuming, poorly understood, often overlooked Library of Congress subject heading subdivision. We, the authors of *Magic Search: Getting the Best Results from Your Catalog and Beyond* (ALA Editions, 2009), will demonstrate why LC subdivisions work so well in an online environment. We'll highlight subdivisions that find special formats like images or that work especially well for historical research or research in the humanities. We'll show why using the word "memoir" to find memoirs is a really bad idea, why Cleopatra has no portraits, and why Picasso never had a mistress! We'll reveal surprising cataloging practices as well as discoveries regarding who is now also using subdivisions. Finally, we will offer recommendations to library administrators, database vendors and designers, reference librarians, and library educators, so that we all can design smarter, search smarter, deliver smarter.

I. Introduction

At this conference, there will be a lot discussion about how libraries should keep up with the rest of the world (Google, etc.). Shouldn't we also be thinking about what we do best? Your library has already made two big investments: your materials and the careful, thoughtful cataloging of those materials. How can you make the most of these existing investments? How do you find what you already own?

By making use of cataloging's best kept secret—the Library of Congress Subject Subdivision! In today's presentation we will explain the ins and outs of the subdivision; give you examples of how to use them as a true discovery tool. We will inform (and probably amuse) you with the reality of some of Library of Congress's rules; and will give recommendations for maintaining and improving this valuable [resource; tool]. We are even sending you home armed with a list of some of the best LC subdivisions that will allow you to unearth the gems in your library's collection.

Why do we care so much?

Because over the past few years we have discovered just how powerful subdivisions can be. We started with an article about how handy these terms are in keyword searching. After positive feedback from the library community, we continued with a whole book! We then went from dabbling with subdivisions in keyword searches to diving headfirst in to the intricate rules. At the very beginning, Becky and I, both reference librarians, recruited an experienced cataloger,

Hiddy, to be our guide in exploring the depths of the mysterious (at least mysterious to public services librarians) “blue books”. And we have emerged with discoveries about the intricate system that is LC. Then we took all of this knowledge, decided what rules matter and when they can be cautiously ignored. We developed lists of the top performers, organizing them in ways that librarians could use and devised tricks for performing magic keyword searches that will make patrons exclaim, “how did you do that?”

Why should *you* care?

You should care because The LC subdivision is the best new “old thing we’ve got”:

You should care because often your users are looking for the “right words to type in” and frankly guessing just doesn’t work. Using Library of Congress’ terminology allows you to get a great return on your investment:

You should care Because, as an example, 2005 study from Gross and Arlene Taylor shows us that without subject headings [including subdivisions] “users performing keyword searches would miss more than one third of the hits they currently retrieve” (Gross & Taylor, 2005, C&RL Vol 66, no. 3, p. 223). Imagine if those same patrons were deliberately using subdivisions with their key terms!

And you should care because since you can use them in a keyword search, they work beautifully in an online environment. We have found that they work in WorldCat; Google Book Search; EbscoHost and others.

II. What Is a Subdivision?

Love and death in Renaissance Italy

Italy -- Social life and customs -- To 1500 -- Sources

Before we go further I want to give a quick overview of the LC subdivision. First the definition. Subdivisions are the “trailing” parts of a Library of Congress subject heading. The first segment of a subject heading is called the main heading, and it tells what the book is about. The subdivisions follow the main heading, are introduced by a dash, and add specificity.

Italy -- Social life and customs -- To 1500 -- Sources

This is an LC subject heading in its purest form, like it would have looked in a card catalogs, with all punctuation separating the different parts. Today each ILS and discovery tool has its own way of displaying subject headings, but for today, for the sake of clarity on our slides we’ll include the prominent dash.

So in this case,

Italy is the main heading; social life and customs is a subdivision, To 1500 is a subdivision, and –Sources is a subdivision.

Subdivisions fall into 4 functional categories.

Geographical

Helpful. . .and straightforward

A coast for all seasons : a naturalist's guide to the coast of South Carolina
Coastal ecology -- South Carolina.

Chronological

Quite helpful, but not so simple.

Canada—History—1841-1867

France—History—1848-1870

Iraq—History—To 634

Egypt—History—To 332 B.C.

Notice that each country has its own set of date ranges. These are not accidental date ranges, created on a lark. Rather they represent an (the) enormous body of scholarly work done at the Library of Congress.

Topical

The third type of subdivision, the topical subdivision, tells what approach the book takes. What aspect of the main topic is treated?

So, yes, the book is about Thomas Jefferson. But is it about his educational background?

Subdivision is **–Knowledge and learning**. Is it about his reading habits? **–Books and reading**.

Is it about where Jefferson liked to spend time? **–Homes and haunts**. Or who he hung out

with? **–Friends and associates** ~~–Relations with women~~

Form/Genre

The fourth category of subdivision is the form subdivision. These describe the material's genre or format. Here are a few of these.

Actors--Interviews,

Happiness—Anecdotes

Pianists –Diaries

These 3 lead you to formats that offer primary sources.

Aeronautics--Poetry

Cowboys --Songs and music

These subdivisions are just what they say they are.

Summary: subdivisions clue you in to the author's approach to the topic, specify the time period and any geographical emphasis, and identify the genre or format of the work.

III. Reality: Library of Congress Rules, Decisions, Definitions

When the three of us drew straws, I ended up with the job of explaining the system that supports LC's list of over 4000 subdivisions—an elaborate system of definitions, decisions, and rules. Heidi has just said that we can use these subdivisions as keywords, we can be carefree and freewheeling. That is true. If it weren't true, we wouldn't have bothered to do all this work to bring the subdivisions to you in the first place.

But sometimes, just sometimes, LC's rules and decisions can make a mess of a search. Over the next few minutes I want to give you a taste of what goes on ~~back~~ "back of the house", and show you what makes your subdivision search beautifully most of the time and, on occasion, fail miserably.

--Diaries

LC decided on the word Diaries for its subdivision. Not journals, not memoirs, not diary. – Diaries. Good search results rely on getting this detail right.

--Personal narratives

The meaning of this one is pretty clear. And LC added some useful rules. Any account that gets the subdivision --Personal narratives, must be first-person, autobiographical, and eyewitness. This is a world-class subdivision. Search results dazzle—usually. But occasionally a search turns up no hits, even though you know someone has written a personal account of a topic. Why?

It's because LC added a third condition. --Personal narratives only goes with wars and events—wars and events. And by events they mean BIG events.

So --Personal narratives works great for finding a veteran's story of serving in Vietnam. Or a personal account of surviving Hurricane Katrina.

But if you're looking for a firsthand, eyewitness account of something that is not a war or big event, --Personal narratives won't be there to help you out. A book about the 4 years my husband and I spent building our own house might be a good read, but it wouldn't be a personal narrative. The autobiography of a person with autism would not be a personal narratives either. *My life in libraries?* No.

Never assume that you and LC will agree—on a definition!

--Atlases or --Maps

[Hold up atlas] This is not an atlas. LC uses the subdivision --Maps to describe collections of maps, what we would all call atlases. Now there is a subdivision --Atlases. Why not use it? LC has set --Atlases aside for a different meaning : "bound collection of tables, charts, or plates" (Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged ed., 1961) Also, LC limited its use to scientific, medical, or technical fields. So while this Delorme atlas of North Carolina is not described by --Atlases, these books *are* assigned the subdivision: *Development of the chick heart, Photoguide of common skin disorders, Sewage organisms: A color atlas.*

The Times of Our Lives

Over the course of our project I've poked a lot of fun at LC's decisions. For Hiddy, a career cataloger, they always made sense. Not true for me. For example, let's take a look at LC's decisions regarding life. This one baffled me.

Library of Congress starts us off with --Childhood and youth. A good start. But the next available subdivision is this one: --Last years. LC, is there nothing between --Childhood and youth and --Last years. Did you just forget? Do I, at 56, not deserve a subdivision? I like this idea. Kornegay, Rebecca, 1953- --Glory days?

Now once LC reached --Last years, things do pick up. LC came back to life and gave us an exhaustive procession: --Last years --Last years and death; --Death, --Death and burial. LC offers us --Tomb, --Shrines, --Monuments, even --Death mask.

I was mystified. Why doesn't LC have a subdivision for the prime of life? But when we started putting together a list of subdivisions to use for finding out about people's lives, I saw what was going on.

According to Library of Congress. . .

We have relationships

--Family

--Friends and associates

And *relationships*

- Relations with women
- Relations with men
- Contemporaries

We can do things

- Marriage
- Sexual behavior
- Divorce
- Travel
- Political activity

We can succeed.

- Contributions in
- Influence

We can think

- Religion
- Philosophy
- Political and social views
- Humor

We can even have stuff

- Clothing
- Collections
- Homes and haunts

So my first impression was wrong. LC did not ignore adulthood. In fact, they suggest that it is indeed the prime of our lives.

It is easy to poke fun at the quirkiness of the system, but in reality, LC has created a remarkable assemblage of terminology to help us express complicated ideas. This goes far beyond deciding between automobile or car/lawyer or attorney.

IV. The Power of Searching with Subdivisions

Now it is time to show the advantages of using this fine, carefully crafted terminology and discover what has been collected. Let's approach this concept simply and be very pragmatic. We'll start with requests for information that sound very familiar to reference librarians. We are approached with natural language questions and explanations.

—I am an interior design student. I need to find out how architecture affects people,” or —How does the color of the room affect my mood?”

The trick to getting good information sources is to translate these natural language questions into potent search terms. What is at the heart of these inquiries? As far as Library of Congress is concerned it is how architecture or color affect ~~the~~ mental condition or personality of individuals” (Library of Congress 2009a, H1095). The subdivision that Library of Congress has chosen to describe this interaction is --Psychological aspects. So, the keyword search *color*

and psychological aspects, or, architecture and psychological aspects will be a good bet to get relevant material.

Patrons come to us with requests such as “How do I find out how people feel about _____, let’s say psychiatrists?” –Public opinion is the subdivision to use for such a question. A search in one of the EBSCOhost databases on *psychiatrists and public opinion* reveals a not very flattering picture, at least as far as American movies are concerned.

Let’s turn the tables and look to answer how psychiatrists feel about, well _____ whatever. –Attitudes is the subdivision we would turn to. Using the same EBSCOhost database to answer this question with *psychiatrists and attitudes* brings results. Reading one of the abstracts, I now know that psychiatrists and patients consider dress to be an important part of the doctor-patient relationship, and that a properly dressed psychiatrist is much more important to psychiatrists than to patients.

What was the impact? This perennial favorite can be answered with –Influence. It probably is more of a favorite with the teaching faculty than students.

And then there is the Why-does-it-matter? kind of question. I have already pointed out the –Psychological aspects subdivision earlier but any subdivision that has aspects included will perform wonders (economic aspects, environmental aspects, health aspects, moral and ethical aspects, physiological aspects, political aspects, psychological aspects, religious aspects, social aspects, sociological aspects).

Often library patrons have a need to get material on an unfamiliar topic. The topic might be new to them (“I know nothing about this topic and I am supposed to write a 15 page paper on this”). They might want to recapture what they once knew (“I used to know this stuff but it is not as fresh in mind as I thought”), or are trying to keep their heads above water in a course (“I need to bring my grades up”).

--Outlines, syllabi, etc. gets material to that is “brief statements of principle elements of a subject to be studied” (Library of Congress 2009a, H1095). Really very straight forward and to the point, more than our own outlines tend to be (Introduction! Meaty part! Conclusion!). --Problems, exercises, etc. will provide the opportunity to self-test what is known and where gaps still remain.

--Textbooks used to be reserved only for religious topics and foreign languages. Luckily, in 2002 Library of Congress had a change of heart. Now this subdivision gets us to books that are written on all kinds of subjects “in an organized and simplified manner” (Library of Congress 2009a, H2187).

Would you not think that the subdivision –Popular works, material for the non-specialist, would be a close match with --Textbooks, and maybe even hold the promise of a livelier read? Unfortunately only material that covers the sciences, legal disciplines, technical fields, and medicine will get this designation. LC, give us a break!

Current events spark renewed interest in world religions. The very elegant, yet totally unexpected --Essence, genius, nature subdivision lets us direct our patrons to material that explains the central element of a religion.

V. Using Subdivisions to Restore Life to a Topic

So what can you do about the too broad or too boring topic? The Civil War? Shakespeare?

Add a subdivision to your topic! They will give life to the tired old research project.

All of these are “Clark Kent Subdivisions”—at first glance they are unimpressive, but they are downright super when used in keyword searches with a topic.

We will start with the aspects, or as we call it “The Royal Family of Subdivisions” have a knack for giving any drab topic a fabulous makeover.

Here’s The makeover team:

Economic aspects

Health aspects

Moral and ethical aspects

Psychological aspects

Physiological aspects

Social aspects

Simply add “aspects” to your topic and prepare to be amazed!

Let’s take a topic we see all the time: Body image

Add aspects and your topic becomes: the psychological effect of foundational garments! *Jiggle: (re)shaping American women*

Next, Case Studies

One of our favorites!

Will save a research paper from sounding like an encyclopedia entry by providing examples from REAL LIFE! Add some “humanity” to the topic or to warn the reader with a “cautionary tale.” Add the phrase case studies for any true life account! Really—anything! Add it to a broad topic like Adoption, Patriotism, Murder, or Homosexuality.

Another Clark Kent subdivision is Pamphlets

LC defines them as “short, separately published, usually polemical, essays or treatises regarding controversial issues of contemporary interest, especially political or religious matters” (Library of Congress). As Hiddy says, they are the blogs of the time!

Miscellanea

Need inspiration? You are sure to find it with “Miscellanea

Miscellanea is applied to a subject when a work is:

Is a compilation of “unusual or miscellaneous facts about the subject without continuous text” (Library of Congress).

Or

Deals “with special aspects of a subject for which no other subdivision exists or can be established and yet, because of their unusual nature, cannot be treated as general works on the subject” (Library of Congress).

Or

Is “on a topic written in a question and answer format” (Library of Congress).

The results? See for yourself! Here are some sample titles from our catalog, ranging from silly to somber

- *You Are Weird: Your Body's Peculiar Parts And Funny Functions*
- ***Acupuncture: everything you ever wanted to know***
- *Weather's greatest mysteries solved!*

- *Bioethics at the movies*
- *Death at the ballpark : a comprehensive study of **game-related fatalities of players, other personnel and spectators in amateur and professional baseball, 1862-2007***
- *100 questions & answers about HIV and AIDS*

Sources— give a topic a little oomph by finding eyewitness accounts. Pair it with a broad historical topic and get results every time. Discover primary documents for the Byzantine Empire, the Women's Movement, Earthquakes—just about any topic! This is only one of several subdivisions that will help find primary documents; check out our handout (and our book!)

Not sure which subdivision to add to your search? Here are 3 ways to browse after the fact:

If you're really lucky, your catalog will be set up so that you can do a subject search, for say, Shakespeare, William and get a nice list of subject and subdivisions (show example), allowing you to see what subdivisions there are and what your library has.

If you have a discovery tool and it is set up like Harvard's HOLLIS catalog. You can do a search for William Shakespeare, look at the list of subjects; click on "more" and get a list of Subjects and Subdivisions. This is a great way to explore the unique materials in which your library has invested.

If you don't have those options, but your library catalog still displays the subject strings, you can look at relevant records to find out your options (show example).

VI. Conclusion: Recommendations for maintaining and improving this valuable tool

Standing our ground is an important, often difficult stance to take during an economic downturn. Tiresome as it might be for us, we need to insist on the continued financial and intellectual support for maintaining our collections, including how to best describe and access what we have collected.

Sometimes we have to repeat the obvious: Our catalogs are not just an easily described inventory of sweaters in red, blue, white, black, laptops with 2, 3, 6 GB of memory, Flickr pictures of "The beach", "Fluffy at the beach." No, they provide access to the greatest ideas and most complex issues of all times--among other things.

Most of the time the uninitiated, those still exploring and trying to discover this wisdom will avail themselves of our catalogs. A meaningful tool to access our collections will never be cheap, but do we not owe future generations the best access possible? Carefully applied metadata provides our libraries unique and lasting value, while poorly chosen metadata is a lasting handicap. Martha Yee made us aware of what is at stake when she raised these questions to the profession in 2007:

Is it too much to ask for our colleagues in the profession, at least, to understand and acknowledge the value of human intervention for information organization, expensive though it is? Surely the richest country in the world can afford to pay for the human labor required to keep its cultural record in good order for future generations. (Yee, 2007, p. 5).

The struggle continues and we are still looking for a cure of what ails our catalogs. Two years later, the article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, After losing users in catalogs, libraries

find better search software, Sept. 28th, 2009, tries to encourage us by stating that new technology trends will make everything better. →. a growing number of universities are shelling out serious money for sophisticated software that makes exploring their collections more like the easy-to-filter experience you might find in an online Sears catalog.” New technology alone will do little to improve results.

Bad data + excellent/expensive software = poor, undesirable results.

‘Putting lipstick on a pig’ comes to mind. A good supporting metadata foundation will benefit any new technological application. The serious money spent will have something to cling to. Responses to the previously mentioned *Chronicle of Higher Education* article pointed fingers in all directions. Whatever shortcomings our catalogs have in store, librarians need to be the go-to professional searchers when patrons need more than what they found using the -easy-to-use, online catalog search software.”

It goes without saying that we all will want to include the latest technology in our libraries to assist our patrons in their research activities but there are also other areas where we need to focus our attention and enrich the library experience for our patrons.

Librarians, please:

- Know the structure of your catalog and of the databases
- Add subdivisions to your lists of handy keywords
- Advocate for full subject cataloging. Counter arguments about cost-effectiveness with evidence of search-effectiveness
- Demand excellent subject access in expensive full-text databases

Publishers, Vendors, Catalog and Database Designers, please:

- Use the magnificent Library of Congress subject headings system in your products. The presence of subject headings—including subdivisions—is crucial in large full-text databases
- Invest in access points as well as in the digitization itself. Thousands of primary documents are wonderful, but we have to be able to find the one we need!
- Make subject headings prominent in results displays
- Decouple with care! Terms connected to one another in subject headings offer the searcher an understanding of the relationships between concepts and topics. Martha Yee and Shatford Layne (1998, 132) suggest, and it still holds true, that it is important to -keep the controlled vocabulary and the free text vocabulary distinct, so that the power of the controlled vocabulary is not lost.”
- Retain meaningful labels on facet displays so the searcher can make informed choices

EVERYBODY, please:

- Teach new librarians all the angles of professional searching—truly teach subject searching in reference classes, or in on-the-job training situations

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VII. Extra: Answers to questions posed in the abstract

Why Picasso never had a mistress

What, no mistresses for Picasso? Library of Congress is very discreet and deliberately vague. Most of us, including the famous, are only allowed --Relations with women, or --Relations with men. Heads of states get special consideration and are paired with genderless --Paramours. Sorry, mistresses are not available for subdivisions.

Why Cleopatra has no portraits

In our proposal we promised to tell you why Cleopatra has no portraits. It's because she lived before 1400 AD. That's why. Simple as that. According to LC, --Portraits describes collections of drawings, photographs, paintings of people—who lived after 1400 A.D. Those who lived before that date get the subdivision --Art. So Cleopatra has --Art, not --Portraits.

Why a cut-off of 1400? We suspected a turning point in civilization or in art history. Hiddy turned to her source high up in Library of Congress.

His reply:

"Unfortunately we have no historical record as to why the date 1400 A.D. was chosen"

Why it's a really bad idea to use memoirs when you're looking for memoirs