

12-1-1995

ALCTS Demystifying Subject Cataloging Institute

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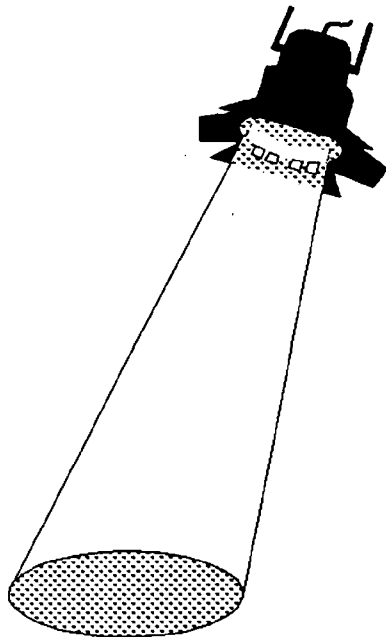
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Recommended Citation

Ellen T. McGrath, *ALCTS Demystifying Subject Cataloging Institute*, 20 ALLUNY Newsl. 15 (1995).

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SPOTLIGHT ON...

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ALCTS DEMYSTIFYING SUBJECT
CATALOGING INSTITUTE

I attended the "Demytifying Subject Cataloging" institute held in Rochester, New York on October 24-25, 1995. It was sponsored by ALCTS (Association for Library Collections & Technical Services). Coincidentally, Ellen Rappaport (Albany Law), my co-editor of the "Technical Tips" column in this newsletter, was also in attendance, though we did not know beforehand that we had both registered.

There were approximately 60 attendees and the faculty consisted of:

Lynn El-Hoshy, Senior Cataloging Policy Specialist, Library of Congress

Arlene G. Taylor, Associate Professor, School of Library & Information Science, University of Pittsburgh

J. Bradford Young, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania

Mark Ziomek, formerly Cataloging Policy & Support Office, Library of Congress, now Director, National Holocaust Museum, Washington, DC

Professor Taylor began with a presentation on "What Is the Subject of This Item? The Process of Subject Analysis." She broke the process of subject cataloging down into its component parts: 1. determine what it is about (aboutness); 2. translate aboutness into the subject heading and/or classification scheme used (hierarchical framework); and, 3. translate this framework into the specific symbols that apply to the work in hand. Professor Taylor's approach was a simple one that I found excellent. She prefaced her remarks by saying that all too few library schools seem to have the time to spend on subject cataloging, so the simple approach that she uses often is left unsaid. I know this was true of my own cataloging class. I always find the subject cataloging part the most difficult to get across in training and perhaps it is

because, until now, it had never been communicated to me in such a clear, straightforward manner.

Professor Taylor focussed on the parts of a work that can be of use to us in subject analysis: title, subtitle, verso, table of contents, internal indexes, preface, introduction, foreword, and conclusion. She also mentioned that illustrations, diagrams, and their captions can be quite helpful. Someone raised the question of the dust jacket, which Professor Taylor characterized as publisher "propaganda" that should not be used. We went through some exercises using a worksheet that she uses in her cataloging classes. These exercises illustrated easily how difficult it can be to do the subject analysis on certain works. One of the reasons is that we are each influenced by our own world view, experiences, opinion, education, judgment, etc. Yet, objectivity is one our goals in subject cataloging.

The resulting translation of concepts into index terms follows the general principles of specificity and direct entry. There is no arbitrary limit on the number of terms (theoretically) and concepts not present in the thesaurus used should be added. The identification of names (personal, corporate, geographic), chronological elements, and form also come into play. There was mention of the fact that LCSH is an example of precoordination, while total keyword access is the ultimate in post-coordination.

"Assigning Library of Congress Subject Headings: Understanding the Nature and Structure of LCSH" was the next presentation given by Lynn El-Hoshy. She began by reminding us to convert our topic into LCSH by using keywords and thinking of synonyms, then following the headings and cross references of LCSH. Ms. El-Hoshy referred us to the *Subject Cataloging Manual: Subject Headings* (SCM:SH) for instructions on basic philosophy and the specifics of assigning and constructing subject headings. She encouraged us to use our judgment, but to remain objective and to be consistent. Ms. El-Hoshy also responded to Professor Taylor's comment regarding the fact that there should not be a limit on the number of terms applied to a work by stating that as a practical matter, LC does not assign more than ten subject headings to a work.

Precoordination came about as a result of LC's need over the years to break up some really large files in a meaningful way. Some postcoordination does take place in a conscious manner by LC so as to avoid the result of creating an enormous amount of new headings. The example Ms. El-Hoshy gave of this was diseases in particular classes of persons. She went on to give a bit of the history surrounding the LCSH, which is really a whole system, not just the "red books." In addition, the system consists of the SCM:SH and the weekly lists of new, changes, and cancelled headings.

Mark Ziomek's session "What Do You Think of These Subject Headings?" was thought-provoking and a good way to get going on the morning of our second day of

the institute. We examined a number of subject headings on records created by LC with the object being to discover what was wrong with the headings. It is nice to know that LC makes mistakes too! Mr. Ziomek went on to describe the structure at LC and to discuss the process of the weekly lists and corresponding weekly meetings. He also mentioned SACO and encouraged everyone to participate in proposing new subject headings. It seems that LC typically adds 8,000-9,000 new subject headings each year, and this year, 1,400 of those were contributed by other libraries.

Ms. El-Hoshy was back up next with her presentation on "Subdivisions in LCSH." She discussed the various types: form, geographic, chronological, and topical in some detail. Luckily the SCM:SH provides us with a great deal of information on the application of subject subdivisions. Before this was published, it was very difficult for non-LC catalogers to figure out how to apply subdivisions. And the trend at LC is to record even more information in the SCM:SH in the future.

Subdivision application has gone through various phases at LC according to Ms. El-Hoshy. From the mid-1970s until about 1982, subdivisions were assigned liberally. Since then, the trend has switched to using new phrase headings more. "Bound concepts" often make more sense under direct entry. There has also been a change in the "May subdivide geographically" instruction. It used to be that LC would not add this unless the work at hand needed it added. Now it is added if a heading could logically be

subdivided geographically. Ms. El-Hoshy cautioned us that the *Free-Floating Subdivisions: An Alphabetical Index* can be used as an entry point to the SCM:SH or for copy cataloging verification, but that it should not be used alone for original cataloging. She also pointed out that the free-floating subdivisions are not really "free," since they do usually have limitations on the type of headings to which they can be applied.

"Geographic Headings and Subdivisions" by Mr. Ziomek was next. This session is a bit hard to summarize, but the handout included in our binder is an excellent one and I would be happy to share it with anyone who is interested in a copy. Actually that same comment goes for each of the sessions of this institute. Most of the information conveyed may exist somewhere in the LCSH, the SCM:SH, or wherever, but the presenters did an excellent job of boiling it all down and collecting it in their handouts under various categories.

The final session, "Airlie House" was given by J. Bradford Young. In it, Mr. Young discussed the Subject Subdivisions Conference sponsored by LC and held May 9-12, 1991 at Airlie House, Virginia. The purposes of the Conference were: 1. to make the assignment of subject headings more efficient; 2. to enhance and encourage cooperative cataloging efforts; and, 3. to improve subject access for online public access catalog (OPAC) users. Mr. Young presented the four hypothetical proposals that formed the basis for discussion at the Conference, the assumptions