

# Sears List of Subject Headings: An introduction to the Nineteenth Edition (2007)

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## Abstract

The paper discusses the importance of Vocabulary Control in Subject cataloguing. It gives a brief history of the Sears list from 1923 to 2007, highlights the major changes in all its 19 editions and makes a critical study of the 19th (2007) edition of the Sears List. It warns that it is not very suitable for Pakistani and other Asians' subjects and suggests some measures for adapting it to Pakistani and Indian subjects.

*Keywords: Sears List of Subject Headings; Vocabulary control; Subject cataloguing; Indexing languages*

## Introduction

Vocabulary control is important for providing subject access to information in libraries and databases. Names of subjects called, subject descriptors, must be standardized for use in subject catalogues, otherwise our information retrieval system will be chaotic and inefficient.

The *Sears List of Subject Headings* (popularly called the Sears List) is a known tool for assigning standardized subject headings to all types of documents in a general small libraries having upto 20,000 titles in all subjects. In Pakistani and Indian conditions it is suitable for public, college and small university libraries. Research, special and large libraries may not find it adequate or detailed enough for subject cataloguing their collections.

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## History

A standard and popular subject cataloguing tool for more than eight decades, the *Sears List of Subject Headings* was first designed in 1923 by Minnie Earl Sears (1873-1933) in deference to demands of small libraries for simpler and broader subject headings for use in their dictionary catalogues. Such libraries were finding L C subject headings list too detailed, complicated and also costly. As compared to the LCSH the *Sears List* has simple phrasing. The first edition contained only 3200 preferred headings. The list become popular for dictionary catalogues of medium and small size libraries. The 2<sup>nd</sup> (1926) and 3<sup>rd</sup> (1933) editions were again edited by her. From fourth to fourteenth (1939/1991) editions, it was regularly updated to include new subject headings and modernize the terminology of old ones, if needed. But the format continued the same with some new features such as the addition of Abridged DDC numbers. The orientation to the online environment started with the 13th edition (1986), edited jointly by Carmen Rovira and Caroline Reyes. It was the first edition to be created as an online database for editorial use. It initiated changes to suit online databases and OPACs searches by transcribing headings in natural form with most of the inverted headings being recast to go with the changed approach of users in searching electronic information. It is believed that majority of the users search subjects of an electronic database by natural form of their names. For example, Art became Islamic art to suit searches in online databases. "Library, Public" was changed to "Public library", similarly "Chemistry, Organic" was changed to "Organic chemistry". This also eased the congestion of entries under a single entry word. For example, all entries pertaining to libraries were now filed by the initial word instead of all converging under the word 'library', i.e. 'Public libraries' filed under 'p' and 'School libraries' under 's'. With the creation of the electronic database came frequent updates with new topics, current terminology and subject indexing theories. The 13th and subsequent editions follow *ALA Filing Rules* (1980). The de-inversion of heading lasted till to the 15<sup>th</sup> edition, the first edition edited by Dr Joseph Miller, now Vice President of the H W Wilson Company, New York.. Joseph Miller further edited editions 16(1997), 17(2000), 18<sup>th</sup> (2004) and

19<sup>th</sup>(2007) the later two editions were edited with the assistance of same associate editor.

Each edition of the *Sears List* strengthens and continues the policies and consolidates the reforms that began with the 15<sup>th</sup> edition. It is indeed an era of innovations in Sears. The latest knowledge from information sciences and information seeking behavior has been deployed to modernize the internal structure and grammar of the *Sears List*. Continuing adaptation constitutes the key to its success and popularity in the shifting sands of the information-seeking behavior of users. But the list is still a living manifestation of the principles of subject cataloguing put forth by C.A. Cutter (1837-1903).

Since the beginning the Sears List has always been published by the H.W. Company, New York who are its proprietors and copyright holders. Its editor is an employee of the Company. Its new editions are produced regularly to:

- Incorporate new subjects and their terms
- Restructure the form of old headings based on the changing information needs and information seeking behaviour of the users.
- Give new terms to old subject headings based on current usage
- Delete the obsolete terms.
- Discover new relations between subjects and terms thereof.

Many of the new headings are suggested by the working librarians, bibliographic products vendors, and the specialists with the H W Wilson Company. It simply means the new terms are from the recently published literature.

Orientation to the online environment started with the 13<sup>th</sup> edition (1986). It was the first edition to be created as an online database for editorial use Miller de-inversion process was completed.

Another important change introduced since its 15<sup>th</sup> edition is its thesaurus format of listing subject headings by using standard thesaural abbreviations, i.e. NT, BT, RT, USE and SA instead of x, xx, etc. Thesaurus format conform to the ANSI/NISO Standard (American Standards Institution) (1993). It gave every page a new totally new look. Though the format made easy work of cataloguers, yet it had little effect on the public catalogues and their users. Nevertheless, Sears remains a list of subject headings because it is still a general list for pre-coordinated subject headings, whereas a thesaurus is for a specialized subject area for use in post-coordinated subject searching. The current edition is the 19<sup>th</sup> (2007) edited by Joseph Miller in association with Barbara A Bristow.

### **Changes in and a Brief Review of the 19<sup>th</sup> edition (2007)**

Sears' philosophy is to accommodate change while maintaining sound continuity. There are about 440 new SHs in the new edition, though seminal changes are none. New headings are in the areas of computers, IT, politics, popular culture and psychology. Total number of preferred headings is likely to the tune of 8000, yet the number of headings that can be coined or subdivided is, as usual, much larger.

Two major areas of new additions are Islam (very obvious) and graphic novel—latter has thirty headings perhaps formulated from the WilsonWeb Database on Graphic Novels Core Collection. Islam has constantly remained in news since the 9/11 attacks, and many US schools have now introduced curricula on Islamic religion and culture. Some other new headings are: Reality shows, Suicide bombers, Stem cell research, Body piercing and many more drawn from literary warrant. Some other changes are in cancelled or modified headings (p. xlii): Biological diversity becomes Biodiversity, Native peoples has been replaced by Indigenous peoples. Some headings have been fine tuned, e.g., Fictitious character becomes Fictional character. "Principles ..." has been expanded a bit to formulate headings in some areas, namely, Native Americans, Government policy, and Mythology and folklore.

Some subdivisions in the main list do not appear in the separate “List of Subdivisions...” (p. xlv+): Following list is only random:

Bible-----Natural history  
Food-----Fiber content  
Photography-----Enlarging  
Popular music-----Writing and publishing

In fact these are very specific and exclusive subdivisions, which have resulted from the de-inversion of all the headings and are not subdivisions in the real sense. As an another contention Hindu philosophy should be Indian philosophy—latter term is apt and popular. Legally seeking Hindu philosophy is only a part, of the Indian philosophy. In the Sears Indian philosophy has not even been recognized as a non-preferred term. As other anomaly we can have two synonymous headings, Earth--Satellites and Moon for the same celestial entity. Under Body piercing RT could have been Tattooing and vice-versa. Moon worship and Sun worship have not been related. One wonders which small library will need SH “Napkin folding”; “Table setting and decorations” seems more than sufficient.

### **Principles of Vocabulary Control**

Every system of controlled vocabulary is based on some principles regarding:

- Choice of preferred headings (i.e. usable descriptors)
- Levels of specificity of terms (Depth of subject analysis allowed)
- Form and structure of preferred headings (Grammar of headings).

These issues make principles of the system and grammar of the headings (indexing language). Choice and structure of the headings is determined by user studies and the literary warrant.

Level is determined by the strength of collection, level of users and above all by the library policy.

### **Principles of the Sears List**

From the very beginning as a matter of policy, the Sears List has always been based on the principles of the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) with certain modifications needed for simplification. The principles of the Sears List are:

- Direct and specific entry
- Common usage
- Uniformity and consistency

It may be noted these are the same principles which C.A. Cutter (1837-1903) gave in his famous *Rules for a Dictionary Catalog* (1873). These principles have been explained in Sears 19 (2007) on pages xvi-xxii.

### **Specific entry**

It means a subject should be entered under its most specific heading, not under the class to which it belongs. For example, Rose should be entered under “Rose”, not under “flowers”. Penguin is entered “Penguins”, not under “Birds” or even “Water birds”. Similarly, Guide dogs are entered under “Guide dogs” not “dogs”. But specificity is a matter of relativity depending upon the strength of collection, levels of the users, and on the policy of the library.

### **Direct entry**

It means that the specific heading chosen should be entered directly as the lead point, instead of a subdivision. For example, Penguins is entered as such instead of Water birds--Penguins. Similarly use “Barbie doll” instead of Dolls--Barbie doll, Roses instead of Flowers-Roses dolls.

## Common usage

The terms chosen as preferred headings are from common usage. If a word has more than one spellings, then the most popular one is chosen for this purpose. (It may be noted that the Sears uses American spellings drawn Webster and Random House dictionaries. But the Indian libraries should use British spellings). It uses common and popular terms instead of scientific or technical terms or jargon. That is the Sears uses terms current among lay users. For example, it uses “Dinners” instead of “Banquets”; “Birds” instead of “Ornithology”; and “Renaissance” instead of Renascence.

## Uniformity

This is the very reason for compiling such tools. It means that a heading once chosen should be consistently and uniformly applied in its scope, meaning and spellings until a decision is taken to the contrary. It, however, does not mean that old terms cannot be changed or deleted, or new terms cannot be added. The Sears continuously does it.

## Structure of the Sears List

Sears List is an alphabetical [arranged word by word according to ALA Filing Rules (1980)] general list of standard names of subjects in English language for use in small and medium size libraries. It provides subject headings for the entire range of knowledge. The latest edition (19<sup>th</sup>, 2007) has the following bibliographic details:

Sears, Minnie Earl. *Sears List of Subject Headings* - 19<sup>th</sup> ed./ edited by Joseph Miller; associate editor, Barbara A Bristow. New York; Dublin: The H.W. Wilson Company, 2007. ii, 823p, ISBN-13:978-0-8242-1076-2. www.hwwilson.com

It is in two parts:

Introductory part including the list of about 500 (common) subdivisions.

List of subject headings in alphabetical order given in two columns on every page.

Introductory part describes brief history, and principles of the *Sears List*. But essentially it is a sort of an operation manual to use the *List* to select proper SHs. It also provides instructions to divide them further, if needed; and to coin new SHs as per grammar of the *Sears List*.

### List of SHs

Core of the system is the word by word alphabetical list of SHs. All the headings are of two types:

Non-preferred headings  
Preferred headings  
Subdivisions used to subdivide a preferred heading

### Non preferred headings

These headings are those which are not to be used. Such headings are given in light type face print. Each such non-preferred heading is invariably preceded by given the a lead "USE", directing us to the preferred heading, e.g. :

Cyclopedias

Use **Encyclopedias and dictionaries**

Cyclotron

Use **Cyclotrons**

Cytology

Use **Cells**

Dairy farming

Use **Dairying**



Obviously the SH following the word USE is always printed in bold face; and a full entry exists for all such headings at proper alphabetical place in the List.

### Preferred headings

Printed in bold type these are the headings which can be assigned to a document. These headings broadly categorized are: Ideas, Objects, Places, Processes and Relationships. Under with preferred heading is given the full entry with its DDC class number(s) scope or definitional note if any, instruction for its further subdivision, and all the Narrower (NT), Broader (BT), Related (RT) terms and also to other headings "to be [Coined and] added as needed". For example take the following simple entry :

**Dairying** (May subdiv. geog.) **636.2; 637**

Use for materials on the production and marketing of milk and milk products and for general materials on dairy farming.

UF	Dairies Dairy farming Dairy industry
BT	Agriculture Livestock industry
NT	Dairy cattle Milk

It means the following in practical terms:

The SH Dairying (printed in bold type face) can be used as a heading.

"May subdiv. geog" given in the parenthesis means this heading may be subdivided geographically (by a place name), e.g.

Dairying - India  
Dairying - Haryana  
Dairying - Karnal

636.2 and 637 are its DDC numbers from the Abridged DDC-14 (2004).

The three terms namely Dairies, Dairy farming and Dairy industry given against the abbreviation UF (Used for) are non-preferred (synonyms) of the heading used. These are equivalent to Dairying in meaning. For this, the cataloguers will have to make *see* references from these terms to the entry terms, that is, from the terms not-used to the term used e.g. :

Dairies *see* **Dairying**  
Dairy farming *see* **Dairying**  
Dairy industry *see* **Dairying**

BT means (hierarchically) Broader Term. Its practical implication is to prepare “see also” entry from broader to narrower term above :

Agriculture  
*see also Dairying*  
Livestock industry  
*see also Dairying*

NT means Narrower Term. For this we have to make *see* references from broader to narrower terms :

Dairying  
*see also Dairy cattle; Milk*

RT means related terms. These are the terms at equal level of hierarchy but are related with the entry in some way. Its practical implication is to prepare *see also* entries on reciprocal basis. For example in the entry

Diagnosis	616.07	-----
		-----
		-----
RT	Pathology	

So we will prepare the following two entries for the RT:

Diagnosis  
    *see also* Pathology  
Pathology  
    *see also* Diagnosis

### Subdivisions

Strictly speaking preferred headings are of two types. About 500 preferred SHs are used as direct headings as well as subdivisions to other SHs. For example, Directories is a heading and also used as a subdivision, e.g.

Directories	- History
Mumbai	- Directories
Colleges and universities	- Directories
Physicians	- Directories

### Key headings

In the List all subjects are not listed. For some subjects models are given to coin SHs on that pattern. On the basis of these models analogous headings can be coined. Major key (or model) headings (given on page xli) are:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Model heading</b>
Author	: Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616
Country	: United States
State	: Ohio
City	: Chicago (Ill)
Language	: English language
Literature	: English literature
Ethnic	: Native American
Public figures	: President United States
Wars	: World war, 1939-1945

It means, if we have a subject pertaining to any country we will look under the United States for a similar SH for that country, and then adapt the heading accordingly. If our subject is

Geography of India

We will look under the United States where an analogous heading is

United States - Geography

So our SH will be

India - Geography

Similarly, for

Gazetteer of Haryana

In this case we will look under Ohio, and adapt the heading:  
Haryana - Gazetteer

For historical buildings of Delhi, we will look under Chicago, and form the following heading:

Historic buildings - Delhi

For a book on "Style of Shri Prem Chand" we will look under Shakespeare, William to get the following SH:

Prem Chand, 1880-1940 - Technique

Similarly Hindi Grammar will get the heading:

Hindi language - Grammar

Sanskrit *Ucharan* will get the SH

Sanskrit language - Pronunciation

## Some suggestions for postulating new key headings

Key headings form a vital part of the system to coin new headings while keeping the volume slim and trim. This small list (p. xii ) is frozen for a long time. It is time to identify and designate a few more key headings. Some candidate headings for such elevated positions are obtruding. Bible has seventy headings both preferred and non- preferred, while say the holy Koran has only two, and the Vedas has a single entry. Most of the Biblical phrased headings or subdivisions can smoothly be transferred to other scriptures. On the Biblical analogy we can have SHs like Koran in literature, Koranic cosmology, and Koran–Prophecies. Other heading which can be upgraded seems Napoleon I, Emperor of the French. Need is to identify many more key headings.

Going further it seems every preferred heading is a key heading for its NTs. For example, From the SH Flowers we can derive SHs:

Roses--United States  
Roses–Drying  
Roses arrangement  
Roses in art  
Even, Artificial Roses.

As other examples, we can coin Computer games industry from Computer software industry; and Broadcast journalism–objectivity; Reporters and reporters–Objectivity from Journalism. It means what is true of a broader class is equally true of its narrow class, by the principle of phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny.

This will enormously enhance the capacity of the *List* without adding even an iota to its text. Awaited is a single command from editors to authorize this. That is need to is to make this provision explicitly in the “Introduction...”.

## Subdivisions

Subdivisions are a mean to make a heading more specific and to make class of headings smaller. Some of the SHs are already subdivided, while all the SHs in the list may be further subdivided by any of the about 500 subdivisions given on pages xiv-l of the Sears List-19 to make a headings more specific :

Science	--	Philosophy
Food	--	Fiber contents
Girls	--	Education
Trees	--	India
Education	--	Bibliography
Bible	--	Study and teaching
India	--	History--1857-1947
Architecture	--	20 <sup>th</sup> Century

These subdivisions are either generally applicable to all the SHs or somewhat restricted in use suitable for a given category of headings. It may be noted that though the list of subdivisions is given separately, yet instructions to apply these subdivisions are given for each separately in the main list under that heading. For example, to use "Indexes" which is listed as a subdivision, we go to the main list (p. 384, Sears - 19). There we find the instruction to use it as a subdivision under names of subjects:

English literature - Indexes  
India - History - Indexes

As said earlier some headings are both a SH as well as a subdivision. It is due to the growing complexity of subjects and documents. For example, bibliography is a SH as well as a subdivision. There are four types of subdivision:

1. Topical: Birds--Eggs
2. Bibliographical: Sindhi language - Dictionaries
3. Geographical: Trees -- India
4. Chronological: India -- History--1857-1947
5. English literature -21<sup>st</sup> century

## Categories omitted

As said earlier, the Sears is a list/register of headings as well as it provides patterns and instructions to coin headings for new and old subjects. Paradoxically the headings which can be newly formulated from the *Sears* are much more in number than listed there. These unlisted but coinable headings mostly pertain to:

Specific names of individuals, corporate bodies, associations, institutions, commercial organizations, processes, events, natural, and geographical entities (mountains, rivers, lakes etc), flowers, vegetables, fruits, animals and all creatures (living, extinct, or mythical). All these can form subject headings and are to be supplied by the cataloguers as per the instructions. Other categories of headings to be coined are by the use of subdivisions taken from pages xiii-l.

We can have the following subject headings though these are not listed in the Sears List:

- Bhuto, Benazir - Biography
- Punjab University - Administration
- Manto, Sadat Hasan - Characters
- Nishan-e-Pakistan - Maintenance and repair
- Urdu language - Dictionaries
- Blauchistan - Boundaries
- Himalayas - Geography
- Holy Quran - Quotations
- Parrots - Eggs
- Pakistan International Airlines - Accounting
- Pakistan - Bibliography
- Sunnis - Canada
- Roses -Collection and preservation- Pakistan

## Limitations

It may be noted that the Sears list is designed for American, Christians and Western Culture. It also uses American

spellings, for example, “catalog” instead of “catalogue”. We can modify to use Pakistan/British spellings. Content wise for other cultures and countries, it may not be wholly suitable. It has headings which have no relevance in India at the moment, e.g., Only child [families], Unmarried fathers, Teenage fathers. Sometimes it looks too specialized for a small library, e.g., Napkin folding. On the other hand it does not have headings for Asian subjects and concepts. There is no heading specific to Caste systems, Gherao, Mosques, Honour killings, *Mehr*, Jihad, Child marriage, Dowry deaths, etc. For such subjects the Pakistani libraries will have to make their own SHs or modify and adapt the existing ones. For example for History of Mosques in Sindh, we have to adapt the heading “Ohio-Church history” to get Sindh-Mosques history. It makes the SHs work interesting and challenging.

Encouraged by the international use of the Sears List, the H. W. Wilson Company is toying with the idea of published its international companion to suit different countries and cultures.

### Further Reading

Satija, M.P. and Haynes, Elizabeth: *User's Guide to the Sears Lists of Subject Headings* Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008.

### Appendices

#### 2005 Sears additions

Affective disorders	Assisted living
Affirmations	Aunts
African American dancers	Baboons
African American educators	Badgers
African American inventors	Badges
African American singers	Bathrooms
Air guitar	Bears
Apes	Beetles
Aphasia	Cajuns
Appalachian Region	Caribbean Region
Arachnids	Chickens
Asperger's syndrome	Chimpanzees



Chinese New Year  
Cinco de Mayo (Holiday)  
Cockroaches  
Comparative literature/English and German  
Comparative literature/German and English  
Crickets  
Digestive system  
Electronic reference services (Libraries)  
Entropy  
Flannel boards  
Gorillas  
Grandfathers  
Grandmothers  
Habeas corpus

**2006 additions**

401(k) plans  
Academy Awards (Motion pictures)  
Adults  
Adventure travel  
Air travel  
Alimony  
Ambition  
Amnesia  
Anime  
Arson  
Art deco  
Art nouveau  
Attention deficit disorder  
Avalanches  
Avant-garde (Aesthetics)  
Bar mitzvah  
Bat mitzvah  
Beads  
Beauty contests  
Belly dance  
Betrothal  
Bisexuality

Helplessness (Psychology)  
Human genome  
Icons (Computer graphics)  
Iron in the body  
Isolationism  
Minerals in human nutrition  
Minerals in the body  
Online journalism  
Open access publishing  
Self-help techniques  
Senior centers  
String theory  
Suicide bombers  
Uncles  
Vision in animals  
War reparations  
Weblogs

Bishops  
Blindness  
Body piercing  
Book clubs (Discussion groups)  
Border patrols  
Burlesque (Literature)  
Burlesque (Theater)  
Business consultants  
Cancer/Environmental aspects  
Canonization  
Carbohydrates  
Catholic Church/Bishops  
Chests  
Child actors  
Chinese cooking  
Cholesterol  
Christian-owned business enterprises  
Computer animation  
Disabilities  
Diseases/Causes  
Domestic terrorism  
Emmy Awards

Environmentally induced diseases	Nature and nurture
Evacuation of civilians	Neopaganism
Exiles	Neptune (Planet)
Experimental medicine	Nineteen eighties
Extortion	Nineteen fifties
Grammy Awards	Nineteen forties
High-carbohydrate diet	Nineteen nineties
Identity theft	Nineteen seventies
Igloos	Nineteen sixties
Internship programs	Nineteen thirties
Interviewing (Journalism)	Nineteen twenties
Invalids	Open source software
Job interviews	Phonetic spelling
Jupiter (Planet)	Pluto (Planet)
Kabuki	Postpartum depression
LSD (Drug)	Reality television programs
Labyrinths	Small claims courts
Leprosy	Social status
Lifeguards	Spelling
Loch Ness monster	Stem cell research
Low-carbohydrate diet	Teddy bears
Low-cholesterol diet	Theater/Japan
Low-fat diet	Troy (Extinct city)
Mercury (Planet)	Turkey/Antiquities
Milky Way	Uranus (Planet)
Motion picture theaters	Venus (Planet)
Movement disorders	Wikis (Computer science)
Nations	Zines