

**The wisdom of the cataloguers:
LCSH, indexer inconsistencies and
collective intelligence**

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The Wisdom of the Cataloguers

“Sometimes the only person who has devoted fifteen minutes of mental receptivity and appreciation to a book, aside from the author and (with luck) its publisher, is the cataloguer at the library who described it.”

(Nicholson Baker, The Size of Thoughts: Essays and Other Lumber, 1996)

Indexer Inconsistencies

Modernism : 1890-1930 / edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane.

(15 Responses – 23 Headings)

- 5: Modernism (Literature)
- 5: Modernism (Literature)--Europe
- 4: Literature, Modern--20th century--History and criticism
- 3: European literature--19th century--History and criticism
- 3: European literature--20th century--History and criticism
- 3: Modernism (Literature)--History and criticism
- 3: Literature, Modern--19th century--History and criticism
- 2: European literature--History and criticism
- 2: European literature--20th century
- 2: Literary movements--Europe--20th century
- 1: Culture in literature
- 1: European drama--20th century--History and criticism
- 1: European fiction--20th century--History and criticism
- 1: European poetry--20th century--History and criticism
- 1: Europe--Intellectual Life--19th century
- 1: Europe--Intellectual Life--20th century
- 1: Literature--20th century
- 1: Literature--19th century
- 1: Intellectual life
- 1: Literary movements
- 1: Literature and history--Europe--20th century
- 1: Literature and society--Europe
- 1: Literature, Experimental

Aboutness

“Assign headings based on an analysis of the contents of the work being cataloged”

(Library of Congress Subject Headings Manual, Section: H180, Rule 3: Cataloging treatment)

Specificity

“Assign headings that are as specific as the topics they cover.

Specificity is not a property of a given subject heading; instead, it is a relative concept that reflects the relationship between a subject heading and the work to which it is applied. For example, a seemingly broad heading like Psychology is specific when it is assigned to an introductory textbook on psychology. The method through which specificity is achieved depends on the nature of the available headings. In many cases, specificity can be achieved by assigning a basic heading consisting of one word or a phrase; in other cases, specificity can be achieved by subdividing a heading. See sec. 15 below for a discussion of the construction of subject headings.”

(Library of Congress Subject Headings Manual, Section: H180, Rule 4: Specificity)

Objectivity

“Avoid assigning headings that label topics or express personal value judgments regarding topics or materials. Individual cataloger knowledge and judgment inevitably play a role in assessing what is significant in a work's contents, but headings should not be assigned that reflect a cataloger's opinion about the contents. **Consider the intent of the author or publisher and, if possible, assign headings for this orientation without being judgmental.** Follow stated intentions of the author or publisher in such matters as readership, audience level, treatment as fact or fiction, etc.”

(Library of Congress Subject Headings Manual, Section: H180, Rule 14: Objectivity)

The Wisdom of Crowds

1. Diversity of opinion
2. Independence of decision
3. Decentralisation of expertise
4. A method to summarise these individual decisions

(James Surowiecki, The wisdom of crowds, 2004)

Rules for a Dictionary Catalog

OBJECTS. *

1. To enable a person to find a book of which either
 - (A) the author
 - (B) the title
 - (C) the subject } is known.
2. To show what the library has
 - (D) by a given author
 - (E) on a given subject
 - (F) in a given kind of literature.
3. To assist in the choice of a book
 - (G) as to its edition (bibliographically).
 - (H) as to its character (literary or topical).

(Charles C. Cutter, Rules for a printed dictionary catalog (4th ed.), 1904)

Some examples

URL

<http://46.137.185.152>

Sample searches

@and @attr 1=4 "story of art" @attr 1=1003 "gombrich"

@and @attr 1=4 "modernism" @attr 1=1003 "bradbury"

@and @attr 1=4 "order of things" @attr 1=1003 "foucault"

@and @attr 1=4 "selfish gene" @attr 1=1003 "dawkins"

@and @attr 1=4 "politics and poetics of transgression" @attr 1=1003 "stallybrass"

Story of art / E.H. Gombrich.

Headings Summary

Number of titles selected: 189

Number of titles with 650 fields: 180

Suggested Headings

179: Art--History

1: Art--Study and teaching

1: Art--History--Periodicals

Step 1: RPN query

Input RPN query (@and @attr 1=4 "Insert Title Here" @attr 1=1003 "Insert Author Here")

Step 2: Results List

Targets Summary

2 hit(s) from Library of Congress
2 hit(s) from National Library of Wales
1 hit(s) from Bangor University Library
1 hit(s) from Trinity College Dublin Library
3 hit(s) from University College Cork Library
1 hit(s) from University of Western Australia
3 hit(s) from Victoria University Library
3 hit(s) from University of Queensland
1 hit(s) from University of Canberra
2 hit(s) from University of Pretoria Library
3 hit(s) from University of Hong Kong
1 hit(s) from Brown University Library
1 hit(s) from Boston University Libraries
2 hit(s) from Deakin University Library
9 hit(s) from OhioLINK
0 hit(s) from Washington State University
1 hit(s) from New York Public Library
0 hit(s) from East Chicago Public Library
0 hit(s) from Berkeley Public Library
1 hit(s) from SOAS Library
2 hit(s) from Nottingham Trent University Library
3 hit(s) from Oxford University Library
3 hit(s) from University of London Library
2 hit(s) from University of Exeter
1 hit(s) from City University London

Results Summary

Number of hits: 48
Number of empty records: 0
Number of records saved: 48

Step 3: Select Titles

Select Headings field to compare

Select Titles to compare

Modernism, 1890–1930 / edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane.
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Modernism : 1890–1930 / edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane.
880–01 Xian dai zhu yi / Zhongguo she hui ke xue yuan wai guo wen xue yan jiu suo wai guo wen xue yan jiu zi liao cong kan bian ji wei yuan hui
Modernism, 1890–1930 / edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane.
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Modernism 1890–1930 / edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane.

Submit

Modernism : 1890-1930 / edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane.

Headings Summary

Number of titles selected: 46

Number of titles with 650 fields: 44

Suggested Headings

30: Modernism (Literature)

5: Literature, Modern--20th century--History and criticism

4: Modernism (Literature)--History and criticism

4: Modernism (Literature)--Europe

3: Modernism (Literature)--History

3: Literature, Modern--19th century--History and criticism

1: Modernism--Literature

1: Literature--History--Modern

1: Literature History and criticism

1: European literature History and criticism

The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences / Michel Foucault.

Headings Summary

Number of titles selected: 82

Number of titles with 650 fields: 78

Suggested Headings

68: Learning and scholarship

53: Civilization--History

15: Postmodernism

15: Knowledge, Theory of

1: Sociology--Philosophy

1: Learning and scholarship--Europe

1: Art--Philosophy

1: Aesthetics

The selfish gene / Richard Dawkins.

Headings Summary

Number of titles selected: 77

Number of titles with 650 fields: 74

Suggested Headings

53: Genetics

42: Evolution (Biology)

25: Sociobiology

22: Evolution

11: Natural selection

9: Animals, Habits and behavior of

8: Behavior genetics

7: Animal genetics

5: Animals--Genetics

4: Animal behavior

1: Evolutionary genetics

1: Evolution--popular works

Politics and poetics of transgression / Peter Stallybrass and Allon White.

Headings Summary

Number of titles selected: 25

Number of titles with 650 fields: 25

Suggested Headings

20: Social psychology

20: Literature and society

19: Hierarchies

4: Literature, Modern--History and criticism

3: Middle classes in literature

2: Middle class in literature

1: Social interaction

1: Social history

1: Social aspects

1: Moral conditions in literature

1: Manners and customs in literature

1: Manners and customs

1: Literature, Modern

1: Literature

1: Community life