



Using Library of Congress Subject Headings

Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) are a part of the Library of Congress Classification System, a system of shelving books with similar topics together. Subject headings are those terms used to identify the topics addressed by a book. You can use LCSH to help choose appropriate terms for doing searches in the online catalog, the print indices and in electronic databases.

How it works. Look up "ethnicity" in the LCSH books, located to the right of the New York Times Index.

You will see this:

Ethnicity (May Subd Geog)

Here are entered works on the subjective sense of belonging to an individual ethnic group...

UF Ethnic identity

Group identity, Ethnic

BT Group identity

RT Multiculturalism

Pluralism (Social sciences)

SA *subdivisions* Race identity *or* Ethnic identity *under individual races or ethnic groups, e.g.* Afro-Americans—Race identity; Japanese Americans—Ethnic identity; Australian aborigines—Ethnic identity

NT Blacks—Race identity

Ethnicity in children

--Religious aspects

A callout box with a speech bubble shape pointing to the text "Here are entered works on the subjective sense of belonging to an individual ethnic group...". The box contains the text "Scope note".

Scope note

What does it all mean?

Next to the word "Ethnicity" are the words "May Subd Geog". This means that the subject terms within the broad subject "Ethnicity" may be subdivided geographically. In other words, it is possible to search specifically for Ethnicity in the United States, for example. In the OPAC under subject search you would type in "ethnicity united states". On the next line there may be a scope note that clarifies the meaning of the heading.

- **UF** stands for "**Used For.**" LCSH tells us that the subject heading "Ethnicity" covers "Ethnic identity" and "Group identity, Ethnic." "Ethnic identity," and "Group identity, Ethnic" are NOT subject headings.
- **BT** stands for "**Broader Topic.**" In the example above, "BT Group identity" signifies that "Group identity" can be used in a subject search if "Ethnicity" is too specific for your needs. It could be said that the broader topic "Group identity" is more general than "Ethnicity."
- **RT** stands for "**Related Topic.**" These terms are neither broader nor narrower than "Ethnicity," but you may want to use them to find more material related to your topic of interest.
- **SA** stands for "**See Also.**" This reference can give hints for finding information related to your topic within other subject headings.
- **NT** stands for "**Narrower Topic.**" These are subject search terms that can be used to find material on more specific topics, essentially sub-topics of the subject "Ethnicity."

Similar to the way a geographic region can be tagged on the given subject headings, other terms can be tagged on the subject headings to narrow your subject search. These terms are followed by dashed lines (--) in LCSH. For example, under Ethnicity the subtopic is "--Religious aspects"