

# Sears List of Subject Headings

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## INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

In 1876, Charles A. Cutter, a librarian at the Boston Athenaeum, published *Rules for a Dictionary Catalog*, in which he listed three objectives for a catalog. These are still taught today, and have been regarded by many to be the classic objectives for a catalog (Jeng, 1997). According to Cutter, these objectives of a bibliographic system are:

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
  - a. By a given author
  - b. On a given subject
  - c. In a given kind of literature
3. To assist in the choice of a book
  - a. As to its edition (bibliographically)
  - b. As to its character (literary or topical)
 (Cutter, 1904).

While these objectives still apply, it is the identification of a subject, given kind of literature, or character of a book that is of importance as they relate to the *Sears List of Subject Headings*. In order to meet 1c, 2b, 2c, and 3b of Cutter's objectives, controlled vocabularies of terminologies, which contain one term per concept were established and become known as lists of subject headings (Akers, 1969; Kaplan & Riedling, 2006). There are various subject heading lists with authorized headings that are used as the standard headings for a particular catalog to enable collocating of materials on a similar subject (Karpuk, 2008; Taylor, 2006). However, as Sanford Berman has indicated in his research, these headings lists do not always present the best terms (Berman, 1971).

The most popular list used in school media centers and small-to-medium sized libraries is the *Sears List*

(Kaplan & Riedling, 2006). Other subject heading lists include the *Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)* used for college and university libraries, the *Weine Classification Scheme* for use in Judaica collections, and *Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)* developed by the National Library of Medicine. According to Joseph Miller, former Vice-President of Cataloging Services at H. W. Wilson Company and editor of the most recent edition of *Sears*, some specialized libraries use an in-house list of subject headings for the main focus area of the collection and *Sears* for general materials in the collection (J. Miller, personal communication, February 19, 2010).

## BACKGROUND

The last of the three major subject heading lists, and one of the two still being used today, *Sears* first appeared in 1923 to join the Library of Congress's *Subject Headings Used in the Dictionary Catalogs of the Library of Congress* and the American Library Association's *List of Subject Headings for Use in Dictionary Catalogs* (see Table 1 for a timeline). The Library of Congress list has always been tailored to the needs of the Library of Congress, one of the largest research libraries in the world. According to the introduction to *Sears*, "The *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, which is in print now comprises five large volumes, is primarily a list of headings that have been used in the Library [of Congress]" (Miller, 2007, p. xvi). Thus, *Sears* was created "based on the headings used by nine small libraries that were known to be well cataloged" (Miller, 2007, p. vii) as determined by the original compiler, Minnie Earl Sears, and compiled into a single list – the *List of Subject Headings for Small Libraries*. *Sears* never intended that her list be used for juvenile materials, but rather for small and medium-sized general collections.

While *Sears* is now the mainstay of small and medium-sized-public libraries and K-12 collections,

Table 1. Timeline

Date	Title	Edition	Editor	Other Information
1876	<i>Cutter's Rules for a Dictionary Catalog</i> issued as a second part of the Bureau of Education's Special Report on <i>Public Libraries in the United States of America</i>	1st		
1889	<i>Cutter's Rules for a Dictionary Catalog</i>	2nd		
1891	<i>Cutter's Rules for a Dictionary Catalog</i>	3rd		
1892	ALA (American Library Association) appoints committee (C.A. Cutter, Gardner M. Jones, and G. E. Wire) to compile a list of subject headings			
1895	ALA produces <i>List of Subject Headings for Use in Dictionary Catalogs</i>		C.A. Cutter, Gardner M. Jones, G. E. Wire	First widely accepted universal list for medium sized libraries.
1898	<i>ALA's List of Subject Headings for Use in Dictionary Catalogs</i>		C. A. Cutter, Gardner M. Jones, Edith Fuller	
1904	<i>Cutter's Rules for a Dictionary Catalog</i>	4th		
1909	Library of Congress (LC) first begins its list of headings used by the LC in <i>Subject Headings Used in the Dictionary Catalogues of the Library of Congress</i>			
1911	<i>ALA List of Subject Headings for Use in Dictionary Catalogs</i>	3rd		Now called <i>ALA List of Subject Headings</i> .
1914	LC finishes its first list of subject headings			
1916	<i>Subject Headings for Juvenile Catalogs</i> published by ALA		Margaret Mann	
1919	<i>Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)</i>	2nd		
1923	<i>LCSH</i>	3rd		
1923	<i>List of Subject Headings for Small Libraries: Compiled from Lists Used in Nine Representative Small Libraries</i>		Minnie Earl Sears	
1926	<i>List of Subject Headings for Small Libraries, Compiled from Lists Used in Nine Representative Libraries</i>	2nd	Minnie Earl Sears	
1928	<i>List of Subject Headings for Small Libraries, Compiled from Lists Used in Nine Representative Libraries</i>	2nd, 2nd printing	Minnie Earl Sears	
1933	<i>List of Subject Headings for Small Libraries</i>	3rd	Minnie Earl Sears	First edition to include <i>Practical Suggestions for the Beginner in Subject Heading Work</i> .
1933	<i>Practical Suggestions for the Beginner in Subject Heading Work</i> published as a separate pamphlet		Minnie Earl Sears	
1933	<i>Subject Headings for Juvenile Catalogs</i> published by ALA		E. S. Smith	
1935	<i>List of Subject Headings for Small Libraries, Compiled from Lists Used in Nine Representative Libraries</i>	3rd, 2nd printing	Minnie Earl Sears	
1939	<i>List of Subject Headings for Small Libraries: Including Practical Suggestions for the Beginner in Subject Heading Work</i>	4th	Isabel Stevenson Monro	Includes DDC (Dewey Decimal Classification) numbers.

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