

OVERVIEW AND PRINCIPLES OF SCIS SUBJECT HEADINGS

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1 Introduction

1.1 Functions of SCIS Subject Headings

The purpose of *SCIS Subject Headings* is to provide a controlled language approach suitable for subject access to the library catalogue for primary and secondary school students. In order to achieve this aim, *SCIS Subject Headings* fulfils three basic criteria:

1. It is suitable for use by school students and staff in primary and secondary schools.
2. It uses Australasian terminology which reflects changes in curriculum.
3. It represents new and established ideas and concepts.

SCIS Subject Headings is made up of three main elements:

1. an alphabetical listing of allowed and non-allowed headings
2. cross-references from non-allowed to allowed headings and between allowed headings
3. a set of prescriptive guidelines for the construction of other headings not in the list.

This list is used by SCIS cataloguers when selecting or devising appropriate subject headings for educational and curriculum resources catalogued onto the SCIS database. The list can be used by schools that subscribe to SCIS to assist their library staff in conforming to SCIS standards when adding subject headings to local resources.

SCIS Subject Headings can be used by organisations or services that require an English language controlled vocabulary with an Australasian focus intended for the subject analysis of resources. For example, the list could be used as a source to assign headings to indexed journal articles in an online database. *SCIS Subject Headings* could be used when creating metadata for collections of educational documents. The list may appeal to public libraries, given the detailed attention to genre and other headings for fiction material.

1.2 Background to the Schools Catalogue Information Service

The Schools Catalogue Information Service (SCIS) maintains and develops a bibliographic database for resources accessible in school libraries. These records are available through subscription via the Internet. To ensure satisfactory retrieval of information sources in the school catalogue considerable time needs to be spent in documenting and applying descriptive cataloguing rules, maintaining a controlled vocabulary for subject analysis and the assigning of subject headings and classification numbers to each resource. The use of SCIS enables library staff to reduce the time needed to develop and maintain the school catalogue. School catalogues have been enhanced with an extension of services including bibliographic records for websites and additional fields such as contents notes.

The service originally began as the Australian Schools Catalogue Information Service (ASCIS) in November 1982. Prior to the introduction of this national cooperative cataloguing scheme, representatives from eleven authorities (comprising education departments from all States and Territories, the National Catholic Education Commission, the National Council of Independent Schools and the Commonwealth Schools Commission) participated in a project initiated by the Commonwealth Schools Commission, which recognised the benefits of having one list of subject headings to ensure the effective functioning of the cooperative cataloguing scheme.

A pilot edition of *ASCIS Subject Headings* was published in 1983. It drew on the available controlled vocabularies developed by individual education departments, which had provided cataloguing services to schools for many years. Two well-established overseas publications were also consulted when the list was being compiled: the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* and *Sears List of Subject Headings*. These lists are still consulted when new headings are being considered for inclusion in *SCIS Subject Headings*.

The first edition of *ASCIS Subject Headings* was published in 1985. The third edition (published in 1994) incorporated headings relevant to New Zealand schools. By this stage the name of the service had changed to Schools Catalogue Information Service in recognition of the usefulness of the SCIS database and *SCIS Subject Headings* to schools outside Australia.

The Schools Catalogue Information Service operates with the collaboration of the cataloguing agency in the New South Wales Department of Education and the support of cataloguers in Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria and New Zealand. The service is coordinated and supported by Education Services Australia in Melbourne.

2 Principles of SCIS heading construction

SCIS Subject Headings adheres to a number of principles and policies, which are used as a guide when headings are being revised or new headings added to the list. These principles and policies are constantly reviewed to ensure that they meet the needs of users.

2.1 The principle of literary warrant

The SCIS database serves as the primary literary warrant for *SCIS Subject Headings*.

However, there is also recognition that many schools use *SCIS Subject Headings* for items that are catalogued locally on their own library systems. Such resources include material that for various reasons is not found on the SCIS database, for example locally

published materials including online resources, and vertical file material. There is a need to ensure that the list of available headings is adequate to meet these needs.

New subject headings may be established for a topic that is readily identifiable in a resource being catalogued, where that topic is determined to be a useful access point in the school context. It may be that the item includes new concepts not yet represented by the available headings. In other cases the item may require a more specific heading than is available or may be devised using the list. It is on this basis that new headings will be considered for inclusion in the list.

2.2 Level of specificity

The level of specificity is chiefly governed by the needs of the school library and its users. In subjects of greater student interest and in curriculum areas there is a greater level of specificity. Outside of these areas terms may be clustered, where possible, under a broader heading.

The reference structure of ‘top terms’ (headings in the list that do not have broader terms but have narrower and/or related terms) is undergoing a review to expand where necessary the number of levels within the structure. This will ensure that there is not a large gap of knowledge between the broader terms and more specific terms, and that there is no confusion under headings which enable the construction of proper or common name headings that might result in relationship conflicts between headings.

As part of the ongoing management of *SCIS Subject Headings*, existing reference structures are being reviewed to ensure that the level of specificity within the structure is suitable to cater for the level of knowledge relating to the heading concept and ideas.

2.3 Development of subject headings

2.3.1 *Use of language*

School libraries serve a clientele of varying ages, abilities and interests. To enable as many students as possible to make use of the catalogue, the language of the headings has been aligned with an approximate reading age of ten years. However, it is recognised that subjects and concepts encountered in senior secondary education often cannot be expressed in simple words.

A prime consideration of the list has been to ensure that the headings reflect contemporary Australasian–English usage. Wherever possible within the structure of the list Australasian words have been preferred.

When a new heading is being developed the intended audience of the heading is considered. The use of jargon or outdated terminology is avoided as are terms that are considered to be too narrow or esoteric. In some cases these rejected terms are included as USE references directing the user to the allowed heading. For example **Mobile phones**

is used in preference to Mobile telephones or Cell phones which are both non-allowed headings.

Terms that have been coined by the media or other groups and are considered to be well known are included as non-allowed headings and reviewed at a later date to determine their usefulness. For example, the term Asylum seekers has been included as a non-allowed term for the allowed heading **Refugees** in response to prevalent media use of the term.

Scientific terminology is considered on its merits and is used only if there is not an equivalent well-known term that is in mainstream use.

2.3.1.1 Authorities for language and format

When devising a new heading, research is undertaken to determine the most appropriate spelling or form of the term. Where appropriate, newspapers or journals are consulted for terms that reflect popular media or community use. Official government and other websites or documents are used to clarify the names of programs or departments.

The current edition of *The Macquarie Dictionary* is used as the authority for spelling. Note that 's' is not added to a Maori word for plurals. For example use the heading **Kiwi** rather than **Kiwis**.

A number of authorities are used for geographic and place names including Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, *The Macquarie Illustrated World Atlas*, *Webster's New Geographic Dictionary* and *Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index*.

Other established controlled vocabularies are consulted when devising new headings or revising existing headings in the list. These include *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, *Sears List of Subject Headings*, the *Australian Thesaurus of Education Descriptors* and *Libraries Australia Authorities*.

2.3.2 Structure of the headings

Subject headings may consist of one or more words which can represent a single or multi-concept heading. Generally a single word represents a single concept or idea and a multi-word heading represents two or more identifiable concepts or ideas. These are also known as compound headings, e.g. **Libraries and censorship**. However, single concept subjects can also be represented in some cases by multi-word headings, e.g. **Decision making**.

2.3.2.1 Natural language versus inverted headings

Wherever possible, the natural language form of a heading will be used, e.g. **Electric wiring** rather than **Wiring, Electric**. However, inverted headings can be used as non-allowed headings. Therefore **Electric wiring** would have a non-allowed UF heading **Wiring, Electric**.

An exception is name headings, e.g. **Shakespeare, William**. These are constructed according to the instructions for name headings in *RDA: Resource Description & Access*.

2.3.2.2 Use of compound headings

In the interests of increasing the specificity of the list and to improve subject retrieval, a program has commenced to review all compound headings in the list with a view to separating some of the terms currently within phrases. This is a departure from the traditional practice of co-locating similar concepts. For example, **Boats and boating** has been split into two separate headings **Boats** and **Boating** but the headings are cross-referenced with each other as related terms.

A number of factors are considered when determining whether a compound heading should be split into two singular headings or retained:

1. Phrases may be in common usage and if the heading were split the meaning of the term would be lost.

Examples:

Aboriginal deaths in custody

Bone marrow

Electric currents

2. The compound heading avoids irrelevant retrieval of resources. For example, the heading **Library science** if split into **Library** and **Science** could also retrieve resources on science libraries.
3. If the heading is split there could be loss of meaning of the concept.

Examples:

Lunar probes

Disaster relief

4. The heading is a proper name.

Examples:

Brisbane City Council

Fremantle Football Club

5. Where there are two distinct concepts relating to the same broad topic, the compound heading should be split. For example, **Boats and boating** becomes **Boats** and **Boating** and **Canoes and canoeing** becomes **Canoes** and **Canoeing**.

2.3.2.3 Use of qualifiers

Qualifiers are used in *SCIS Subject Headings* to resolve possible conflicts between headings that may have a similar meaning or to specify the location of a larger geographic region. All qualifiers are enclosed in parentheses.

1. Qualifiers are used for many geographic headings.

Examples:

Bass Strait (Vic. and Tas.)

Melbourne (Vic.)

New York (City)

2. Qualifiers are used to distinguish homographic terms, i.e. words that are spelt the same but have different meanings.

Examples:

Fans (Hand-held)

Fans (Machinery)

Fans (Persons)

3. Qualifiers are used for the names of fictional and legendary characters, Biblical figures, bands and names of films, television shows and many other proper names.

Examples:

Ghan (Train)

Potter, Harry (Fictional character)

Spice Girls (Band)

2.3.3 *Use of notes*

There are three types of notes that are used to provide the user with information on the definition, scope or use of the heading within *SCIS Subject Headings*: Scope Notes, Indexing Notes and Specific Example Notes. The use or applicability of these notes is considered when new or revised headings are being constructed for *SCIS Subject Headings*.

2.4 *Revising SCIS Subject Headings*

An important principle of *SCIS Subject Headings* is that there is an ongoing process of revision to ensure that the list reflects the needs of the user and improvements in the searching capabilities of library management systems.

The revision of a controlled vocabulary is an ongoing process that requires staff time, knowledge of cataloguing and indexing principles, and access to expertise in a wide range of subject areas.

Terminology and attitudes change over the years, and compilers of a list like this continually need to review the appropriateness of terminology and of links between headings. At the same time, revisions need to maintain a balance between responsiveness to new concepts and terms, and the stability and search predictability of each school catalogue.

In addition to the creation of new headings when needed, ongoing revision work includes the following:

1. Review of broader, narrower and related terms within a reference structure. A priority in this regard is the analysis of headings with long lists of narrower, broader or related terms. A review of the level of hierarchical structures throughout the list commenced in 2001 with the objective that a more comprehensive hierarchy will be considered for certain subject areas.
2. The currency, acceptability and frequency of the use of existing headings and non-allowed terms.
3. Headings in areas where there have been many changes in thinking and in structure, e.g. computers, higher education structures, areas of science and technology, teaching methods and assessment.
4. The number of headings which may be subdivided geographically and the need to increase these to allow more specificity is reviewed.
5. Optimal use of vocabulary and indexing policies in light of increasingly sophisticated search engines.

SCIS Subject Headings have over time benefited from the contributions of Teacher Librarians and other users of the list who have provided valuable feedback on SCIS catalogue records and indexing policies, and have made suggestions for new headings.

Users are encouraged to put forward proposals for new subject headings. An electronic form is available for downloading from the SCIS web site at http://www2.curriculum.edu.au/scis/subject_headings.html.

Proposals are discussed in regular meetings between Education Services Australia and the SCIS agencies and cataloguers. Appropriate headings are developed in consultation with curriculum advisers.

3 Explanation of revised symbols

3.1 Entries in the list

There are three types of entries in the list:

1. Entries for allowed subject headings are represented in bold typeface. The allowed heading is in the lead position and may be followed by one or more notes, i.e. the Scope Note (SN), the Indexing Note (IN) and the Specific Example Note (SEN). All non-allowed terms for the heading are labelled with the UF (Used For) symbol, while allowed broader, narrower and related terms of the main heading are labelled with the symbols BT, NT and RT.
2. Entries for references from non-allowed words and phrases that direct the user to appropriate allowed headings are known as USE references and are not shown in bold type.¹

¹ In SCIS Subject Headings Online, allowed subject headings are not in bold typeface. Broader, narrower and related terms and notes are labelled in full. Non-allowed terms are shown in italics.

3. Entries for terms that may only be used as subdivisions are included in the list without bold type, e.g. Moral and ethical aspects.

3.1.1 *Scope Notes, Indexing Notes and Specific Example Notes*

The use of notes within headings has been revised, facilitated by the use of thesaurus management software. These notes provide clear instructions for the correct application of the heading. A subject heading may have more than one kind of note. Definitions of the notes that may be found within a SCIS subject heading are given below:

3.1.1.1 *SN (Scope Notes)*

Scope Notes are included in the list where needed to explain the meaning of the heading for the purpose of using it in the catalogue. The differences between similar headings or the limits of the application of the heading are often explained.

Examples:

Metadata

SN Use for works on metadata elements and the process of applying metadata.

Drugs and sport

SN Use for works on the use of drugs to affect sporting performance. For works on the use of drugs to treat sporting injuries, use Sports medicine.

3.1.1.2 *IN (Indexing Notes)*

Indexing Notes provide instructions to the cataloguer on the use of the heading, for example allowing subdivision following the examples in the model headings or allowing subdivision geographically.

Examples:

Motor boats

IN May be subdivided like Motor vehicles.

Television

IN May subdiv. geog.

3.1.1.3 *SEN (Specific Example Notes)*

As it is not practical to include all possible headings in a list of this type, several examples of headings, which have been constructed according to instructions given in a Specific Example Note, are included throughout the list. A decision has been made not to include these headings as narrower terms under the main heading but to include them instead as examples.

Examples:

Barramundi

SEN Example under Fishes

UF Giant perch

Perch, Giant

Fishes

SEN See also names of specific fish*, e.g. Barramundi.

3.1.2 UF and USE references

The two symbols UF (Used For) and USE provide the user with as many access points as possible to an allowed heading, alternative terms or similes. They may be represented in the list as non-allowed terms that direct the user to the allowed term. The UF and USE symbols facilitate this access.

3.1.2.1 UF (Used For)

This symbol (UF) under a heading identifies one or more alternative non-allowed words and phrases for the given concepts expressed by the heading. These are arranged alphabetically.

Example:

Petroleum

UF Crude oil
Oil

3.1.2.2 USE

Each non-allowed term or phrase has a reciprocal USE reference directing the user to the allowed heading. Non-allowed terms with USE references are *not* shown in bold typeface.

Examples:

Crude oil
USE Petroleum

Oil
USE Petroleum

A USE reference may direct the user to more than one allowed heading.

Example:

Speaking
USE Debates and debating
Public speaking
Rhetoric
Voice

These references are an essential element in the catalogue if users are to undertake suitable subject heading searches. With some online catalogues the connection between the allowed and non-allowed headings is hidden from the user who is taken directly to relevant material regardless of which alternative words or phrases have been entered.

3.1.3 Broader, Narrower and Related Terms

The headings labelled as BT, NT and RT are other allowed headings from the list which are associated with the main heading. Definitions for the Broader, Narrower and Related Terms are given below.

3.1.3.1 *BT (Broader Term)*

The symbol BT provides the user with allowed headings in the list which are more general in concept than the main heading. They identify the broader context(s) of the main heading.

3.1.3.2 *NT (Narrower Term)*

The symbol NT provides the user with allowed headings that identify a more specific facet of the main heading.

3.1.3.3 *RT (Related Term)*

The symbol RT provides the user with allowed headings that are associated with the main heading in some way other than hierarchically.

Example:

Spectrum
BT Optics
NT Photography, Infra-red
RT Light

Each broader, narrower and related term itself appears as a main heading in its appropriate alphabetical sequence, with a reciprocal reference. The following entries would therefore appear.

Optics
NT Spectrum
Photography, Infra-red
BT Spectrum
Light
RT Spectrum

The role of the associated broader, narrower and related terms is to assist the user in choosing the most appropriate heading to describe the subject content of a resource. When inserted in the catalogue (or made available as a look-up list) they may assist users of the catalogue in broadening, narrowing or extending their subject heading searches.

3.2 Filing arrangement within the list

In the fifth edition the list of subject headings is filed alphabetically word by word, with the exception of headings with subdivisions after the long dash, which are always grouped together. The subdivided headings, which are grouped together, are also filed alphabetically.

Example:

Animal tracks
Animal training
Animals

Animals – Anatomy

Phrase headings of different kinds that begin with the same word as the heading (such as Ability, Executive and Ability grouping in education) are interfiled alphabetically after the heading and its subdivisions².

Example:

Ability
Ability – Testing
Ability, Executive
Ability grouping in education

Chronological subdivisions attached to the subdivision History file in chronological order with the subdivision for an entire century filing before subdivisions for periods within that century³.

Example:

Australia – History – To 1788
Australia – History – 1788-1851
Australia – History – 19th century
Australia – History – 1851-1901
Australia – History – 20th century
Australia – History – 1901-1918

A set of letters followed by a space files before the same set with additional letters and no space. Full stops in acronyms count as spaces and the hyphen also counts as a space. Other punctuation such as the apostrophe, parentheses and the comma are ignored for the purpose of filing⁴.

Example:

A & P shows
A.B.C.
A.I.D.S. (Disease)
A.L.I.A.
Abacus

² In SCIS Subject Headings Online, phrase headings file before inverted headings. For example Ability grouping in education files *before* Ability, Executive.

³ In SCIS Subject Headings Online and the SCIS Catalogue, subdivisions beginning with a number are filed before subdivisions beginning with a letter. Thus the order may not be strictly chronological.

⁴ Other punctuation such as parentheses may affect filing in SCIS Subject Headings Online.

4 Features of SCIS Subject Headings Fifth Edition

4.1 New Zealand subject headings

In late 2001 the opportunity arose to revise the existing New Zealand specific subject headings. The widespread introduction of SCIS products into New Zealand school libraries and the addition of bibliographic records from the National Library of New Zealand Te Puna National Bibliographic Database prompted a revision of the existing New Zealand headings.

4.2 Inverted headings

Inverted headings reflect the practice of grouping similar topics together under a broad concept to make searching easier in the relatively inflexible card catalogue or microfiche. A review of the use of inverted headings in *SCIS Subject Headings* has commenced and a policy has been implemented whereby most allowed headings developed since the fourth edition are in natural language form rather than inverted form. There will be a progressive review of all other existing inverted headings in *SCIS Subject Headings* which began with the conversion of inverted headings for countries, such as **Southeast Asia**, which used to be shown in *SCIS Subject Headings* as **Asia, Southeast**.

4.3 Compound headings

The policy for constructing new subject headings has been revised in relation to the use of compound headings, and a program of identification and review of existing compound headings in *SCIS Subject Headings* has been initiated.

4.4 Changes to subject headings and cross-references

A number of new and revised headings have been introduced in this edition and some dated headings have been removed.

Some headings have been revised to accommodate contemporary language use. For example, the term **Film** will replace **Motion picture** in headings relating to films, e.g. **Motion picture posters** is now **Film posters**.

Each change to a heading results in consequential changes to all the other entries in the list that contain references to the changed heading. In the preparation of this edition, a major review of the hierarchical and associative relationships between entries in the list has been performed, resulting in changes to reference structures within entries.

Updates to *SCIS Subject Headings* are placed on the SCIS website at http://www2.curriculum.edu.au/subject_heading_lists.html and are also announced in *Connections*, the newsletter of the Schools Catalogue Information Service, http://www2.curriculum.edu.au/scis/connections/latest_issue.html.

BRIEF GUIDE TO SCIS SUBJECT HEADINGS

