

Topical and Geographic Subject Heading Fields

In MARC, the subject heading fields are the 6XX fields. In this section, we will be focusing on the 650 field for topical headings and the 651 field for geographic headings.

One of the important things to remember about subject headings is that they require authority control. Authority control is important because it allows us to maintain consistency when assigning headings, and because it shows the relationships between subject headings through cross references. You can look up authority records at the Library of Congress authorities web site (<http://authorities.loc.gov>), the same way we looked up series headings last week.

You can choose from the different types of subject headings to search on this site. Whether you are looking for a topical heading or a geographic heading, choose Subject Authority Headings from the Search Type menu. If you are cataloging using another program, such as OCLC Connexion, you may be able to specify either Topicals or Geographic Names for your search.

The subfields for 650 and 651 are the same. Subfield a is where the subject heading itself goes, and the rest of the subfields are used for subdivisions.

\$x = general subdivision

\$z = geographic subdivision

\$y = chronological subdivision

\$v = form subdivision

Subdivisions are exactly what they sound like – they subdivide the subject heading so that its focus is more narrow. There are a few different kinds of subdivisions, and they will make more sense when we start seeing examples.

If you have a book where the topical subject heading “Children’s libraries” is subdivided to only refer to children’s libraries in the United States, the topical subject heading would look like this:

650 _0 \$a Children’s libraries \$z United States.

Subject headings can have more than one subdivision, like this one:

650 _0 \$a Proposal writing for grants \$z United States \$v Handbooks, manuals, etc.

Geographic headings go in 651 fields, and they can also have subdivisions:

651 _0 \$a United States \$x Social life and customs \$v Fiction.

Geographic headings include the names of countries, states, cities, and other things you might not think of, like Indian reservations.

651 _0 \$a Great Sioux Indian Reservation (N.D. and S.D.) \$x History.

651 _0 \$a Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (S.D.) \$x History.

So far, we've only looked at LCSH. There is also another group of headings that you might encounter – the Library of Congress Children's Subject Headings. In CIP information, if a subject heading is not in brackets, it is a regular Library of Congress Subject Heading. Headings in brackets are children's subject headings.

Children's subject headings go in the same fields that LC subject headings do, but the second indicator is 1. Just like with LC headings, for children's headings, topical headings go in 650 fields, and geographic headings go in 651 fields. Children's subject headings can be subdivided, too.

650 _1 \$a Poetry \$v Collections.

651 _1 \$a France \$x History \$y Charles V, 1364-1380 \$v Fiction.

If you are creating a record from scratch, you should double check the authority records for the subject headings, rather than just taking them from the CIP information. The correct form of the subject headings may have changed since the CIP information was created. For example, if you were cataloging a book with "Afro-Americans" as a subject heading in the CIP information, and you looked in the LC authority file, you would see that the correct subject heading is actually "African Americans." "Afro-Americans" is an older subject heading that is now outdated.