



Coffee Break Training - Info Search and Web 2.0

Understanding How Information is Organized – Subject Searching

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Learning Objective: The student shall be able to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the subject search technique and know how to find and use LRC subject headings in the online catalog.

Chances are you've undoubtedly used the yellow pages somewhere along the line. The key, of course, to finding what you're looking for in the yellow pages is knowing under what topic heading it's listed. And that's not always obvious. Say you're looking for paint for your car. Do you look under Paint – Automobile? Paint – Car? Well, actually, in my phone book it's found under Automobile – Parts, Services, and Accessories.

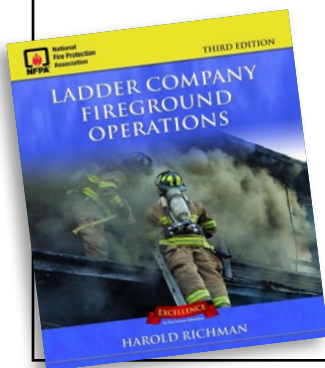
The benefit of grouping things under these categories is that once you've found the right term to look under, you can be assured that everything fitting your particular interest can be found there.

Searching for things by subject in a database such as the Learning Resource Center (LRC) Online Catalog is really no different. Just as with the yellow pages, you may not always find your topic categorized by the term that seems most obvious to you. If, for example, you browse the LRC Online Catalog subject listing on the topic "municipal fire protection" you'll find instead that you'll need to look under the term "urban fire protection."

Another problem to watch out for is the need to use the exact correct form of the subject heading. For example, the term "supply" will yield nothing in the LRC catalog subject search since "supplies" is the correct form for that subject heading. For the best results, when doing subject searches, it pays to first identify what the correct subject headings are in the LRC database that correspond to your research topic.

The LRC organizes all materials it acquires by subject. Each item added to the LRC database is assigned a subject heading from a predetermined subject listing, also known as a "thesaurus". For example consider this book below:

The subject terms assigned to this item are



- **ladder companies;**
- **fire apparatus;**
- **fire suppression;**
- **fireground command;**
- **rescue operations; and**
- **ventilation.**

Using the LRC thesaurus is a great way to find synonymous terms for your topic. Plus, if you search using the subject headings used by the LRC, you'll get more precise results and spend less time searching for what you need.

So how do you learn what terms are used by the LRC as subject headings for your topic? One way is to choose the "Explore Subject Terms" link on our Online Patron Access Catalog (OPAC) menu. You can browse subject headings listed there to use as search terms on your topic. Please take a moment to watch this brief demonstration video: http://www.lrc.fema.gov/downloads/tutorials/subject_skin.swf

In the video you see how to explore the LRC subject listing and then employ multiple subject terms in the LRC subject search to retrieve the desired results.

Another common technique in subject searching is known as "pearlstringing." It's a good strategy where you:

1. First, use your own terms in a General Keyword search.
2. Then, look at the retrieved citations that appear closest to your desired topic.
3. Next, write down any good subject headings that are listed in these citations and use them later in your own subject searches, or, you can click on the Full record link of a citation, and then click on the linked subject terms.