

# Brief Communication: The 21<sup>st</sup> Edition (2014) of the *Sears List of Subject Headings*: A Brief Introduction

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**Abstract:** States in brief the new features of the recently released 21<sup>st</sup> edition of the *Sears List of Subject Headings*. Introduces its new editor Barbara A. Bristow, and the new publisher EBSCO Information Services which recently acquired Sears' founder publisher since 1923, the H.W. Wilson Company. Names a few new subject headings in areas like science, technology, engineering and medicine (STEM). In this edition there are a total of 250 new headings making it a total of 10,000 preferred headings meant for small and medium sized libraries. Critically examines inconsistencies in a few headings. States the additional features of the online edition. Concludes to say the new edition maintains its stellar reputation of a handy list of general subject headings.

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## 1.0 A New Edition

First since the retirement in December 2011 of its long term and formidable editor, Dr. Joseph Miller (ed. 15, 1994--ed.20, 2010), this new edition is slightly late by its earlier cycle of three year revisions started since the *Sears-14* (1991). In the transitional period after his retirement Ms. Eve-Marie Miller had taken over its editorship. In fact, the period immediately after the retirement of Dr. Miller has been bit uncertain, nevertheless now the ship of *Sears* is on an even keel. The new edition has the following bibliographical details:

*Sears List of Subject Headings*, 21<sup>st</sup> ed. Barbara A. Bristow, Chief editor; Christi Showman Farrar, Associate editor. Ipswich MA: H.W. Wilson Co., a Division of

EBSCO Information Services (Print edition by Grey House Publishing, Amenia, NY), 2014. liii, 946p. ISBN 978-1-61925-190-8 (Hb).

This edition by the new editor Ms. Barbara A Bristow is also the first to be published by EBSCO, which in 2011 acquired *Sears'* founding publisher and proprietor H.W. Wilson Co., and since January 2012 the *Sears* is edited from its EBSCO office at Ipswich, MA. EBSCO is a famous research content provider and has more resources in the form of databases, e-books and e-journals. This acquisition provides *Sears* with a larger and wider literary warrant base to bank upon. One wonders whether this acquisition will prove as beneficial as was that of OCLC to the *Dewey Decimal Classification* (DDC) research, growth and popularity. Time seems auspicious for *Sears*.

The new editor Ms. Bristow has been with the H.W. Wilson as indexer and associate editor of the *Humanities Index* and was also editor of the *OmniFiles* at Wilson. Currently she is Senior Taxonomist of the Taxonomy Team at EBSCO Information Services. A long-term colleague of the outgoing editor Dr. Miller, she was the associate editor of the *Sears* 19th edition (2007). During her tenure she also worked part-time in the Wilson Subject Authority Department and so is thus experienced in both indexing and subject headings work. No wonder she toes the line of the previous editor.

Grey House Publishing, Amenia, NY<sup>1</sup>, under license agreement with EBSCO Publishing handles all print editions for H.W. Wilson. It is responsible for printing, distribution, marketing and selling *Sears* in print edition, and is responsible for providing CIP data which has been outsourced from Donohue Group, Inc.<sup>2</sup> It may be mentioned that in the CIP data the catalogue entry has been made under the title main access point instead of the original author, Sears, Minnie Earl, 1873-1933. The *Sears List* is neither a composite book with contributions from many credited authors, nor a serial. Hence main access point under the title is not justified. The *DDC* is always entered under Melvil Dewey.

As another change for the first time a *Sears* Advisory Board of nine members has been constituted which had its first meeting in June 2013 held by the side lanes of the American Library Association (ALA) annual conference. The board has members from public and school libraries and those who have served on the ALA cataloguing committees. It is planned to expand the board which meets digitally and in-person several times a year to advise on revisions and to keep it, inclusive, accurate, useful, popular and, of course, to maintain its stellar reputation.

The major feature of this edition is the inclusion of more than 250 new Subject headings, which reflect the changing needs of library users and emergence of new subjects in many areas of knowledge. Special attention has been paid to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects: **Functional equations, Near-Earth objects, Streaming technology, Virology.** In computer science the newly coined headings are: **Brain-computer interfaces, Cloud computing, Information theory, iPad (Computer), Linked data (Semantic web), Computer bulletin board, and Internet forums.** The recent global economic recession is reflected in the headings: **Business writing, Deflation (Finance), Derivative securities, Economic indicators, Financial risk, International economic integration, and Subprime mortgages, Systemic risk, Target marketing.** Next in line is education with subject headings like, **Flipped classrooms, Massive open online courses (MOOCs), Research-Methodology.** The new

headings in sports are **Aikido, Paralympic games and World Cup (Soccer).** There are updates reflecting world events and the changing face of society: **Occupy protests movements** (started in 2011) and **Arab Spring, 2010- .** And of course more headings in these areas can be coined on instructions. Happily the changes and replacements are only in 34 headings listed on page xlv.

As ever the new headings are suggested by practicing catalogers from various kinds and different sizes of libraries and by commercial vendors of bibliographic records, indexers and of course from the indexing staff and subject experts of EBSCO. As a major change the latest sixth edition (Lighthall 2001) of the *Canadian Companion* of the *Sears List* has been merged indistinguishably (mostly on pages 126-144) with the main *Sears*, perhaps forever, to improve the efficiency to access all subject headings in one volume. This also accounts for this edition having about a hundred pages more than the *DDC-20*. Thus for Canada it provides highest number of subject headings for any country next to the U.S.A.

The structure of the headings conforms to the *Resource Description and Access (RDA)* standards which have already been in vogue since early 2013. Its impact is in limited areas, e.g., earlier subject headings such as Bible. N.T. and Bible. O.T. have now been replaced by **Bible. New Testament** and **Bible. Old Testament** respectively, along with their derivatives. Also the capitalization, corporate and geographic names are *RDA* compliant as the earlier editions were to the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (AACR2)*. And also there are minor changes in filing rules, e.g., 'United States. Army' is now interfiled with subdivisions of the main corporate heading, United States. e.g.,

#### United States - Armed forces

##### United States. Army – Uniform

United States – Associations

United States – Atlases

##### United States – Bibliography

But the libraries have the option to continue with their earlier word-by-word alphabetical arrangement. However, this filing rule seems to have been violated in the case of **Bible. New Testament** and **Bible. Old Testament**, which have been given separately instead of interfiling, e.g.,

#### Bible. Old Testament

Bible – Animals

Bible – Antiquities

The class numbers are by the latest abridged WebDewey, as earlier.

Some changes have been occasioned by the changing information seeking patterns of library users, changing usage of the English language, and to be in tune with the current vocabulary of the subject—though it always prefers popular terms over the technical ones, provided both are true synonyms. For example, handicapped has been replaced by **People with disabilities** and Hispanic Americans by the **Latinos (U.S.)** along with their derivatives, e.g., Handicapped children is now **Children with disabilities**, and Hispanic American authors is **Latino authors**.

Though there is nothing to say special about this edition but here and there one may disagree with the headings and the terms under that, e.g., under **Appetizers** (p. 51) its BT is **Cooking** which should have been Food, instead; Cooking is a process whereas appetizers and foods are entity nouns. Similarly, under **Food** (p. 361) the NT **Spice** should have been given as RT as spices are not a kind of food but only related to it, as is the icing on the cake. Under **Indian philosophy**, which was coined in the *Sears-20* on this author's suggestion (Satija 2008) in a review of the *Sears-19*, the NT should have been given as **Hindu philosophy**, latter is a subset of the basket of Indian philosophies which include Jain and Buddhist philosophies, regretfully both of these have not been listed in the *Sears*. There is confusion regarding the SH **Research-Methodology** (p. 747); it has been inadvertently printed in light type-face. And the SH **Research** is hotch-potch in its relationships with headings given below it. Neither is it exhaustive, nor systematic.

Filing of entities is alphabetical by main headings with subheadings along with organs of a corporate entry arranged in one sequence of word-by-word order. Its web-based version<sup>3</sup> available since 2009, includes all the headings and the cross references in the 21<sup>st</sup> print edition and all the new headings added annually. The search results are ranked according to relevance and have the option of brief or full display. It is also possible to browse the en-

tire list and see established subject terms and cross references in one alphabetical order, or by their *DDC* numbers in one numerical (systematic) order. More than 1400 scope notes accompany all new, revised and existing 10,000 headings, where needed. MARC authority record delivery is available separately. In fact the online data base is the main version and print is simply its derivative.

To offer a suggestion, its 27 page (pp. xv-xli) "Principles of the *Sears List of Subject Headings*" is a concise, clear and illustrated manual not only on the *Sears List*, but on the general theory and practice of subject headings work. Its concept index would be highly useful to the learners, teachers and practitioners of subject indexing.

In all, the new edition with high publication standards, some minor typos notwithstanding, maintains its reputation earned over more than nine decades of its service to the library users and the information retrieval community.

## Notes

1. Grey House Publishing <http://www.greyhouse.com/>.
2. For the last three decades the Donohue Group <http://www.dgiinc.com/> provides contract services to the community of libraries and archives through consulting, cataloging, retro conversion, authority control and tech support.
3. The web version of the *Sears* is available at <https://www.ebscohost.com/public/sears-list-of-subject-headings>.

## References

- Lighthall, Lynne, ed. 2001. *Sears List of Subject Headings: Canadian Companion*, 6th ed. New York: The H.W. Wilson Co.
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