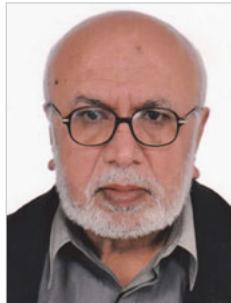


Brief Communication:

The 22nd Edition (2018) of the *Sears List of Subject Headings:* A Brief Introduction

M. P. Satija

Dept. of Library and Information Science, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjab-143005, India
<satija_mp@yahoo.com>



M.P. Satija recently retired as Professor, Head and then Emeritus Fellow from the Department of Library and Information Science, Guru Nanak Dev University, India. He is a member of the Advisory Board of the UDC Consortium and founder patron of the Satija Research Foundation in Library Science (SRFLIS).

Satija, M. P. 2018. "The 22nd edition (2018) of the Sears List of Subject Headings: A Brief Introduction." *Knowledge Organization* 45(8): 712-714. 3 references. DOI:10.5771/0943-7444-2018-8-712.

Abstract: Briefly describes the new features of the recently released 22nd edition of the *Sears List of Subject Headings*. Introduces its new publisher Grey House Publishing, Amenia, N.Y., which recently acquired comprehensive rights for the Sears along with its aboriginal publisher, the H W Wilson from the Ebsco Information Services. The system is available both in print and online versions. Names a few new subject headings in areas like science, technology, engineering and medicine (STEM). In this edition, there are a total of 1,600 new headings

making it a total of 12,000+ preferred headings meant for subject access in small and medium sized libraries. This unprecedented increase of about 1,600 headings is mostly due the complete incorporation of the Canadian Sears last published independently in 2006. Also critically examines inconsistencies in a few headings. Concludes to say the new edition in resplendent, hard binding maintains its stellar reputation of a handy list of general subject headings both for applications and a teaching resource.

Received: 24 October 2018; Accepted: 7 November 2018

Keywords: subject headings, *Sears List of Subject Headings*

This new edition of the *Sears List*¹ in the ninety-fifth year of its birth, in usual resplendent binding with flower motifs, comes after now the set circle of four years—the twenty-first was published in 2014 (Satija 2015). This makes the average of four-year period between two editions though previously new editions have appeared between a gap of three (fourteenth edition 1991; eleventh edition 1994) to seven years (second 1926 to third 1933; tenth 1965 to eleventh 1972). This edition comes with many changes, namely new physical size, new format of entries, the new publisher, the Grey House Publishing, and of course with updated and enhanced core content. In fact, the publisher is not entirely new to the Sears List, as it had the print edition rights of the previous edition. Now in 2018, it has acquired comprehensive rights from Ebsco. Grey House, a little less than four decades old publishing company, is a publishing house of reference

sources such as *Reference Shelf*, Bowker's *Books in Print*, directories, year books and databases in health, education, statistics, finance, and food among many others.² These may provide the much-needed resources to keep the *Sears* grounded in the literary warrant. The *List* is also available as a database and MARC record for direct integration with the library management system (to the buyers of the print edition, access to the online version is complimentary for one year). Though there are changes in page size (being increased to eight by ten trim size from the earlier six by nine size—new size is that of the *LCSH*) and also in the format and display of entries, yet its intellectual content and rules of operation remain the same. There is an overall increase of 123 pages over the previous edition. For the first time, the prefatory pages have been marked A-1 to A-66, replacing the Roman numbering—is it an innovation? This physical increase seems mostly on

two accounts, namely changed typography and formatting, and headings incorporated from the Canadian Sears. The number 1,600 seems superficial and inflationary as most of the merged Canadian headings could have been easily coined on the basis of key headings (given on page A-55). This mostly refers to the new headings on Canada and few more from history of say China and India, etc. And also unnecessary enumeration of headings like: "Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804-1806), Mathematics—Study and teaching, Greece—Biography," and many more. This is despite the claim that in this edition "many provisions have been added for creating new headings as needed" (Preface, A-7), and repeatedly encourages the cataloguers to locally develop a larger vocabulary of terms (A-18):

By using the Sears as a foundation, the cataloger in a small library can develop a local authority list that is consistent in form and comprehensive for that library.

Since the previous edition, the subject headings are *RDA* compliant. In the "Principles..." (A-17), it is erroneously mentioned that the *RDA* is in the "process" of replacing *AACR-2*, whereas the previous edition had become fully *RDA* compliant.

In the changed internal format, it makes a dubious claim of having "cleaner lines and more accessible typography" (A-7). In fact, now the bi-column page, despite increase in width, looks more crammed and entries appear jumbled up due to discarding of the universally known thesaural symbols BT, NT, RT, UF, etc. in favour of their fully spelled forms. And since many previous editions, the page margins have no space for recording local decisions and additions. Now an entry looks like this:

Ancient history

Dewey: 930

Scope Note: Use for materials on the history of the ancient world up to the fall of Rome not limited to a single country or region.

Use For: History, Ancient

See Also: names of ancient peoples, e.g. **Hittites**; and names of countries of antiquity, with the subdivision *History* [to be added as needed]

Broader Term(s): **World history**

Narrower Term(s): **Ancient civilization**

Ancient geography

Classical dictionaries

Hittites

Inscriptions

Numismatics

Phoenicians

Related Term(s): **Bible**

We are told the new *List* includes 1,600 new and revised headings, mostly from the STEM areas of science (e.g., Sinkholes), technology (e.g., Androids), engineering (e.g., Bioengineering), and medicine (e.g., Traumatic brain injury). Overall, the SHs from the STEM areas still dominate the *List* with about 22% of all the headings on the average (Adamich 2014). Other additions are from currently discussed topics such as LGBTQIA and their derivatives such as the "LGBTQ in the military." However, it may be mentioned that the current term is now "LGBTQIA." Other newly added headings are from human rights, privacy rights, gun battle and many more. Total integration of the Canadian Sears (2006), started in the previous edition (2014), has been completed now with merging all the Canadian heading. It did indeed required modification of a few Canadian headings to provide the context. Still, most of the Canadian headings retain their separate antecedents, though most of them could have been easily merged indistinguishably, and coined from the key headings. Among the forty-three cancelled and replaced headings (A-57), two, namely Fortran (Computer language) and Google (Firm), have been cancelled altogether—though Google (Website) is still retained as a heading. Of the remaining forty-one replaced headings, website is now Website—both as an independent heading and a parenthetical qualifier. Of the other replaced headings up scaled to current terminology, eighteen are of the SH Elderly and its subdivisions.

Replacing Elderly by Older people is not so flattering, though the *Sears* still uses the Elderly phrased headings such as Elderly abuse and also Elder hostels. Ironically, in the prefatory instructions, it still retains the heading "Elderly—Housing—United States" (A-31). By way of another change, to repeat, the abbreviations BT, NT, etc. have been fully spelled though in earlier editions, entries with these relational legends looked more elegant. The legends BT, NT, RT, etc. are standardized and universally recognized thesaural symbols and functional keys—not mere abbreviations. It is doubtful that such fully spelled abbreviations will benefit anyone or be easy with the non-library or novice users of the system as is believed by the editors.

This edition, second one for the editor Bristow, has a new team of associate editors to assist her. She has been a longtime colleague, and also associate editor of the *Sears* nineteen (2007), of the most celebrated and charismatic editor, Dr. Joseph Miller, who successfully modernized the system from editions fifteen (1994) to twenty (2010).

Also, formally acknowledged are many individual cataloguers, reference librarians, and vendors of cataloguing services for suggesting headings to be included. An internal Sears work group has many names (A-15). The editors are assisted by the Sears Advisory Board (SAB) constituted for “improving the accuracy, breadth and inclusiveness” (A-12) of the system. This faceless and not so fully defined and revealed group is “comprised of public and school librarians... many of them have served on cataloguing committees for the American Library Association including the Cataloguing of Children’s Material Committee” (A-12). This group first met in June 2013 for finalizing the twenty-first edition (2014). Though it is claimed that this group continues to meet several times a year, both digitally and in person, yet it is uncertain what this faceless and unnamed group achieves in such perfunctory meetings, and what is its formal mandate and authority? The *Sears* is not merely a private property. It has become an institution of the English speaking (now also straddling Spanish areas) KO world, and thus needs a well-oiled, publicly known, and self-perpetuating machinery on the lines of the Decimal Classification Editorial Committee DCEPC/OCLC for keeping up its status and continued relevance. The ALA should have some stakes in it. It looks like its changing publishing hands may stymie its growth.

The edition is not without acts of omissions and commissions. Though the abbreviations BT, NT, UF, etc. are no more used, in the *Principles* these have been mentioned in the present tense as if still in practice (A-46). Similarly, “May subdiv. geog. (A-29), is “May subdivide geographically” in the entries. It only means the prefatory matter, especially, the “Principles,” needs attuned to the changes. Mr. Michael Panzer, the very short serving editor-in-chief of the *DDC*, is thanked in the acknowledgements (A-15), though this post at the *DDC/OCLC* has been abolished since Panzer left in a hush-hush manner

long ago. There can be many differences and debates among users and experts regarding its syndetic relations. But some are obvious omissions, like the SHs Biotechnology, and Bioengineering have not been correlated though both of them share the same *Dewey* number 660.6. The SH Indian philosophy could have Hindu philosophy as a narrower term. Many depicted associative and hierarchic relations can be debated, both as fact or opinion. To suggest, all the entries need a long and close look, as a special critical review, to keep it current and a consensual subject authority meeting the changing needs of the users.

Despite many omissions and commissions, as in every edition, the *Sears* twenty-two maintains itself as a time tested tool for application and a resource for teaching subject cataloguing.

Notes

1. *Sears List of Subject Headings*, 22nd ed./ed. by Barbara A Bristow; Maria Hugger, Kendal Spires and Claire Fielde, associate editors. Amenia, N. Y.: H. W. Wilson (now a subsidiary of) Grey House Publishing, 2018 (July), A-66, 1056p. ISBN 978-1-68217-234-6(Hb)
2. chrome-extension://oemmndcbldboiebfnladdacbdhmoadadm/https://www.hwwilsoninprint.com/pdf/ghp_acquires_sears.pdf (Accessed 20 October, 2018).

References

Adamich, Tom. 2014. “The Sears List: An Old Friend With 21st Century Look.” *Library Media Connection* 32, no. 4: 43.

Barbara A Bristow, ed. 2018. *Sears List of Subject Headings*, 22nd ed. Ipswich, MA: H. W. Wilson.

Satija, M. P. 2015. “The 21st Edition (2014) of the Sears List of Subject Headings: A Brief Introduction.” *Knowledge Organization* 42: 187-9.