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## The Changing Terms in Sears

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# The Changing Terms in Sears

SARA ROFOFSKY MARCUS

## ABSTRACT

Librarians are considered the keepers of knowledge. However, the very method in which this knowledge is kept can cause confusion, not only for patrons seeking the knowledge held, but also for librarians unfamiliar with methods used in classifying books. Changing terms, or terms that do not change and thus portray what today could be considered bias or prejudice, cause confusion or even embarrassment in searching the vast knowledge base available. Librarians are known for organizational work, particularly catalogers who organize knowledge in the library into a seemingly accessible order. This article focuses on selected concepts of importance to the Judaic library and Judaic library collection: Judaism, Jews, Israelis, and the Holocaust, which have increased in coverage in small and medium-sized libraries; and it traces how the subjects for these concepts have changed over time. The focus is on the headings used in the *Sears List of Subject Headings*, and those used in the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* list are not addressed.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1876, Charles A. Cutter, a librarian at the Boston Athenaeum, published *Rules for a Dictionary Catalog*, in which he listed three objectives for a catalog. These are still taught today, and have been regarded by many to be the classic objectives for a catalog (Jeng 1997). According to Cutter, the objectives of a bibliographic system are:

1. to enable a person to find a book of which either
  - a. the author
  - b. the title
  - c. the subject, is known
2. to show what the library has
  - a. by a given author
  - b. on a given subject

- c. in a given kind of literature
3. to assist in the choice of a book
  - a. as to its edition (bibliographically)
  - b. as to its character (literary or topical) (Cutter 1904).

While these objectives still apply today, it is the identification of a subject, given kind of literature, or character of a book that is of importance in this research. In order to meet Cutter's objectives of 1c, 2b, 2c, and 3b, controlled vocabularies of terminologies, which contain one term per concept, were established, to become known as lists of subject headings (Akers 1969; Kaplan and Riedling 2006). There are various subject heading lists with authorized headings that are used as the standard headings for a particular catalog to enable collocating of materials on a similar subject (Taylor 2006; Karpuk 2008). However, as Sanford Berman has indicated in his research (1971), these headings lists do not always present the best choices of terms. Some of the more popular and most used lists in school media centers and small to medium-sized libraries are the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* and the *Sears List* (Kaplan and Riedling 2006). Other subject heading lists exist for particular subject areas, such as those found in the *Weine Classification Scheme* and the *Elazar Classification Scheme* for use in Judaic collections, and *Medical Subject Headings (MeSH)* from the National Library of Medicine. According to Joseph Miller, Vice President of Cataloging Services at the H. W. Wilson Company and current editor of the *Sears List of Subject Headings*, some specialized libraries use a specialized list for the main focus area of the library and the *Sears List* for the general materials also included in the library's collection (Marcus 2011).

Definitions were created for consistency in evaluation and writing, and are included in Appendix A.

## Background

The last of the three big subject heading lists, and one of the two still being revised and updated today, the *Sears List* first appeared in 1923 to join the *Subject Headings Used in the Dictionary Catalogs of the Library of Congress* and the *American Library Association's List of Subject Headings for Use in Dictionary Catalogs*. The Library of Congress list has always been tailored to its own needs—those of a very large research library. According to the *Sears List of Subject Headings*, “The *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, which is in print now comprises five large volumes, is primarily a list of headings that have been used in the Library” (Miller 2007, p. xvi). Thus, the *Sears List* was created “based on the headings used by nine small libraries that were known to be well cataloged” (Miller 2007, p. vii) as determined by the original compiler, Minnie Earl Sears, and compiled into a single list—the *List of Subject Headings for Small Libraries*. Sears had never intended her list to be geared towards children's materials, but rather to small and medium-sized general collections. While the *Sears List* is geared towards small and medium-sized libraries, it is founded on the Library of Congress list, enabling those whose library grows beyond the scope of the

*Sears List* to easily transfer to the LC list. Both the *Sears List* and the LC list (currently titled *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, or *LCSH*) are based on literary warrant with similar formats, and both are considered precoordinated systems. Both use a controlled vocabulary and are alphabetical subject lists, with reference relationships noted, not true thesauri (ANSI/NISO Z39.19, 2005). Both lists are devised for implementation of Cutter's Rules at the greatest possible level of specificity for the intended library size. Both use key or pattern headings and make use of form and subject subdivisions. However, the *Sears List*, from its start, has always used terms that are less scientific, less technical, and less specific—and hence less complex or difficult to understand and use—than those found in the LC published list. (See Appendix for definitions of terms used in this paragraph.)

The *Sears List* has always been, and continues to be, published by the H. W. Wilson Company, where Minnie Earl Sears was working at the time of her compilation of subject headings for small libraries. The H. W. Wilson Company ensured the popularity of the list of subject headings when these were adopted for use on the catalog cards produced by Wilson for its commercial card distribution service, catering mainly to small public and school libraries. Although the *Sears List* was created with a focus on the small public and school library in the United States, it has also been used for curriculum-support materials and in libraries in Britain and Australia. The *Sears List* is used in school libraries where the principal or school board has not purchased commercial cataloging services. Other small libraries frequently use the *Sears List*, even special libraries with collections on narrow topics. The *Sears List* is a correct choice for a small or medium-sized general collection. When the *Sears List* is essentially the incorrect choice for a collection, the reasons for that choice are almost invariably cost and sometimes the difference in physical size between the two subject heading lists. The *Sears List* can be accommodated on a desk and easily carried. *LCSH*'s five large-size volumes are heavy, cumbersome to store, and not very portable (Weihs 2004, p. 6). While both the *Sears List* and *LCSH* can also be viewed online, the cost of an online subscription can be prohibitive to the small and medium-sized libraries for which the *Sears List* was intended.

Minnie Earl Sears did not have a problem with the structure of *LCSH*, just with the terminology chosen and the breakdown of subjects into categories being too specific. Sears had known from the start that her list was not exhaustive or comprehensive—she included explicit yet simple directions on how to create subject headings in order to help keep the *Sears List* brief, in a single volume. Some may feel that many of the disadvantages of *LCSH* for small libraries were alleviated with the Library of Congress list of *Subject Headings for Children's Literature*, which is a list of exceptions to the *LCSH*, bringing headings into much clearer alignment with the *Sears List*. In the tenth edition of the *Sears List*, many of these headings provided in LC's list of *Subject Headings for Children's Literature* began to be included.

The editorship of the *Sears List* has experienced both lengthy and brief tenures. The longer the editorship the more changes might be made over the long term, though an established editor might also defer some changes for a

future edition. A new editor, in contrast, might wish to make many changes at once, or might have a different point of view regarding how a concept ought to be addressed. These variations in editorial tenure and practices may well have impacted changes in headings used in the *Sears List* or the pace of change for the authorized headings provided.

## Purpose of Research

This article will focus on selected concepts of importance to the Judaic library and Judaic library collection—Judaism, Jews, Israelis, and the Holocaust—which have increased in coverage in small and medium-sized libraries, and it will trace how the subjects for these concepts have changed over time. The focus is on the headings used in the *Sears List of Subject Headings*, and not on those used in the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* list.

With the increasing frequency of updates of the currently named *Sears List* from every five to seven years, beginning with the first edition in 1923 until 1988, when it changed to every three years (Evans, Intner, and Weihs 2002), and the continuously reduced budgets for libraries, it is important for cataloger and user alike to know the extent of changes from one edition to the next of the *Sears List*, as each edition is to be used alone, with each volume superseding its predecessor where changes are made. These changes are listed in recent editions of the *Sears List* in the preliminary matter, but one must access the newest edition of the *Sears List* to obtain this list of changes. These changes can cause problems to the subject cataloger, who must keep up-to-date with the changes in terminology and must also determine whether to go with the new heading or remain with the older heading. Patrons and public services librarians will suffer as well, whether a new term is implemented that one must learn, or an archaic term is used for a subject with a new name (Elsesser 1984). With the advent of computerized cataloging and the online public access catalog, cross references, such as “see” or “see also” do help, but there still remains the issue of updating records—or for those smaller libraries still using printed catalog cards the issue of updating and revising. For the user of the catalog, the ability to find one’s desired topic on a single screen rather than having to click through to another screen makes the experience more pleasant, encouraging repeat use.

As Elsesser noted in 1984, “Librarians have a responsibility to avoid employing labels which connote or imply a judgment of deviance, aberration, abnormality, or unfitness. Just as we attempt to avoid sexist or racist terminology. As an ethical matter, this seems an unassailable position; as a practical matter, it can help avoid the inconsistencies and cataloging trauma” (pp. 68–69).

## RESEARCH METHODS

This article uses all editions of the *Sears List*, from the first edition in 1923 through the nineteenth edition (2007), in order to trace the growth and change of the authorized headings for topics related to: (1) Jews, (2) Judaism, (3) Israelis, and (4) the Holocaust. The subject headings lists were accessed at the New York

Public Library's Schwarzman Building, the City University of New York, C. W. Post of Long Island University, and the H. W. Wilson Company's archive.

The editions were analyzed for the terms used for the topics indicated, and then also analyzed a second time for terms found in other editions that might have been in prior or more recent editions. Authorized headings, as well as referenced headings—whether authorized or unauthorized—were identified and compared from edition to edition.

It should be noted that it was not until the fifteenth edition of the *Sears List* that *See also* references were clarified further, utilizing RT (Related Term), NT (Narrower Term) and BT (Broader Term). (See Appendix for definitions of these terms.)

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### ANALYSIS OF JUDAIC HEADINGS

<i>Term</i>	<i>First Appearance</i>	<i>Last Appearance</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<i>Christianity—Relations—Judaism</i>	16th (1997)	19th (2007)	
<i>Holocaust, Jewish (1933–1945)</i>	12th (1982)	14th (1991)	
<i>Islam—Relations—Judaism</i>	16th (1997)	19th (2007)	
<i>Israeli-Arab relations</i>	11th (1977)	11th (1977)	
<i>Israelis</i>	11th (1977)	19th (2007)	This became an official heading 29 years after the State of Israel was formed.
<i>Jewish-Arab relations</i>	9th (1965)	9th (1965)	This is 17 years after the declaration of the State of Israel
<i>Jewish-Arab relations</i>	13th (1986)	19th (2007)	
<i>Jewish-Christian relations</i>	15th (1994)	15th (1994)	
<i>Jewish civilization</i>	15th (1994)	19th (2007)	
<i>Jewish folk literature</i>	18th (2004)	19th (2007)	
<i>Jewish holidays</i>	15th (1994)	19th (2007)	
<i>Jewish-Islamic relations</i>	15th (1994)	15th (1994)	
<i>Jewish legends</i>	15th (1994)	19th (2007)	
<i>Jewish literature</i>	1st (1923)	19th (2007)	It was not until the 13th edition that separate headings for genres of Jewish literature appeared.
<i>Jewish question</i>	4th (1941)	10th (1972)	

(continued)

## ANALYSIS OF JUDAIC HEADINGS

*(continued)*

<i>Term</i>	<i>First Appearance</i>	<i>Last Appearance</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<i>Jewish religious fiction</i>	16th (1997)	19th (2007)	
<i>Jewish wit and humor</i>	18th (2004)	19th (2007)	
<i>Jews (May subdiv. geog.) —Folklore</i>	13th (1986)	19th (2007)	Omitted in 16th edition edition of 1997.
<i>Jews</i>	1st (1923)	12th (1982)	
<i>Jews (May subdiv. geog.)</i>	13th (1986)	19th (2007)	Omitted in 16th edition of 1997.
<i>Jews in the U.S.</i>	1st (1923)	10th (1972)	
<i>Jews—Civilization</i>	7th (1954)	14th (1991)	
<i>Jews—Customs and and practices</i>	13th (1986)	19th (2007)	
<i>Jews—France</i>	18th (2004)	19th (2007)	
<i>Jews—Persecutions</i>	4th (1939)	19th (2007)	
<i>Jews—Political activity</i>	10th (1972)	19th (2007)	
<i>Jews—Political and social conditions</i>	2nd (1926)	9th (1965)	
<i>Jews—Political and social customs</i>	1st (1923)	1st (1923)	
<i>Jews—Religion</i>	2nd (1926)	6th (1950)	
<i>Jews—Rites and ceremonies</i>	7th (1954)	12th (1982)	
<i>Jews—Social conditions</i>	10th (1972)	19th (2007)	
<i>Jews see also Discrimination</i>	6th (1950)	10th (1972)	
<i>Judaism</i>	7th (1954)	16th (1997)	
<i>Judaism (May subdiv. geog.)</i>	17th (2000)	19th (2007)	
<i>Judaism (May subdiv. geog.)—Liturgy</i>	13th (1986)	19th (2007)	
<i>Judaism—Relations— Christianity</i>	16th (1997)	19th (2007)	
<i>Judaism—Relations— Islam</i>	16th (1997)	19th (2007)	
<i>Sabbath</i>	8th (1959)	8th (1959)	
<i>Sabbath</i>	13th (1986)	19th (2007)	

## ANALYSIS OF JUDAIC HEADINGS: HOLOCAUST

<i>Edition</i>	<i>s.a., BT, NT, RT</i>	<i>X, UF, Use, See</i>	<i>XX, BT, NT, RT, see also from</i>
12th (1982)	World War, 1939–1945 —Jews	Destruction of Jews (1933–1945) Extermination of Jews (1933–1945) Jewish holocaust (1933–1945)	World War, 1939–1945 —Jews Jews—Persecutions Antisemitism
13th (1986)	World War, 1939–1945 —Jews	Destruction of Jews (1933–1945) Extermination of Jews (1933–1945) Jewish holocaust (1933–1945)	World War, 1939–1945 —Jews Jews—Persecutions Antisemitism
14th (1991)	World War, 1939–1945 —Jews	Destruction of Jews (1933–1945) Extermination of Jews (1933–1945) Jewish holocaust (1933–1945)	World War, 1939–1945 —Jews Jews—Persecutions Antisemitism
15th (1994)	Jewish holocaust (1933–1945)	Destruction of Jews (1933–1945) Extermination of Jews (1933–1945) Holocaust, Jewish (1933–1945) Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)	Antisemitism Jews—Persecutions World War, 1939–1945 —Jews
16th (1997)	Holocaust, 1933–1945 Holocaust survivors Holocaust, 1933–1945 —Personal narratives	Destruction of Jews (1933–1945) Extermination of Jews (1933–1945) Holocaust, Jewish (1933–1945) Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)	Antisemitism Jews—Persecutions World War, 1939–1945 —Jews
17th (2000)	Holocaust, 1933–1945 Holocaust survivors Holocaust, 1933–1945 —Personal narratives	Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)	Antisemitism Jews—Persecutions World War, 1939–1945 —Jews

(continued)



## ANALYSIS OF JUDAIC HEADINGS: HOLOCAUST

<i>Edition</i>	<i>s.a., BT, NT, RT</i>	<i>X, UF, Use, See</i>	<i>XX, BT, NT, RT, see also from</i>
	Righteous Gentiles in the Holocaust		
18th (2004)	Holocaust, 1933–1945 Holocaust survivors Holocaust, 1933–1945 —Personal narratives	Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945) Jewish Holocaust (1933–1945)	Antisemitism Jews—Persecutions World War, 1939–1945 —Jews
	Righteous Gentiles in the Holocaust Jewish children in the Holocaust Holocaust denial		
19th (2007)	Holocaust, 1933–1945 Holocaust survivors Holocaust, 1933–1945 —Personal narratives	Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945) Jewish Holocaust (1933–1945)	Antisemitism Jews—Persecutions World War, 1939–1945 —Jews
	Righteous Gentiles in the Holocaust Jewish children in the Holocaust Holocaust denial		

The term *Israelis* was recognized from its first inclusion in 1977 through 2007 as a subgroup of the term *Jews*, which is not always accurate as there are members of other religious groups living in Israel who can be referred to as *Israelis*, such as Christians and Muslims living in the State of Israel. It would be better to have *Israelis* subdivided by *Jews*, along with the authorized forms for other religious groups living in Israel, as this would better indicate the State's diverse population.

For Jews in a specific location, it is interesting to note that this was indicated solely by a form heading, *Jews in the U.S.*, from the first edition in 1923 through the tenth edition (1972), and was then not recognized officially again until the thirteenth edition (1986) with the qualifier (*May subdiv. geog.*) added and a pattern heading provided in the eighteenth edition (2004), *Jews—France*.

Political and social issues have been apparent for Jews since their beginning, as recorded in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). It is important to note that it was not until 1972 that social and political concepts were separated in the *Sears List* as different subject headings; until then, materials on social conditions and political activities were collocated under the same heading.

The controversy between Jews and Arabs in the State of Israel has always been one of great importance, as has been the conflict between followers of Judaism and other religions (most notably Christianity and Islam). It was not until the ninth edition (1965), seventeen years after the declaration of the State of Israel, that the heading Jewish-Arab relations was authorized, although no heading appeared again until the eleventh edition (1977) with the inclusion of *Israeli-Arab relations*. The relations between religions was first identified by the term used to define a person or concept, i.e., Jewish, Islamic, or Christian, and was quickly changed in the next edition to be the name of the religion, i.e., Judaism, Islam, or Christianity.

One of the most recognized, large, and current persecutions of Jews in current times is the Jewish Holocaust, or Shoah. Surprisingly, the *Sears List* did not provide an authorized heading for materials on this topic until 1982, thirty-seven years after the end of World War II. From the twelfth edition (1982) until the fourteenth edition (1991), catalogers and users were directed to *see also World War, 1939–1945—Jews*. The five years immediately preceding the publication of the twelfth edition (1977 to 1982) brought about many new terms in the *Sears List*, both authorized and non-authorized, such as a direction to *see also names of concentration camps*, and varying names for the event called colloquially the Holocaust, or Shoah. It should be noted that the term “Jewish” was omitted in the authorized heading for the Shoah starting in the sixteenth edition (1997), indicating a recognition of the works written about other groups affected and impacted by the events of the Holocaust, including Gentiles, Gypsies, Disabled, and Homosexuals.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of this study, as John M. Christ suggests (1972), lies in the fact that K–12 students and faculty working with them—together with librarians working in small to medium-sized public libraries—grow accustomed to established subject terms. Changes in these terms can cause confusion for patrons searching for items in a field of knowledge for which they used to know the authorized headings, as determined by the creator(s) of the chosen subject-heading list. The reverse can also be observed, in that there is significance to examining the terminology used for access to the knowledge base by subject in order to determine the effectiveness of this representation of knowledge. Change is inevitable, as the needs from thirty years ago will not match the needs of today. The pace of the changes can cause confusion as well, such as in the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, when the heading European War remained for seventy years before changing to *World War I*, while *Atomic* was replaced less than thirty years later by the term *Nuclear* where appropriate. This inconsistency in changing terminology does not give the cataloger or other user a frame of reference for determining when a new heading might appear. Librar-

ians in specialized collections became increasingly dissatisfied with how their specialized subjects were treated, with multiple subdivisions required to achieve distinctions between them, leading to the development of specialized lists, as in the 1950s and 1960s, when the Weine and Elazar classification schemes were created for classification or call number assignments.

## CONCLUSION

It is of great importance for librarians and other library staff to keep abreast of changes in subject headings, both as users of the catalog (the case with reference librarians) and as creators of records to be included in the catalog. With the growth in computerized catalogs, changes in catalog records require a smaller time investment than was formerly the case. This can encourage catalogers to change subject headings and include see references. The ease with which global changes can be made should not, however, engender change for change's sake; rather, changes ought to be made in response to an identified *need* for change.

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## APPENDIX

### Definitions

**Authorized heading**—a heading that has been determined by the creator of the subject-heading list to be the correct one to use.

**Commonly used subdivisions**—a list of words that can be used as subdivisions for nearly every subject. A list of these is included at the beginning of the volume of the *Sears List*.

**Concept**—an idea, person, place, or thing, that requires defining.

**Controlled vocabulary**—a list of terms selected for use as subject headings. This list contains one authorized, or permitted, term or phrase for each concept. The purpose is to ensure that all similar materials are assigned to the same descriptive term or phrase.

**Dictionary catalog**—a listing of items held in a library by author, title, and subject in a single alphabet.

**Direct heading**—a heading that presents the words in proper English order (i.e., Gay Males).

**Free-floating subdivision**—a list of words that can be used as subdivisions for nearly every subject. A list of these is included with the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*.

**Indirect heading**—a heading that uses a comma in order to collocate headings on similar topics alphabetically (i.e. Gays, Male).

**Key heading**—a model for using subdivisions under other headings of the same type. A list of these is included at the beginning of the *Sears List*.

**Pattern heading**—a model for using subdivisions under other headings of the same type. A list of these is included with the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*.

**Phrase heading**—a heading that uses more than one word in proper order. This includes those headings that use prepositions.

**Pre-coordinate indexing system**—terms that are created before the items are analyzed. This is generally a predictable, limited set of terms, with one term for each concept.

**Principle of specific entry**—this principle states that the subject heading selected for each item shall be only as specific as, but not more specific than, the content of the item in hand.

- Principle of unique entry**—this principle states that only one subject heading represents each unique topic that occurs in the collection of knowledge held by a library.
- Subdivisions**—descriptive terms or phrases that further narrow the subject heading to bring out specific aspects of the subject heading.
- Subject authority**—an accepted term from a published list of standard terms to be used as subject headings in the catalog.
- Subject entry**—a term or phrase used in a dictionary catalog to express the subjects or subjects of items held in a library.
- Subject heading**—a descriptive term or phrase from a subject authority that conveys the meaning of a topic. These form a controlled vocabulary presented in a thesaurus-like structure with links to broader, narrower, and related terms as well as terms considered but not used.
- Subject heading list**—a written record of authorized and unauthorized subject entries and relationships between authorized and unauthorized headings. This also includes divisions of subjects, and notes indicating the scope of an authorized term.
- SA (see also)** and **XX** both lead the user to another term that is on the same level of scope as the term in question, or to a term that is narrower in scope than the one in question.
- Use** and **See** both lead the user from a term that is not authorized to a similar term that is authorized.
- UF (Use For)** and **X** both appear under authorized headings, indicating to the user alternate terms that should not be used but rather should be included under this authorized heading.
- RT (Related Term)** leads the user from one authorized heading to another heading that is on the same level of scope as the heading in question.
- NT (Narrower Term)** leads the user from one authorized heading to another heading that is narrower in scope than the one in question.
- BT (Broader Term)** leads the user from one authorized heading to another heading that is broader in scope than the one in question.