

Frequently asked questions about LC genre/form headings

Basic information

Q1: What is a genre/form heading? How is it different from a “regular” subject heading?

A: Subject headings have traditionally been assigned to describe the *content* of the work. Genre/form headings, on the other hand, describe what an item *is*, not what it is *about*. The traditional subject heading **Horror films**, with appropriate subdivisions, would be assigned to a book *about* horror films. A cataloger assigning headings to the movie *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* would also use the heading **Horror films**, but it would be a genre/form heading since the movie *is* a horror film, not a movie *about* horror films.

Q2: What is the MARC coding for genre/form headings?

A: Genre/form headings are established in MARC 21 field 155. They are assigned in the 655 field in bibliographic records. Library of Congress genre/form headings have a second indicator of “0” (zero), and only \$a is used.

Q3: What is the difference between a form and a genre?

A: Form is defined as a characteristic of works with a particular format and/or purpose. A “short” is a particular form, for example, as is “animation.” Genre refers to categories of works that are characterized by similar plots, themes, settings, situations, and characters. Examples of genres are westerns and thrillers.

Unlike some other systems, which always make a distinction between genres and forms (e.g., *Moving Image Genre/Form Guide (MIGFG)*), Library of Congress genre/form headings often combine the two. The headings are based on literary warrant (the existence of a body of works representative of the genres and forms) and standard terminology (the terminology used in literature about the genres and forms). Thus, in the heading **Horror films**, “horror” is the genre and “films” is the form.

Q4: Why do two authority records exist for the same heading?

A: Although there may be two authority records with the same heading string (the characters appearing in \$a of the 1xx field), the records and headings are different and serve different purposes.

The headings can be distinguished by their tagging: the heading and reference tags on genre/form authority records are x55 (155, 455, 555). In authority records for topical headings, the heading tag is 150, and the references are usually tagged as 450 or 550, although other tags such as 451, 510, and so forth, may also be used.

The decision to have identical heading strings wherever possible was a conscious one. Doing so allows users to find all of the works in a particular genre or form, and works about that genre or form, in a single search. For example, a user doing a browse search for “B films” will find records for the films themselves along with records for works about them:

B films.	<i>[genre/form heading]</i>
B films—History and criticism.	<i>[topical heading]</i>
B films—Production and direction.	<i>[topical heading]</i>

Some OPACs permit users to limit their searches to either topical headings or genre/form headings. Using the same terminology is also an asset in that case: the user does not have to know two different heading structures, but can search both genre/form headings and topical headings by searching the same phrase.

Updated Q5: *“My library collects DVDs and VHS tapes, and these headings just won’t work. Why are the moving image headings only for films and television programs?”*

A: The goal of the genre/form headings is to describe the expression, not the manifestation, of the work. In other words, the headings refer to the intellectual or artistic expression of a work, not to the physical carrier.

To accomplish this goal, the decision was made to broaden the meaning of the term “film” from referring only to those works on motion picture film (the physical carrier) to include those that are originally recorded on motion picture film, on video, or digitally. This decision allows for more uniformity in catalogs, since the same heading(s) will be applied to a work (e.g., *You’ve Got Mail*) whether a library has it on DVD, VHS, or podcast, or all three.

There are a few exceptions to the general rule. The headings **Video recordings for the hearing impaired** and **Video recordings for people with visual disabilities** were added because the library community asked CPSO (now the Policy and Standards Division) to include them as a service to users. Since captioning, signing, and audio description are usually added as aftermarket enhancements, and because it is useful to collocate all such works under one heading, CPSO determined that they could be added. Instruction on their use is provided in the *Subject Headings Manual* instruction sheet H 1913.

The headings **Podcasts**, **Internet videos**, and **Webisodes** have also been approved although they principally refer to distribution methods and therefore to manifestations and not expressions. However, as these “new media” evolve they are developing their own stylistic and/or release and exhibition parameters, which are aspects of genre and form.

The headings **Rock videos**, **Music videos**, and **Interactive videos** are based on general American English usage.

Q6: *Why not code the fixed field of the topical authority records (tag 150) to indicate that they can be used as genre/form headings (tag 655), instead of creating two records?*

A: In 1993 MARBI considered a proposal (Proposal 93-8) that, if approved, would have defined new codes in field 008, bytes 18-21. Byte 18 would have indicated whether a topical heading (tag 150) is appropriate for use as a genre/form heading in bibliographic records (tag 655). This would have allowed for a “one record approach.” The proposal was withdrawn, however, because MARBI preferred to use new variable data fields to indicate a heading’s availability as a genre/form heading, rather than using fixed field coded data.

MARBI approved fields 155 and 655 for authority and bibliographic records, respectively, in 1995 (Proposal 95-11). These fields are defined as “Index Term—Genre/Form” and permit libraries to code what a work *is* (the genre or form) differently from what a work is *about* (the topic, coded in other 6xx fields).

Q7: Why is it necessary to subdivide topical headings? The difference in the tags (150 v. 155) should be sufficient to distinguish between topical and genre/form headings for ILS searching and displays.

A: As a purely theoretical question the difference in tagging is enough to distinguish between a topical and a genre/form heading, even when the heading string (i.e., the characters in \$a) is the same. As a practical consideration, however, the search engines of many integrated library systems (ILSs) cannot make the distinction. It is anticipated that as the searching and display capabilities of online catalogs become more sophisticated, it may be less important to subdivide topical headings. The Policy and Standards Division and members of the wider cataloging community will reevaluate the subdivision policy at that time and determine whether to retain it.

Updated Q8: What genre/form headings have been approved?

A: The most up-to-date list of genre/form headings is available through *Classification Web*. Choose the “Genre/Form Headings” option on the opening menu. This list is updated weekly with new headings and changes to existing headings.

The genre/form authority records are available online to the general public through Library of Congress Authorities at authorities.loc.gov and are distributed through the MARC Distribution Service to all subscribers.

The headings are also included in the *Supplementary Vocabularies* volume of *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (the Big Red Books) beginning in 2009.

Q9: How can all of the approved genre/form headings in a particular discipline be found?

A: Users can follow the hierarchies to discover works of interest to them. For example, a user searching **Wildlife films** can follow the broader terms to retrieve **Nature films**, **Science films**, **Educational films**, **Documentary films**, and **Nonfiction films**, respectively. The broadest term is the generic term of the discipline. Currently, the broadest terms are **Motion pictures**, **Television programs**, **Video recordings**, and **Radio programs**. By searching one of these headings users can follow the narrower terms to find all of the headings in the discipline.

Q10: Will the genre/form heading list continue to be separate from LCSH?

A: Yes, the genre/form headings are in a separate list which will coexist with *LCSH*, but will not be subsumed into it. Genre/form headings describe what a work *is*; traditional subject headings describe the *content*, what a work is *about*. The two types of headings therefore serve different purposes and do not interact with each other.

Q11: Does this mean that there won't be any more form subdivisions (i.e., \$v)?

A: There are no plans at this time to discontinue the use of form subdivisions on subject headings; catalogers should continue to apply them according to the guidelines set forth in the *Subject Headings Manual*. Form subdivisions of subject headings (tags 600, 610, 630, 650, and 651) should be applied even if genre/form headings (tag 655) appear in the same bibliographic record. Example:

Title: *Arsenic and old lace*
650 #0 \$a Serial murders \$v Drama.
650 #0 \$a Mentally ill \$v Drama.
650 #0 \$a Maiden aunts \$v Drama.
655 #0 \$a Comedy films.
655 #0 \$a Film adaptations.
655 #0 \$a Feature films.
655 #0 \$a Fiction films.

Genre/form headings may not be subdivided, geographically, topically, chronologically, or by form (\$v).

Projects

Q12: Why is the Policy and Standards Division creating genre/form authority records?

A: The Division has three basic objectives for the genre/form projects. They are:

1. To assist in retrieval by providing access points for the forms and genres of expressions, in addition to headings describing subject content
2. To create a system of authority records that:
 - a. Permits future development and maintenance by LC and its SACO partners, patterned after the routines established for *LCSH* as a whole
 - b. Supports automatic validation of headings assigned to bibliographic records
3. To determine the issues that will arise in the creation and use of such thesauri.

Q13: Which disciplines are represented in the genre/form headings?

A: Currently headings for moving images (films, television programs, and video recordings) and radio programs are included in the genre/form heading list.

Updated Q14: Which disciplines are going to be added next? When?

A: LC's Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access Directorate managers have approved expansion into the disciplines of cartography, law, literature, music, and religion.

The Policy and Standards Division presented a timeline and plan to the ABA managers on October 31st, 2008, and they accepted it on November 17th.

The plan follows the principles and recommendations for the management of the genre/form projects, as outlined in the moving image project report; provides opportunities for involvement by other libraries and organizations with an interest in genre/form headings; requests input from the broader library community at various points in each project; and, furnishes a timeline that will allow for the orderly roll-out of genre/form headings in each of the five disciplines under development during the next four years. The plan is available to the public at <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/genreformgeneral.html>.

In addition to the moving image project, there are three others currently underway: cartography; music, which is being undertaken in partnership with the Music Library Association (MLA); and law, undertaken in partnership with the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL).

Q15: Why were headings for moving images the first project?

A: In 2003 LC's Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division (MBRS) approached CPSO (now the Policy and Standards Division), asking whether its in-house thesaurus, the *Moving Image Genre-Form Guide (MIGFG)* could be incorporated into *LCSH*. *MIGFG* had not been updated since 1998 when it was released; there was no mechanism to do so, and no staff to do it. The Division, on the other hand, updates *LCSH* weekly through a time-tested process. Moving *MIGFG* into *LCSH* will allow moving image genre/form headings to maintain currency as new forms and genres are developed.

Beginning the development of genre/form headings with moving image terms also had a major advantage. The moving image headings constitute a relatively small, defined subgroup within *LCSH*. Since this initial foray into genre/form headings was be small in scope, it served as an experiment to determine the issues that arise when undertaking such a project. The resolution of the issues can serve as a template for other projects in other disciplines.

Updated Q16: When will existing LCSH that are actually form headings (e.g., Large type books, Handbooks, vade-mecums, etc.) have genre/form authority records?

A: The Classification and Subject Cataloging Policy Advisory Working Group of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) has presented the Policy and Standards Division with the legal genre/form terms list that it has developed. The thesaurus includes a few general form headings that are of particular interest to the legal community, and AALL has asked that they be included in LC's genre/form thesaurus. The Policy and Standards Division will consider each of the terms that AALL has requested.

To date, an all-encompassing project to develop genre/form headings of general application such as **Handbooks, vade-mecums, etc.** has not been placed on the timeline. The Genre/Form Implementation Subcommittee of the Subject Analysis Committee of ALCTS is considering whether to develop a list of such headings to assist the Policy and Standards Division in their efforts.

Updated Q17: Does the Policy and Standards Division plan to update the bibliographic records that currently have MIGFG and RADFG headings, changing them to the new LC genre/form headings?

A: Yes, the Division plans to programmatically update records that have *MIGFG* and *RADFG* headings, replacing them with LC genre/form headings in LC's database. The Policy and Standards Division is working to determine the best way to undertake this activity.

Q18: When did LC authorize the assignment of the new genre/form headings to bibliographic records in its cataloging?

A: The Moving Image, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division (MBRS) began to apply LC genre/form headings on new cataloging for moving images and radio programs on January 1, 2009. LC's use of the *Moving Image Genre-Form Guide (MIGFG)*, *Moving Image Materials: Genre Terms (MIM)* and the *Radio form-Genre Guide (RADFG)* was discontinued at that time.

Proposals and application of headings

Q19: Where can instructions on proposing and applying genre/form headings be found?

A: The *Subject Headings Manual* includes two instruction sheets that are specific to moving image and radio program genre/form headings proposals and application. H 1913 discusses the former, and H 1969.5, the latter. Catalogers should also consult the instruction sheets that explain the general procedures for proposing new headings and revisions to headings.

Updated Q20: Who can propose new genre/form headings?

A: Library of Congress catalogers and SACO libraries working with moving images and radio programs may propose genre/form headings as needed.

Q21: In what disciplines can genre/form headings be proposed?

A: Genre/form headings can be proposed in those disciplines that the Policy and Standards Division has developed. Currently those disciplines are moving images (films, television programs, and video recordings) and radio programs.

Q22: Can SACO libraries submit proposals to change genre/form authority records?

A: SACO proposals to change genre/form authority records may be submitted through the same SACO workstream that is used for proposed updates to subject authority records. The proposed changes should be supported by research, just as any change proposal is.

Updated Q23: Does there have to be a corresponding topical heading for every genre/form heading, and vice versa?

A: There does not have to be a corresponding topical heading for every genre/form heading proposed. The heading needed to fully analyze the work in hand should be proposed, whether that is a genre/form heading or a topical heading.

It is expected that catalogers proposing a genre/form heading will search the topical headings to discover whether a heading exists for the concept; if there is, the heading may be reused as a genre/form heading. Likewise, a cataloger proposing a topical heading should search the genre/form headings to determine whether a heading has been established there, and use the same terminology if possible in the topical heading.

Catalogers should be aware that there are some topical headings that are similar in syntax to genre/form headings, but that cannot be proposed or used as such. In these cases the meaning of the heading itself restricts it to purely topical use, or renders it useless in a genre/form environment. The Policy and Standards Division has added a scope note to each of those authority records. For example, the scope notes on **Color motion pictures** reads in part:

Here are entered works on motion pictures filmed in color, as opposed to black and white....

This heading is not used for individual films, which are entered under headings appropriate to the content, genre, and/or form of the film.

Q24: Why is the wording of the scope notes different from that on other headings?

A: Some integrated library systems (ILSs) are unable at this time to distinguish between genre/form headings (tag 155) and topical headings (tag 150) in cases where the data in \$a is identical. This lack of functionality can lead to confusing displays for scope notes.

For example, if the standard wording, "Here are entered works on...", were used in these records, the scope note for **Fantasy films** would in some ILSs display as:

Here are entered works on films that feature elements of the fantastic, often including magic, supernatural forces, or exotic fantasy worlds.

Here are entered films that feature elements of the fantastic, often including magic, supernatural forces, or exotic fantasy worlds.

This could be confusing for users, who see what appear to be similar but contradictory definitions – one says that the heading is used for works about fantasy films, and the other says that it is used for fantasy films themselves.

The Policy and Standards Division has modified the wording to make it clearer to end users and catalogers alike, and has included subdivision information in the scope notes for the topical headings. The scope notes for **Fantasy films** are now:

This heading is used as a topical heading for works about films that feature elements of the fantastic, often including magic, supernatural forces, or exotic fantasy worlds. When used as a topical heading it is subdivided by the appropriate geographic, topical, and/or form subdivisions.

This heading is used as a genre/form heading for films that feature elements of the fantastic, often including magic, supernatural forces, or exotic fantasy worlds.

A standard scope note is also being added to all topical headings for which a complementary genre/form heading exists, but whose meaning does not need to be defined. This scope note dictates usage and application only:

When subdivided by the appropriate geographic, topical, and/or form subdivisions, this heading is used for works about [heading].

For example, the scope note for the topical heading **Mummy films** is:

When subdivided by the appropriate geographic, topical and/or form subdivisions, this heading is used for works about mummy films.

Q25: What if a genre/form heading proposal is interdisciplinary and should have a broader term that is in a discipline that isn't yet part of the project?

A: There are many examples of interdisciplinary genre/form headings currently in the genre/form list (e.g., **Opera films**, which could have the BT **Operas**). Adding the BT could cause confusion because it would lead to a lack of uniformity. If **Operas** were to be approved as a genre/form heading, then a user could rationally expect to find **Ballads** as well, but would not. Therefore, the BTs for the interdisciplinary aspect of the headings are not being added at this time.

As the genre/form projects are expanded to include more disciplines, the existing headings will be examined to determine whether any BTs should be added to them.

Q26: What if a cataloger would like to propose a genre/form heading for a discipline that is not currently under development?

A: SACO libraries may propose topical headings (tag 150) instead of genre/form headings (tag 155) for those concepts, and use them as authorized genre/form headings in their local catalogs.

Q27: What are the headings Fiction films and Nonfiction films; Fiction television programs and Nonfiction television programs; and Fiction radio programs and Nonfiction radio programs for?

A: Many genre/form headings are not intrinsically fiction or nonfiction (e.g., **Children's films**, **Low budget films**). The headings **Fiction films** and **Nonfiction films; Fiction television programs** and **Nonfiction television programs**; and, **Fiction radio programs** and **Nonfiction radio programs** are applied to distinguish between nonfiction and fiction treatments of a subject. While the Policy and Standards Division recognizes that most users would not approach a catalog and search "nonfiction films," assigning the heading allows for searches to be limited easily, particularly in a keyword environment.

Q28: Can topical headings (tag 150) be used as genre/form headings in bibliographic records (tag 655) if there is not a corresponding genre/form authority record (tag 155)?

A: The Policy and Standards Division realizes that some libraries would like to use genre/form headings for disciplines in which authority records have not yet been made (e.g., literature). The use of LC topical subject headings (tag 150, second indicator 0) as genre/form headings (tag 655, second indicator 0) in those disciplines is allowed, depending on the meaning of the topical heading.

If the scope note says that the heading is used for works *of* a given type, then it can be used as a genre/form heading. If the scope note says that a heading is used for works *about* (or *on*) a given topic, then it cannot be used as an LC genre/form heading. If there is no scope note, then the cataloger should use his or her best judgment.

For example, the scope note on **Constitutions** reads:

Here are entered collections of constitutions or texts of individual constitutions. Works about constitutions or constitutional law are entered under Constitutional law.

The heading **Constitutions** can therefore be used as an LC genre/form heading.

On the other hand, the scope note for **Interactive art** says:

Here are entered works on art that requires or invites viewer participation, or that provides the elements from which the viewer creates a work of art.

Since this scope note specifies that the heading is for *works on* art, not the works of art themselves, this heading cannot be coded as an LC genre/form heading.

If a topical heading cannot be used as an LC genre/form heading, but a library would like to use it in that way, the cataloger may code it as a local heading:

655 #7 \$a Interactive art. \$2 local

When BIBCO libraries apply genre/form headings (tag 655) according to the above guidelines, they may code their records as BIBCO level.

Q29: Can genre/form headings (tag 155) be used as topical headings in bibliographic records (tag 650) if there is not a corresponding subject authority record (tag 150)?

A: Authorized genre/form headings cannot be used as topical headings. Catalogers who wish to use genre/form headings as topical headings should make a subject proposal in order to do so. For example, **Radio call-in shows** is an approved genre/form heading, but a topical heading does not currently exist for the concept. If a heading were needed for a book about the history of radio call-in shows, then the cataloger would propose such a heading, tagged 150. In almost all cases, the wording of the new topical heading should mimic that of the genre/form heading.

Q30: Is subdivision of genre/form headings permitted?

A: There is currently no provision for the subdivision of LC genre/form headings, either topically, chronologically, geographically, or by form. The MARC authority and

bibliographic formats permit it, but LC has chosen not to implement the subfields at this time.

Updated Q31: Why can't the moving image genre/form headings be subdivided geographically?

A: Whether geographic subdivision of moving image genre/form headings should be permitted has been an ongoing debate, and there are valid arguments on each side. The argument against geographic subdivision is mostly a philosophical one: geography is not part of the genre or the form of a work. A horror film is a horror film whether it is produced in France or in the United States.

There are also practical arguments against geographic subdivision. Within the context of moving images, geographic subdivision could have many different meanings: the country of filming, the country of production, the country of distribution, the nationality of the director, and the setting of the film are several possibilities. Most, but not all, catalogers corresponding with the Policy and Standards Division on the issue agree that the subdivision would denote the country of production, but not all do. Even if catalogers agree, and if instructions are written to clarify it, will users properly interpret it?

The second of the practical arguments against geographic subdivision is that the country of production is available elsewhere in the record. In bibliographic records the country of production is contained in MARC field 257.¹ Place of production is also contained in MARC field 260 in every bibliographic record, and the first one listed there is coded in the fixed field.

There are several arguments in favor of geographic subdivision. The first is that users, particularly those doing film studies, would find it useful to browse a list of films from a given country. Additionally, the ability to limit searches by fixed field coding is not sufficient since only one country is coded there. This is a problem for films that are produced in more than one country. Finally, catalogers in libraries that have implemented genre/form headings locally and that permit geographic subdivision have written to the Division stating that their users find geographic subdivision essential, and that they frequently browse headings in order to take advantage of the subdivision.

The Policy and Standards Division would like to hear from more interested parties, particularly those who have empirical data on user behavior with regard to geographic subdivisions in genre/form searches, before making a final decision.

Q32: Can genre/form headings be used to bring out the language of a work?

A: There is currently no provision for the language of a work within the genre/form headings. The language is coded in various MARC fields that contain descriptive information: the 008/35-37 and 041 fields, and the uniform title fields (e.g., 130, 240). ILSs can be programmed to search on these fields, usually as search limits, obviating the need for duplicative entry in the genre/form headings.

¹ Until July, 2009 MARC 21 field 257 was limited to records describing archival copies of moving images. At the 2009 Annual Conference of the American Library Association, MARBI accepted a proposal to expand the use of the 257 field to include all manifestations of moving images, and renamed the field to "Country of Producing Entity" from "Country of Producing Entity for Archival Films."

Q33: Why can't the headings Motion pictures, Television programs, Radio programs, and Video recordings be applied to individual works? Why are they limited to collections?

A: These four headings are provided mostly for hierarchical purposes, in order to give catalog users a useful collocation point for all of the genre/form headings in a given discipline.

The general rule to assign headings that are as specific as the work being cataloged applies to genre/form headings just as it does to topical headings. Since the genres and forms of moving image works and radio programs have been established, the most specific heading(s) possible should be assigned to each work. In cases where an appropriate specific heading does not yet exist, one should be proposed.

If catalogers in individual libraries choose to apply the headings **Motion pictures**, **Television programs**, **Radio programs**, and/or **Video recordings** to individual works in their collections, they may do so, but must code the heading as a local one. Example:

655 #7 \$a Motion pictures. \$2 local

Q34: How should headings be assigned to nonfiction films or programs about a particular subject?

A: Assign topical headings appropriate to the content of the work, and genre/form headings to describe what the work is. Examples:

Title: *The Civil War*.

651 #0 \$a United States \$x History \$y Civil War, 1861-1865.

655 #0 \$a Documentary television programs.

655 #0 \$a Nonfiction television programs.

Title: *An inconvenient truth*.

650 #0 \$a Global warming.

650 #0 \$a Greenhouse effect, Atmospheric.

650 #0 \$a Environmental policy \$z United States.

650 #0 \$a Environmental protection \$z United States.

655 #0 \$a Nonfiction films.

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