



Keyword versus Subject Searching

Keyword Search

What is a Keyword Search?

A keyword search is done by typing in the way you would normally speak. When you are searching for something on Google you are doing a keyword search. In the library catalog, a keyword search will search in many different fields, including, title, publisher, subjects, chapter name, etc.

What Will I find with a Keyword Search?

Because it is a natural language search, the word "and" is inserted between your search words. If you do a keyword search using Civil War the catalog will search for both "Civil" and "War" you will get records where both words "Civil" and "War" appear in the record. You will get sources relating to the American Civil War, you will also get items about the Spanish Civil War, World War II, Vietnam War, etc. It may even find items not related to any war.

When is a Keyword Search Helpful?

Keyword searching is most helpful when you are beginning your research. It is a broad search and will cover a lot of material. If you don't know where to start, do a keyword search to see what you find.

Subject-Heading Search

What is a Subject-Heading Search?

A subject-heading search uses a specific set of terms is used to describe the contents of resources held in the library, also known as a controlled-vocabulary search. (For a more in-depth explanation, see Subject Headings Guide). Still confused? The Yellow Pages is organized by subject headings. You will find car dealerships listed under "Automobiles--Dealers and movie theatres under "Theatres--Movies."

What Will I Find with a Subject-Heading Search?

When you do a subject-heading search you will get sources related only to your search topic. A subject-search for "Civil War" will return sources relating to civil wars. This is still kind of broad. You can narrow your search by using "United States History Civil War." This will get your sources only related to the U.S. Civil War.

How Do I know What the Subject Heading Is?

You won't always know. That is one of the downsides to searching by subject heading. If you do a subject search for "American Civil War" the catalog will tell you to search under the correct term: "United States History Civil War 1861-1865." If you find a source you want using a keyword search, look at the subject headings listed in the catalog record. Do another search using one or more of these subject headings. Chances are you will find something helpful.

Keyword	Subject Heading
Natural Language Search: easy to use and a good place to start research	"Controlled-vocabulary" search: pre-defined terms used to describe sources
Flexible: Easy to combine words or phrases	Less Flexible: Can be difficult if you don't know the exact subject terms
"Google-ized" search: Searches for keywords anywhere in the record and may return records not relevant to your search	Controlled Search: Only searches for words in the subject field and find records only relevant to your search
Number of Results: May return too many or too few results	Number of results: Catalog will suggest subheadings or other terms to use to increase or decrease the number of results
Relevance: Often returns sources not related to your search	Relevance: Will return sources related to your search

