Searching your topic by Library of Congress Subject Headings is a great way to find resources for your research project. But, what are subject headings? How do you find them? And, why is this beneficial?

The Library of Congress creates an alphabetical list of words and phrases, called subject headings, which are used to describe and label the topics of any given book, video, or other library item. Subject headings group all items on a particular topic together making it easier for you to find all the books on your topic at once. Subheadings are presented after subject headings to narrow a topic so you can find the specific subject you are interested in researching.

Subject headings provide a great example of the power of language and pass that power onto the researcher. For example, a keyword search may yield a different meaning from what a researcher can discover using a subject heading search. This is because subject headings convey relationships between terms and ideas. In addition to discerning meaning subject headings present the researcher with options to narrow a broad topic and explore topics that had not been previously considered. This is true because a subject heading list with its subheadings will alert the researcher to new ideas and allow him to discover more items than a keyword search would have. Subject headings also present topic relevant terms in relation to each other, so the researcher can see the connection and meaning formed through controlled vocabulary. Since subject headings are presented in an alphabetical list the researcher is able to truly browse the broad topic and all of its sub topics to ensure he has found the material of greatest interest.

Let’s look at our example of hip-hop music. In the UW-Milwaukee Library Catalog you can search for hip-hop music as a subject. The page presented shows hip-hop and its subheadings, but also a “See” note taking you to the related term, Rap (Music).

- **Hip-hop music (0)**
  - **See:** *Rap (Music)*
  - **Hip-hop—New York (State)—New York** (3)
  - **Hip-hop—Political aspects** (2)
  - **Hip-hop—Religious aspects** (1)
  - **Hip-hop—Social aspects** (2)
  - **Hip-hop—Social aspects—United States** (4)
  - **Hip-hop—Social aspects—Wisconsin—Milwaukee** (1)
  - **Hip-hop—United States** (16)
  - **Hip-hop—United States—History** (1)
  - **Hip-hop—Wisconsin—Milwaukee** (1)

This shows you more ideas surrounding the broad rap/hip-hop topic, which can help to focus your research. You can then choose the Rap (Music) subject heading along with a subheading that helps you...
to narrow your ideas. For example, you may choose to click on Rap (Music) – Drama. The number in parenthesis lets you know that we hold two items that deal with that subject. Once you have chosen an item to look at you will see a list of other subject headings describing that item that you may want to search as well. By going through the subject headings you have expanded the possibilities of your research project and found all of the library materials that cover your topic.

You do not have to know which subject headings to use right away, but they should rather serve as your guide to the language used to describe your topic. Whether you look those terms up through a Words Anywhere search or a Subject search you will find a list of subject headings assigned to every book, movie, CD, and more.

**Works Consulted**