

# Subject Headings

## What are Subject Headings & how do they differ from keyword searching?

Subject Headings, also be referred to as “index terms,” are controlled vocabulary terms used in database records to make searching easier and more successful. By standardizing the words or phrases used to represent concepts, you don't need to try and figure out all the ways different authors could refer to the same concept.

### Keywords

- Natural language that describes your topic
- What you think of as you think of words to search
- Searched throughout the document, or the search can be focused on title, author, etc.
- Everyone uses different keywords or spellings.

### Subject Headings (SH)

- Also called "controlled vocabulary"
- Words and phrases that are used to "tag" articles in a consistent way
- One SH can be used to cover multiple keywords in the form of narrower terms
- Only searches the SH field, not in the full text or title or anywhere else
- Can be slow to change/update
- Not flexible

## Why use Subject Headings?

With the wide variety of vocabulary used to represent concepts in research literature, finding articles about specific concepts can be difficult without the controlled vocabulary of a thesaurus. Controlled vocabulary provides a way of searching for information to ensure that you are seeing all of the relevant literature on your topic, despite the different vocabulary used to describe the same concept.

Using subject headings can give you more control in your search while ensuring you don't miss anything relevant.