Subject Terms

THE LANGUAGE OF THE DATABASE
Keywords and Subject Terms, oh my!

- **Keywords:**
  - Natural language words, what we think of first when we decide on a research question.
  - You search by keyword when you first start your research.
  - When there has not been a subject term assigned... when a certain topic is new.

- **Subject terms:**
  - The words that are assigned to articles by indexers.
  - They are specific to each database though they are often similar across databases.
  - Help you find all of the articles on a specific topic regardless of what words various authors have used.
    - Think about all the different words you can use for HAT.
Finding the Subject Terms

- One place to find out what the subject terms are for a topic is to look at the complete record of an article that looks good for your subject.

- The record is what you see after you click on the article title in the database retrieval list.

- Be sure to look at the subject terms for articles that are “perfect” for your topic.
A more direct way to find the subject terms is to use the database thesaurus. The thesaurus goes by different names in different databases. In Academic Search Complete it is under Subject Terms.
And even more on finding the Subject Terms

- Type your word in the subject term box and search. (or in this case, browse)

- You will notice that the word to use in this database for “Fish” is “Fishes”

- Click on the Subject Term
Look at the contents of the thesaurus search.

At the top you see the “scope note” that tells the definition of this term.

Broader and narrower terms can be used to manipulate your search to more general or more specific articles.

“Related Terms” might be more accurate to your search.

The “Used for” words are keywords that will be mapped to Fishes if you search using one of them. Notice “Fish” is in the “Used for” list.
Building a Search Term List

- Create a list of search terms for your topic:
  - **Broad terms** to use in the catalog for books and to explore the breadth of a topic in the databases.
  - **Narrow terms** to focus the topic in the databases.
  - **Related terms** explore issues related to the topic or to give context or contrast to a topic.

- Start out with *keywords* then *add subject terms* as you begin to search. Continue to add terms to your list as you do your research. It will make your research easier and you will have better results if you do.
Subject Terms are an OPTION

- You should use both keywords and subject terms in your searches.
- You can do separate keyword and subject searches or you can mix them up!
- It is all about using the many tools for searching.

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