

Foley Center Library
presents



What is a Controlled Vocabulary? (and why do I need it?)

Created by Theresa Kappus, Distance Services Librarian at Foley Library.

It's a common problem.

I've tried searching the library databases for articles and I can't find anything.

Same here!

Same here!

Hey! I'm not the only one!



So, what's going on?

Some things go by different names depending on where you are. It helps to know the local lingo.

A few examples from “real life”:

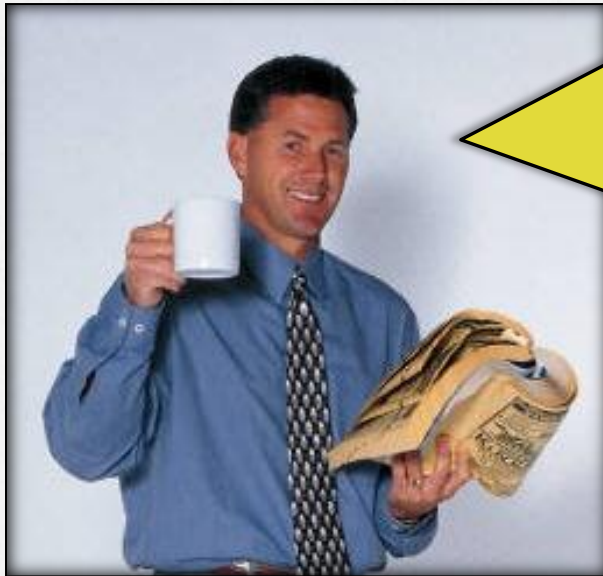
- Is your noon meal **lunch** or **dinner**?
- Do you drink **pop**, **soda**, **soda pop** or **coke**?
- Do you wear **sneakers** or **tennis shoes**?
- Do you ride a **toboggan** or wear one on your head?

Each library database has a “local lingo”, too!
It's called a controlled vocabulary.

A Controlled Vocabulary is...

- o a standardized set of terms used by a database to categorize articles based on the content.
- o a good way to improve your search results. Using terms from a database's controlled vocabulary retrieves more relevant articles.





The yellow pages in a phone book (remember those?) have a controlled vocabulary. Cafes are listed under “Restaurants”, car stuff is listed under “Automobile”.

Yeah, yeah, I know. You could just look it up on your cell phone, but I’m trying to make a point here!
Cheers!

How to find & use a controlled vocabulary.

The controlled vocabulary for the **Academic Search Complete** database can be found under the **Subject Terms** tab.

To check your keyword against the list, enter it in the box and click the Browse button.

In this database, articles about **heart attacks** can be retrieved by searching for: **MYOCARDIAL Infarction**.

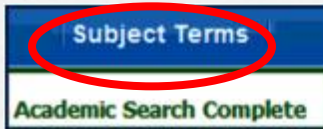
To find articles on **heart bypass surgery**, search, use the Subject Heading: **CORONARY artery bypass**.

The screenshot shows the EBSCO Academic Search Complete interface. At the top, the navigation bar includes 'New Search', 'Publications', 'Subject Terms' (highlighted with a red circle), 'Cited References', and 'More'. Below this, the search bar contains 'Searching: Academic Search Complete' and a 'Search' button. The 'Subject Terms' section is active, showing 'Browsing: Academic Search Complete -- Subject Terms'. A search box contains 'heart attack' and a 'Browse' button is highlighted with a red circle. Below the search box, three radio buttons are visible: 'Term Begins With' (selected), 'Term Contains', and 'Relevancy Ranked'. A list of subject terms is shown below, with red arrows pointing to 'HEART attack Use MYOCARDIAL infarction' and 'HEART bypass surgery Use CORONARY artery bypass'.

Subject Term	Use
HEART attack	Use MYOCARDIAL infarction
HEART beat	
HEART beat & intelligence	
HEART block	
HEART bypass surgery	Use CORONARY artery bypass

So, I can browse the controlled vocabulary of a database to find preferred terms and related terms to use in my search. Perfect! How about some more examples?





More Keyword vs. Subject Heading
examples from
Academic Search Complete

ALLERGIES Use ALLERGY

OFFSHORE drilling (Petroleum) Use OFFSHORE oil well drilling

OJIBWAY language Use OJIBWA language

NOT-in-my-back-yard syndrome Use NIMBY syndrome

FRATERNITIES Use GREEK letter societies

STRING theory Use STRING models

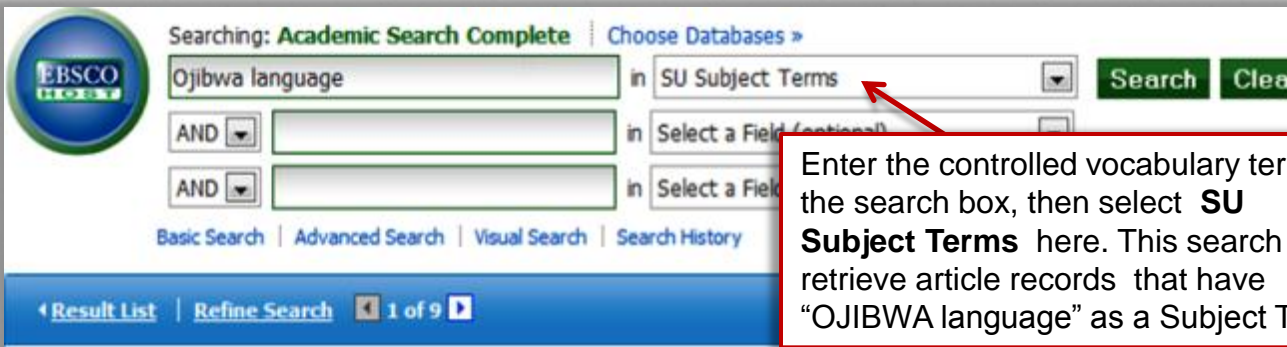
SORORITIES, Greek letter Use GREEK letter societies

BABYLONIAN exile, Jewish Use JEWS -- History -- Babylonian captivity, 598-515 B.C.

Keywords in black

Subject Headings in Blue

To use controlled vocabulary terms in a search...



Searching: **Academic Search Complete** | [Choose Databases >](#)

Ojibwa language in **SU Subject Terms**

AND in Select a Field (optional)

AND in Select a Field (optional)

[Basic Search](#) | [Advanced Search](#) | [Visual Search](#) | [Search History](#)

[Result List](#) | [Refine Search](#) | 1 of 9

Reading Anishinaabe Identities: Meaning and Metaphor in Nindoodem Pictographs

Authors: Bohaker, Heidi¹

Source: Ethnohistory; Winter2010, Vol. 57 Issue 1, p11-33, 23p, 9 Illustrations

Document Type: Article

Subject Terms: *PICTURE-writing, Indian
*PICTURE-writing
*RESEARCH
*OJIBWA language
*OJIBWA Indians
*TREATIES
*METAPHOR
*INDIANS -- Languages -- Writing

The Subject Terms in this field are all part of the controlled vocabulary for *this* database.

Other databases



Foley Center Library

Find Articles

Frequently Used Databases ▾

- All Databases A to Z
- All Databases by Subject
- Electronic Reference Sources by Subject
- Periodicals @ Foley
- * New & Featured Databases

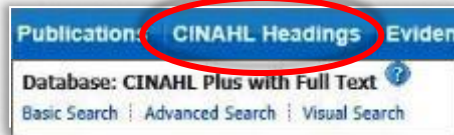
A red arrow points from the text 'Subject Terms' in the adjacent list to the 'All Databases by Subject' link in the screenshot.

Each database has its own controlled vocabulary and they may be called:

- Subject Headings
- Subject Terms
- Thesaurus
- Descriptors

Here are examples from a few other databases.

From the nursing database **CINAHL** Controlled Vocabulary = **CINAHL Headings**



Using controlled vocabulary terms is very important when searching medical databases.



There are a lot of flus!

Cancer Use: [Neoplasms](#)

Itching Use: [Pruritus](#)

Sore Throat Use: [Pharyngitis](#)

Allergies Use: [Hypersensitivity](#)

Knee Replacement Use: [Arthroplasty, Replacement, Knee](#)



CINAHL also uses a “tree view” to show subheadings underneath the main headings.



For more about tree views, look for the tutorials link on the CINAHL Headings screen.

From the education database ERIC Controlled Vocabulary = Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors



Vice Principals **Use** Assistant Principals

Emotions **Use** Psychological Patterns

Foreign Languages **Use** Second Languages

History Curriculum **Use** History Instruction

Grantsmanship

- Scope Note
- Broader Terms
- Related Terms

Skills and procedures for applying for external funding

- Fund Raising
- Bids
- Contracts+
- Federal Aid+
- Financial Support+
- Grants+
- Private Financial Support

A Scope Note explains what the term means in this database.

Notice the list of Broader Terms and Related Terms

From the psychology database **PsycINFO** Controlled Vocabulary = **Thesaurus**

The screenshot shows the PsycINFO Thesaurus interface. At the top, the navigation bar includes 'New Search', 'Thesaurus', 'Cited References', and 'Indexes'. The 'Thesaurus' link is circled in red. Below the navigation bar, the search bar shows 'Searching: PsycINFO' and 'Choose Databases >'. The search input field contains 'attachment disorder', with 'Search' and 'Clear' buttons. Below the search bar, there are links for 'Basic Search', 'Advanced Search', 'Visual Search', and 'Search History'. The main content area is titled 'Browsing: PsycINFO -- Thesaurus'. It features a search input field with 'attachment disorder' and a 'Browse' button. Below this, there are radio buttons for 'Term Begins With' (selected), 'Term Contains', and 'Relevancy Ranked'. A 'Page: Previous | Next' section is visible. Below that, there is a section for adding terms to the search, with a dropdown menu set to 'OR' and an 'Add' button. A note says '(Click term to display details.)'. Below this, a message states: 'The term **attachment disorder** would appear here had there been an exact match'. A list of results is shown with checkboxes and the following terms: 'Attachment Disorders' and 'Attachment Theory'. A red arrow points from a text box to the 'attachment disorder' text in the message.

Even one letter can
make a difference!

Got it?

When searching a database:

- o Start with your own keywords.
- o Browse the **Subject Headings** or **Thesaurus** to find preferred terms and related terms, narrower terms or broader terms.
- o Certain fields like medicine, psychology and engineering use very specific terminology. Always check the controlled vocabulary when searching databases related to those fields.

Try it!

If you need help, let us know!

Email: refdesk@gonzaga.edu

Call: 313-5931 / 800-498-5941

Chat reference is also available on the library website.

*On campus? Come in
and talk to a librarian!*



Images From Microsoft Clip Art

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Photo of Foley Center Library by Brenda Warrington