

# Your Library Today



Mr. Breitsprecher's Edition

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## Finding Information: Slavery

Looking for some information about ocean life? To a librarian, these types of books are about "marine biology." Does that sound odd? Let's review the difference between **KEY WORDS** and **SUBJECT HEADINGS**.

### Keywords

These are words that appear in documents. They are words that we use when we talk and write. There are many ways to express ideas. We use different words to talk about ideas. Different people use different terms and words.

For example, what do you call a fountain to get a drink of water? In Wisconsin, it is commonly called a **bubbler**. In other places, people have never heard of a "bubbler." They may call this a "drinking fountain."

What do you call fizzy drinks like Coke and Pepsi? In Wisconsin, it is commonly called "pop" or "soda pop". Others might just call it a soft drink or soda.

Do you see how we use different words to describe the same ideas?

### Keyword Searches

A keyword search looks for when a word is used. Most Internet searches are keyword searches, though today's search engines use technology to find related items and not just the keyword we used.

**Google** has created special ways to search the Internet with keywords. Google actually is performing the search when you use **YAHOO** search and some other search engines too. Many people believe Google owns the best keyword search technology.

You can do keyword searches with library computer catalogs too.

### Subject Headings for Slavery in the United States

Librarians think about what a book is about and find common terms, called subject headings that ALL libraries will use for that topic or idea. Most school and public libraries use **SEARS SUBJECT HEADINGS**. This ties information together and make research easier. Dewey numbers are assigned by these subject headings and tell you where to find information on the shelves. Here are some subject headings and Dewey Numbers for slavery in the United States:

- African Americans -- Biography 920
- African American -- Civil Rights 323.1; 342
- African Americans -- Economic Conditions 330.973
- African Americans -- Segregation 305.896
- African Americans -- Southern States 305.896
- American literature -- African American Authors 810.8; 810.9
- Slave Trade 341; 345; 380.1
- Slavery 177; 306.3; 326; 342
- Slavery -- United States 306.3; 326.0973
- Slavery -- United States -- Fiction 808.83; 813
- Slaves 305.5
- United States -- History -- 1861-1865, Civil War 973.7
- United States -- History -- 1783-1865 973.3-973.7

But be careful. Different people describe the same topic with different words. Keyword searches can be frustrating, especially when using a library catalog.

If you only use keywords to find information in a library, you will probably miss some good information. Different authors use words differently.

### Subject Headings

Librarians know that we actually look for ideas, topics, and information, not keywords. If different authors use different words for ideas and topics, we should still be able to find what we want.

Librarians gather information and organize it – nonfiction, informational books, are placed together on the shelves. This is done by thinking about the information a nonfiction author is sharing. Librarians use a list of **subject headings**. A number code, a **Dewey Number**, is assigned based on the subject term. Librarians use subject headings that come from a **controlled list**. Most school and public libraries use subject headings that come from the book, **Sears List of Subject Headings**.

### Subject Heading Searches

If you can find the subject headings that a library uses for the information you want, searching with the subject terms will be a faster, more accurate search. The same is true when searching databases.

Sometimes, we don't know the subject headings. An easy way to find out will be to use keyword searches to find ONE book or item about the topic or idea we want.

Then, look for the subject heading that a librarian uses. Most computer catalogs and databases show subject headings along with all searches.

Sometimes, they are listed off to the left or right. Sometimes, they are included with each item's listing.

On a computer, they are usually presented as links. You can just click on the subject headings you want and you will find more of the same information! Research using digital tools is easy when you understand subject headings.