

Review: *Magic Search: Getting the Best Results from Your Catalog and Beyond*

Reviewed by Jeremy Darrington

Magic search: Getting the Best Results from Your Catalog and Beyond

Rebecca S. Kornegay, Heidi E. Buchanan, and Hildegard B. Morgan

Chicago: American Library Association, 2009

ISBN: 978-0-8389-0990-4, Paperback

160 pages, \$45.00

It's time to face facts. You're a general keyword searcher. Admit it—you like the simplicity of that unadorned query box just as much as your patrons do. Unlike your patrons, though, you have an appreciation for the potential that Library of Congress subject headings have for revealing the treasures of your collection. But you don't use them like you should, and you know it. I mean, how often do you *really* browse the list of subject headings in the catalog? Sometimes subject headings seem inscrutable, the product of arcane rules and reasoning inaccessible to people like you and me. So, do you have to become a cataloger to make good use of subject headings in your catalog? Perhaps more importantly, does it mean you have to give up the ease of general keyword searching?

Kornegay, Buchanan, and Morgan don't think so. In this short and illuminating reference book, the authors—a veteran reference librarian, a newer reference librarian, and an experienced cataloger—present an approach to subject searching that combines the power of LCSH's controlled vocabulary with the flexible keyword searching style we've become accustomed to. Their approach revolves around LC subdivisions, those keywords and phrases that appear after a double dash to elucidate different aspects of a subject's main heading. For example, in the heading **Roofs--Amateurs' manuals**, the **--Amateurs' manuals** phrase subdivides the main heading **Roofs** to distinguish it from general works about roofs or from works about **--Design and construction** of roofs. These subdivisions can be added to general keyword searches to work magic in your catalog.

Expanding on their popular 2005 [Library Journal](#) article, the authors have winnowed a list of more than 3,500 subdivisions to a few hundred top performers. The subdivisions are grouped in categories (e.g., finding images, finding how-to guides), and each subdivision is accompanied by a short description of what it's used for, notes about LC rules governing its use, and examples of the kinds of results it finds. You will discover interesting insights (**--Biography** is never applied to individuals), quirky facets (**--Bonsai collections** anyone?), and powerhouse performers (the "aspects" family: social, economic, moral and ethical, etc.). Throughout the book, the authors present a number of "magic searches"—search queries that capture multiple subdivisions to produce better results. For example, **[topic or interest] AND (manuals OR technique)** leverages multiple subdivisions to find a wide variety of how-to guides.



It is important to note that how your online catalog is set up will affect your results (do general keyword searches include subject headings?). Furthermore, exactness matters (*sources* not *source*), though word order doesn't usually. That said, you can improve your results further by placing subdivision phrases in quotes or by using advanced options to combine your chosen subdivision as a subject keyword with other general keywords. *Magic Search* provides some very interesting and illuminating reading, though it's best read in chunks during down time at the desk so you can experiment in your own catalog.

One of the best features of the book is the index. All the featured subdivisions are listed in bold, but even better, the full listing of magic searches is grouped by category under "M." It may be worth photocopying those three pages and keeping them at the reference desk to aid your exploration.

Highly recommended for all reference librarians.

Jeremy Darrington is a reference librarian at the Library! at Collister, a branch of the Boise Public Library. He is finishing up his MLIS at the University of Washington this summer. He is particularly interested in metadata and information organization.

The Idaho Librarian (ISSN: 2151-7738) is a publication of the [Idaho Library Association](#).