Searching with Subject Terms

Using Subject Terms when searching the Library databases (Databases A-Z) will help you narrow your results and find relevant articles on your topic. In the library databases, Subject Terms may also be referred to as Topics or Descriptors, and are sometimes located in a database’s thesaurus. All of these are referring to the same thing: Controlled Vocabulary.

See how different databases refer to Subject Terms:

What Does “Controlled Vocabulary” Mean?

In a nutshell, Controlled Vocabulary is a system of assigning one term to represent multiple related terms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Controlled Vocabulary Term</th>
<th>Related/Synonymous Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Off-white</td>
<td>Beige, vanilla, cream, eggshell, taupe, linen, antique white, ecru</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each article or book in the library databases is assigned several Controlled Vocabulary terms that describe the subject matter of the article. Controlled Vocabulary ensures that one definitive term is used to represent a concept, thus allowing more precision. This lessens the need to use multiple related keywords in a search.
How Can Controlled Vocabulary Improve Database Searching?

You can use Controlled Vocabulary in two ways:

1. **Find the proper subject terms and use them in search.**

**Step 1:** Find proper subject terms.
1. Click **Subject Terms**.
2. Type your keywords or phrases in the **Browse for** search box.
3. Choose one of the options below the search box, e.g., "Relevancy Ranked."
4. Click **Browse** and view your results.

**Step 2:** Use them in search.
2. Narrow your search results

Click on additional subject terms to narrow your search.