

Archivists' Toolkit: Subject Functional Area

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Subject Functional Area (Revised 12 May 2006)

S1: Description

The subject function is for expressing the topic or format characteristic(s) of an archival resource or of a component part of an archival resource, such as an accession, a sub-level part, or a digital object part. The subject function in the AT does not include applying proper names (personal, family, corporate) as subject descriptors to archival resources. That function is part of the name functional area.

A subject record is created for each unique subject term used in an implementation of the Archivists' Toolkit. The uniqueness of a subject term and its corresponding record is based on the values recorded for three of the four elements comprising a subject record: subject term, subject term type, and subject term source. If the values for these three fields in any two records are identical in all respects except for case, then the records are deemed to be duplicates (and the last record to be created will be unable to be saved).

The subject term element is designed primarily to accommodate simple and modified terms. Subject terms can be a single word (e.g., "Mountains") or a phrase (e.g., "Boats and boating") or a word or phrase modified by additional words or phrases, e.g.: .

- "Boats and boating"
- "Boats and boating -- California"
- "Boats and boating -- California -- Accidents and injuries"
- "Boats and boating -- California -- Maps"
- "Boats and boating -- Florida -- Maps"
- "Boats and boating -- Law and legislation"

The Archivists' Toolkit places no requirement on the mark up to be used for dividing parts within the subject term, such as the double hyphen in the examples above. However, using dividers inconsistently can lead to the creation of duplicate records. Thus, it is recommended that repositories settle upon a convention and follow it consistently.

Components of Subject Term Records

In addition to the subject term element, the subject record contains three other elements characterizing the subject term. One element is for indicating the type of the subject term, that is, if it is a genre term, a topical term, a geographical term, etc. (Names that are subjects are expressed in the linking of a name record and not the subject record.) The second element is for indicating the source, or the authority, of the subject term, that is, that it comes from an established thesaurus such as AAT or LCSH or is a local term. The third element is for stating the scope of the term. The subject type and

subject source elements are required for a subject term to be saved, whereas the subject scope statement is optional.

Relationship of Subject Term Records to Other AT Records

Subject records have a many to many relationship to description records. First, one or more subject records may be linked to any one description record. Second, a subject record may link to one or more description records that describe archival resources. Description records include accession records, resource records and component resource records (e.g., series, subseries, folder, item), and digital object records and digital object component records (e.g., child and sibling).

It is important to be able to determine all the subject terms applied to a given resource and, furthermore, only the subject terms applied to a certain component part of a resource. Consequently, subject records should be linked to the description records via the unique record number of the description record, as well as by the resource ID.

This linking strategy will enable, on the one hand, displaying, in the context of a subject record, a list of all the archival resources (by resource number) to which a subject term is applied. On the other hand, in the context of a description record, it will enable displaying a list of all the subject terms applied to that record (not necessarily an entire archival resource, as the record may describe only an item or a folder within a much larger archival resource). This strategy will also support the production of subject guides and of finding aids in which subject terms are listed proximate to the materials to which they apply.

Creation of Subject Term Records

Records for subject terms can be created in advance, using a menu option provided as part of the subject term functional area, and then applied later when needed. Or records for subject terms can be created as an extension of the subject term application and resource description process. If a subject term does not already exist in the implementation, the operator, if he or she has permission, will have the option to create a record for the subject term and then apply it as the last step in the record creation process.

Application of Subject Term Records

The process of applying subject terms begins within the context of the record to which the subject term is to be applied. That is to say, subject terms can only be linked to, or applied, from the context of an open description record. In fact, the command to apply a subject term shall only be available on accession and description records. It shall not be possible to open a subject term record and then apply it to an accession or a description record. This assures that the subject term is not only applied to the intended resource but to the correct component part of the resource.

To illustrate, a resource description record will display with a list of the subjects already linked to the record and, proximate to that list, two command buttons, one for applying a subject and one for removing a subject.

If the operator selects the command to apply a subject, an index list of all the unique subject headings used in the implementation or all subject headings available for use in a processing project is presented in alphabetical order in a different window. The operator may scroll through the list to find the subject term to be applied or, ideally, may begin typing a subject term, with the closest first matching term being highlighted in the list of available subject terms.

If the desired subject term appears in the list, the operator selects (if not automatically selected by the typing function) and then executes the command to apply that subject term to the open resource description record.

If the desired subject term does not appear in the list, the operator selects the command to create a new subject record. As the new subject record is completed and saved, it is linked to the open description record.

Once a subject term is applied, the operator is returned to the context record from which the command to add a subject term was initiated. The subject term that was applied is displayed in the frame for subject terms applied to that record. The operator then selects again the command to add a subject term or moves on to another point in the description record.

Before any new subject record is saved and the subject term appears in the open description record, the subject record is evaluated to assure it does not duplicate a subject record already present in the implementation.

The operator shall also have the option to close the subject term application window at anytime prior to confirming the application command

Editing of Subject Term Records

Subject term records can only be edited from within the subject term functional area. Editing is accomplished by retrieving a subject term record, altering one or more of its four values and then saving the record to retain the modifications. The modifications are valid for all accession and description records to which the subject record is linked.

In some cases, editing a subject term record will cause it to duplicate another record in the implementation. In such an event, an operator should be notified that the edited record is a duplicate and may not be saved as such.

S2: Business Rules

1. Each unique subject term may have only one subject record in an AT implementation. A duplicate subject record is one in which the subject term, the subject type, and the subject source in all respects except for case are identical to those in another record. The AT does not permit the recording of duplicate subject records.
2. Subject records are for expressing topical and format characteristics of archival resources and their component parts, including digital objects. They are used to promote topical (exclusive of proper names) and format access to the archival materials in a repository, either in the form of controlled access terms in finding aids, subject headings in catalog records, subject guides, or search terms to the AT database.
3. To exist in the AT, a subject record must contain a subject term, a subject type statement, and a subject source statement.
4. Subject records may not be linked to other subject records or to name records or to location records.
5. Applying a subject term to an accession or a description record, either by linking to an already extant subject record or creating a new subject record, is accomplished by selecting the option to “Apply” a subject term to an open accession record, resource record, digital object record or digital object component record.
6. Subject term records can be created in advance of their application. That is, all the subject term records for a processing project can be created well before the processing itself is initiated.
7. Successful application of a subject term results in the subject term being listed in the list of subject terms displayed in the open accession or description record (and the resource ID and record number being added to the subject record as links).
8. Removing a link from the accession or description record to a subject record removes the subject term from the list of subjects in the subject area of the accession or description record and, if it is the only instance of application to a certain archival resource, the removal of the resource number from the list of resource IDs to which the subject record is linked.

S3: Required Task Sequence

1. Select option on accession record, resource record, resource component record, digital object record, or digital object component record to apply a subject term

2. Select the subject term from a list of subject terms used in the application or specified for use for the processing project and select the command to apply the subject term to the open description record
3. Or, if the term does not appear in the list and permission is granted, choose to create a new subject record for the subject term
4. Or select main menu option to create a subject term record
5. Enter the subject term to be applied
6. Indicate the type of subject term
7. Indicate the source of the subject term
8. Save the subject record

S4: Optional Tasks

1. Enter a scope note for the subject term

S5:

<i>User Intentions (Required in Italics)</i>	<i>Application Response / Action</i>
<i>Operator chooses to apply a subject record to either an open accession record, resource record, resource component record, digital object record, or digital object component record</i>	
	A list of subject terms is displayed. The list is composed of either 1) all of the subject terms used to date in the repository's implementation of AT, or 2) only the subject terms specified as being available for the processing project
The operator selects (highlights) the term desired if it appears in the list of subject terms and selects the command "Apply"	
	The subject record is linked to the open record, and the subject term appears in the list of subject terms linked to and

	appearing in the open record.
Or the operator selects the command "Create New Subject Record" if the desired subject term does not appear in the list of already used or specified subject terms. (If the operator has not been granted permission to create subject records, then the option to do so is not available or functional.)	
Or the operator selects the command to create a new subject record from the main data entry menu. (If the operator has not been granted permission to create subject records, then the option to do so is not available or functional.)	
	A subject record template is returned.
<i>The operator enters a subject term</i>	
<i>The operator selects a type for the subject term</i>	
<i>The operator selects a source for the subject term</i>	
Enter a scope note	
<i>Save record</i>	If not all required elements are completed, machine responds that required element(s) must be completed. Required elements not completed are highlighted in the record.
	If all required elements are completed, machine checks to assure the subject record is not a duplicate. A duplicate record is a record that has the same subject term, subject type, and subject source as another subject record.
	If all required elements are completed but the record is a duplicate, machine responds with a display of the duplicate record highlighted in the list of subject terms coupled with the statement that the new record cannot be saved and that the operator should apply the

	subject term highlighted in the list of subject terms.
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S6: Inputs

- Subject term
- Subject term type
- Subject term source
- Subject scope note

S7: Reports

- Subject to Record Display
- Subject Terms to Resource Display
- Resources to Subject Term Display
- Repository Subject Guide
