

21st Century Indexing: Learn how FAST (Faceted Application of Subject Terminology) can help libraries and other cultural institutions to assign subject headings

Presenters

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Presentation summary

Why are libraries and other cultural heritage bodies choosing FAST for subject indexing? Learn the answer from a panel of experts. (Note: also participating in the discussion portion of the program was Steve McDonald, Tufts University.) Hosted by Eric Childress, OCLC. Originally broadcast 2020-10-14. Recording and slides are [available](#).

Audience questions

How do you submit new subject FAST controlled "keywords" to FAST?

Answer: At present, there is no direct route to expand the FAST vocabulary. FAST terms are derived from Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). To add a new term to FAST there are currently two routes: submit a [proposal](#) to SACO or use the [importFAST](#) tool. The FAST Policy and Outreach Committee (FPOC) is planning a FAST [SACO Funnel](#) to support institutions who want to add new terms. Regardless of the method of submission, all proposals must first be approved for LCSH before being added to FAST. Look out for further announcements concerning the FAST SACO Funnel next year.

How does FAST incorporate linked data?

Answer: The FAST authority file contains links to LCSH Authorities as well as other authoritative sources such as VIAF, GeoNames, and Wikipedia. OCLC will continue to add other links where possible.

If there were an authoritative private project which has heavily researched a pool of names for a particular field (e.g. Hebrew Studies, or Tibetan Studies, or...) which is already implemented in a LOD context -- would FAST welcome an ingest of such data? Where would one begin to launch such a project? If there are duplicates with existing names, could the submitted URIs be added as a "same as" name?

Answer: This could potentially be taken forward through the FAST SACO funnel.

Are efforts being made to better integrate FAST into OCLC Connexion? For example, FAST authority record search, or the ability to generate or regenerate FAST headings from LCSH terms within Connexion.

Answer: OCLC does not have plans for further integration of FAST in Connexion.

Would not the WorldCat Updates trigger distribution of a record when FAST headings are updated?

Answer: Updated records can be received via OCLC's WorldShare Collection Manager [WorldCat Updates](#) services, although you cannot specify criteria at the subfield level.

I am wondering whether you have use cases to assign FAST directly in OCLC cataloguing utilities.

Answer: Most cataloguers use the [SearchFAST](#) interface to find, copy, and paste the appropriate FAST terms to their template. There is an option to assign FAST in the text view in WorldShare Record Manager, which outputs Dublin Core metadata.

Is OCLC planning to incorporate FAST into the core controlled vocabularies within CONTENTdm?

Answer: It is not possible to incorporate FAST into the current generation of CONTENTdm because FAST is hierarchical and very large. CONTENTdm only supports flat text lists of vocabulary terms and they are stored internal to the digital collection. At the 2019 Best Practices Exchange conference in Columbus, Ohio, OCLC staff discussed [techniques](#) the OCLC Library uses for creating subsets of FAST for use in CONTENTdm.

Are there plans to increase the current limits of the FAST Converter to support larger-scale transformations?

Answer: Not currently.

FAST seems excellent for single things (a book, a letter, a map). Has there been work done on how well it works for archival collections, which are made up of many different things wherein a descriptive term might only apply in the context of another descriptive term? For example: a collection of material relating to British Columbia. In that case, "exploding" the string "Vancouver -- Maps" might result in a loss of information (i.e., that the maps in the collection are of Vancouver).

Answer: At the British Library we have begun to assign FAST to our manuscript and archive collections. It is also being used by the [Endangered Archives Programme](#). The effectiveness of FAST in this context will depend on the scope and focus of the collections being described. If the array of FAST

headings includes a form term for maps and a geographical name for Vancouver there should be no loss of specificity, but the search strategy would be based on key terms rather than browsing a subject index.

Answer: The University of British Columbia notes that exploding strings out to their singular component parts admittedly loses some semantic meaning whether at the individual item or archival collection/fonds level. Its use would be predicated on the idea that both "Vancouver" and "Maps" would be available through a keyword search and be able to be combined through a faceted search.

Are any large archival repositories or special collections libraries adopting or using FAST?

Answer: One of the unfortunate side effects of open linked data is the difficulty of establishing who is using the data and what they are using it for. The survey carried out by OCLC and the "FAST Five" libraries in 2017/2018 found that 15% of respondents worked in archives and 11% in institutional repositories; 18% of those applying FAST were indexing archival materials; 21% were indexing content of special/distinctive collections; 21% were indexing material for institutional repositories. The British Library is applying FAST selectively in its archival collections and for the Endangered Archives Programme. An earlier [survey](#) by OCLC also identified several agencies using FAST for special collections.

Will the "importFAST" function alert the user if they are trying to import a LCCN that has been imported by another user but not yet available on the FAST interface?

Answer: Yes.

Has the PCC, or does it plan to invest in promoting adoption of FAST beyond the library community / library-curated data; for example, with publishers and aggregators of academic journals?

Answer: Publishers have their own subject schema BISAC (U.S.) and Thema (outside the U.S.). The British Library is interested in establishing mappings between FAST and Thema. We see FAST as the successor to LCSH in our subject indexing and as such, it would be embedded in our CIP programme, currently managed by BDS.

What if you have a local personal name but do not have an official name heading in LCNAF, what do you do in a FAST instance?

Answer: We would propose the name to [NACO](#).

Keywords versus strings implies it is OK to add many more FAST headings than LCSH, do your local guidelines recommend a limit on FAST entries per bib record?

Answer: There is no formal limit on the number of FAST terms, but it should be limited by the principle of sufficiency.

Could OCLC put together a training webinar like this for use with student workers/volunteers using FAST with digital collections metadata? This was obviously a more technical presentation.

Answer: Thanks, and we will consider it. It would be helpful to have more context. Are you looking for shared material from institutions that already use FAST?

If we're new to all of this, what are the best resources to consult to make a plan to use FAST?

Answer: This is a great question. A good starting point is [FAST: Faceted application of subject terminology: principles and application](#) by Lois May Chan and Ed O'Neill. FPOC has been contributing to the FAST Training for PCC Task Group which has developed guidance that will be relevant to anyone with an interest in using FAST. The guidelines are currently being reviewed prior to publication on the PCC website. Once published they will be added to the FAST bibliography.

Is the goal to eventually replace LCSH with FAST? Having both in a MARC record just looks redundant.

Answer: FPOC's goal is to promote and develop FAST. We see FAST and LCSH as two different approaches to subject indexing. FAST will suit some applications and institutions better than LCSH. At present, development of the FAST vocabulary is dependent on LCSH. We think that structurally FAST is more flexible and adaptable than LCSH, but both can have a place. The future of discovery is in the creation of networks of relationships linking entities.

Have you studied how FAST affects your users' search experience? Could you also comment on the retrieval effectiveness of FAST?

Answer: The British Library carried out an informal comparison between LCSH and FAST on [Explore the British Library](#). There was very little difference between the results. FAST headings tend to display better in our discovery layer than LCSH. We have not conducted any user studies, as the absence of any subject index terms on many legacy descriptions is a bigger problem for us than records with subject terms from more than one vocabulary. It is also a problem that FAST is helping us to address through retrospective indexing projects.

Is it useful to assign FAST headings along with LCSH or any one is enough?

Answer: From a British Library perspective, having terms from one controlled subject vocabulary applied to everything in our catalogue would be great. Having terms from more than one vocabulary is not necessarily a problem, it really depends on how you configure your discovery layer. Other libraries have chosen to optimize presentation of FAST in their discovery layer. Remember also that FAST is available as linked data which supplies its own context.

Do users find running both LCSH and FAST in parallel confusing where the terms may differ (because you have split up what would have been 1 string in LCSH)?

Answer: This has not been a problem that British Library users have raised. In general, FAST headings display better in our discovery layer.

Are there any studies on the impact on users of discovery layers where FAST has been implemented alongside LCSH? And/or: what sort of outreach or training, if any, have your institutions done to make non-metadata library staff aware of how FAST is used in your systems?

Answer: FPOC is conducting a survey to address some of these questions.

How can FAST be implemented in information retrieval?

Answer: Every institution is different, so it is difficult to provide a definitive answer to this question. Among issues to take into consideration are: how FAST headings will be searched in relation to any other subject systems in use; how to exploit the facets to facilitate discovery and refinement of results sets; how can the array of FAST headings be most effectively and efficiently displayed to users. Several institutions have already implemented FAST in their discovery layers and may serve as exemplars. We will include links to exemplars in the FAST bibliography.

Is LC Thesaurus of Graphic Materials also part of the FAST terms?

Answer: No.

LC authorities do not include a reference to FAST, but FAST authorities include a reference to the source LC authority, correct?

Answer: Yes.

Does LCSH have “see also” references for FAST? Are LCSH see and see also references included in FAST?

Answer: No, LCSH does not have “see also” references to FAST, but FAST has references to LCSH. Note that id.loc.gov has links back to corresponding FAST headings. (e.g., <https://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects/sh85011128.html>).

Question re: Flipping from LCSH to FAST - is there a way to "flip" headings in your LMS or does it have to be done on a record by record basis? Thanks

Answer: OCLC does not provide a LCSH-to-FAST conversion service per se, although the [FAST convertor tool](#) provides conversion for small amounts of headings.

If one FAST heading is derived from LCSH and later LCSH heading (1XX) is changed (say to 4XX, and new 1XX for the term), will FAST heading update accordingly? If yes, does FAST ID remain the same? Do authority vendors right now provide FAST heading authority service?

Answer: Yes, the headings are updated in the FAST authority file and the ID remains the same. Some vendors do provide FAST heading authority services; please check with your vendor.

If LC updates the NAF, do the FAST names then automatically update?

Answer: Yes.

Is there a lag between a new subject being approved in LCSH and being found in FAST? Is the process simultaneous?

Answer: OCLC synchronizes with LCSH monthly.

How do you substitute the loss of context the LCSH string provides?

Answer: By presenting an array of terms to cover the different facets.

Is there an initiative for converting MeSH (Medical Subject Headings) terms to FAST?

Answer: No. Note that MeSH is already a faceted vocabulary; FAST is directly converted from LCSH. If LCSH is less specific than MeSH, the mappings would be to broader terms unless equivalent terms are added to FAST (through LCSH). Northwestern University Galter Health Sciences Library & Learning Center has an ongoing project, the [Northwestern University Libraries LCSH/MeSH Mapping Project](#), mapping MeSH to LCSH so in theory one could adopt a two-step process to convert MeSH to FAST.

Could you give more detail about the FAST picklist the British Library (BL) developed?

Answer: The BL created a pick list of FAST terms that were appropriate to the workflow for UK official publications and grey literature issued online. The picklist was sufficient to put this material into relatively broad categories and to automate the assignment of broad DDC numbers. The project is illustrative of the flexibility of FAST for machine applications, and a similar approach could work in other contexts where the types and scope of content can be reasonably narrowly defined. We are currently working on a more ambitious project to assign FAST headings to 2 million legacy retrocon records by mapping to FAST from Watts Elastic Classification (a scheme developed at the British Museum in 19th century) and still embedded in our pressmarks (call numbers).

What does the BL's 3-hour FAST training consist of?

Answer: This training is aimed at those with experience of subject analysis and includes an introduction to FAST, facets and the relationship to LCSH, but the focus is on application of FAST using SearchFAST to index example publications. We have recently developed this in-house course into something that can be delivered remotely and to external audiences. The main difference is that this includes a self-paced [module](#) on subject analysis and controlled vocabularies, which is completed in advance of the tutored part of the course. It was trialed in December 2019, and once we have evaluated feedback, we will publish details on the British Library Website.

How would you train in FAST in the UK?

Answer: BL was developing "FAST in a day training," to be offered through our collaboration with CILIP Metadata and Discovery Group, when lockdown struck. We have delivered a version of the course in house using Zoom during lockdown and are considering the feasibility of developing for external audiences.

Does FAST incorporate terms from other vocabs besides LCSH?

Answer: FAST does incorporate terms from LCGFT and the NACO file.

A [French version](#) is now available, from Université Laval in Québec City Canada. It's a beta version, with Topical and Geographic facets. Genre and Chronological will be available in the next few months. We were not able to translate everything, but we have more than 300,000 headings for what it is that we're talking about, if it's a person or a creative work. We're excited about the project. We have been working hard, and we've got a lot of work ahead of us.

Answer: Thank you for alerting everyone to this work.