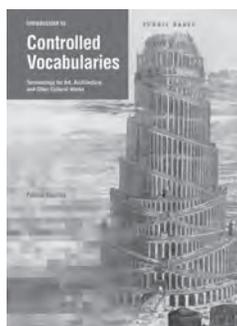


# Reviews

Submissions and suggestions for reviews should be submitted to the Editor, [keywords@asindexing.org](mailto:keywords@asindexing.org).

Patricia Harpring, *Introduction to Controlled Vocabularies: Terminology for Art, Architecture, and Other Cultural Works*, Getty Research Institute 2010



**Controlled vocabularies are essential for periodical and database indexing, but new books in this field are extremely rare.**

Thus, the Getty Research Institute's latest book, *Introduction to Controlled Vocabularies*, although focused on controlled vocabularies for cultural works, is a welcome addition to

the field. Newer books are necessary in this field, due to the technological and information design developments in the online search medium. Other books specifically on controlled vocabularies, such as Lanzi's *Introduction to Vocabularies* and Aitchison, Gilchrist, and Bawden's *Thesaurus Construction and Use: A Practical Manual* were both published back in 2000 and are no longer in print.

The author, Patricia Harpring, is a vocabulary editor and the managing editor of the well-reputed Getty vocabularies: the *Art & Architecture Thesaurus*, the *Union List of Artist Names*, the *Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names*, and *Cultural Objects Name Authority*. As she is an employee of the publisher, the Getty Research Institute, we can assume that Harpring wrote this book as part of her job, which implies that she had the time and resources to research and write a very thorough and accurate book. Indeed the quality of this book fulfills this expectation.

At its outset, *Introduction to Controlled Vocabularies* is exceptionally clear in its explanations in all senses: its audience, its scope, its definition of controlled vocabularies, its definition of cultural works, etc. This should not be taken for granted, for I have read books in the field of taxonomies that have not been so clear in these areas. Even the ANSI/NISO Z39 guidelines do not always explain everything so clearly. For example, ANSI/NISO mentions "lexical variant" as a type of nonpreferred term, but here I finally found a clear explanation of what exactly a lexical variant is. Written with short paragraphs and numerous decimal numeric headings and subheadings (similar to those found in standards and manuals), the book is highly structured and thus easy to read or just skim/browse (except for the fact that the type is rather small).

Cultural works are defined to include objects of

fine art, crafts and decorative arts, and architectural structures designed by an architect with some aesthetic value. Information on cultural works is managed in museums, libraries, visual resource (image) collections, archives, and special collections. As for the limited scope on art/cultural objects, if you never deal with the subject area of art or museum artifact controlled vocabularies, then this book might not be for you, but if you at least sometimes do (or of you work with people who do), then you will find this a quite useful book. The book contains numerous examples of actual controlled vocabularies from various sources. These are supplemented by the occasional illustration of an actual object of art.

Aside from the examples, constructing vocabularies for cultural works has a few specific issues. Cultural/art works tend to share common facets, such as: object types, iconographic subjects, genres, and associated corporate bodies. Cultural works are also usually owned and cataloged by institutions, not commercial enterprises, and these institutions are interested in sharing resources. Thus, the sharing of vocabularies is more acceptable and common. The book, therefore, encourages the use of existing vocabularies whenever possible, and thus suggests the derivation of a new vocabulary from an existing one. In addition to the borrowing of other vocabularies, contributing to others is suggested: "Builders of local vocabularies should investigate the possibility of contributing new terms to an existing standard vocabulary, such as the AAT or Library of Congress Authorities." (p. 134) Needless to say, you must work in a reputable cultural institution to have your vocabulary suggestions considered by others.

The organization of the chapters and some of the sections is not the way I would have considered most logical, but perhaps I am being picky as a writer and workshop leader on taxonomies myself. For example, in the chapter "Using Multiple Vocabularies," I do not think it logically follows that interoperability and mapping are typical issues with multiple vocabularies, and I wouldn't treat multilingual controlled vocabularies as an "interoperability" issue. In the chapter on "Relations" between terms, I would not consider different (foreign) languages to be a type of equivalence relationship, but it appears that way in the organization of the chapter.

*Introduction to Controlled Vocabularies* includes practical advice in many places. This may seem obvious, but books on taxonomies or controlled vocabularies are usually held up in comparison to the published controlled vocabulary standards (ANSI/NISO and ISO). The latter are all about what you "should" do and don't discuss practicality and flexibility. An example of the practical advice that

Harpring offers is that if your vocabulary is small, it may be maintained as a single controlled vocabulary, but if it is very large, it is more practical to manage it in multiple separate controlled vocabularies. I fully agree.

Of particular interest to us indexers is a chapter entitled “Indexing with Controlled Vocabularies.” Indexing is defined as “as conscious activity performed by knowledgeable catalogers who consider retrieval implications when assigning indexing terms.” (p. 165). The terms “indexing” and “cataloging” are used interchangeably, but the issues in indexing that this chapter describes reveal a distinction between indexing (in this case periodical or database-type indexing) and the cataloging of art and cultural heritage items. Indexers index text, whereas cataloging is for objects. The issues particular to cataloging objects include the need to index for only what is stated as obvious, not what is guessed (such as the material of pictured object), to index for exhaustivity (all aspects of an object), to index for the main material not minor parts, to deal with missing or unknown information about an object, and to be able to partially index for a group or set of similar objects at once. The book seems to be a little unclear on how nonpreferred terms are used in indexing.

What stands out as a weakness of this book is the complete lack of an index! Its absence may be partially explained by the inclusion of a highly detailed table of contents, reflecting in turn a very hierarchical structure to the book, with sections, sub-sections, and sub-subsections enumerated by decimal heading numbers of up to five levels deep. While I miss the index, the detailed table of contents (nearly 7 pages of 40 lines per page) and lack of index are probably better than having a bad index.

Although lacking an index, the book does include other useful features: an appendix of selected vocabularies and other terminology sources, a bibliography, and a lengthy glossary. The glossary is quite valuable, but its terms need to be considered in their context of art and architecture controlled vocabularies.

While this book, which is somewhat dense, may not be appropriate for all indexers, it is a welcome addition to the small collection of books on controlled vocabularies and should be of great interest to anyone involved in cataloging or vocabulary development for art or other museum-type artifacts.