Subject headings are terms and phrases that describe the main topics or subjects of a bibliographic record. When you do a subject search you ask the catalog to find words and phrases that are listed only in the subject field of a bibliographic record.

This is what a bibliographic record with subject headings looks like:

You can use the linked subject headings in bibliographic records as “leaping off points” to find related works.

Let’s say you’re working on a paper for your religion class and you need to find out about witchcraft in America.

If you do a keyword search for the term *witchcraft* in the FSW Libraries’ online catalog, you will get over sixty results, but not all of them deal with witchcraft in America. However, one result of your search is the book *Witches!: the Absolutely True Tale of Disaster in Salem*, which has the subject heading Witchcraft -- Massachusetts – Salem. Clicking on this link will connect you to other works with the same subject heading, making for a more efficient and relevant search.
Helpful Hint: To search by subject, your search terms must be worded and formatted in the exact same way that they are listed in the records of online catalog. For example, to search for information on the subject of the Salem Witch Trials in the subject search field, you must enter the search terms Witchcraft, Massachusetts, Salem, History, 17th century in your online search tool, or your search will yield no results. This is because Witchcraft, Massachusetts, Salem, History, 17th century is the universally accepted or standardized way to describe all works on the subject of the Salem Witch Trials.

Warning: Since subject headings are specialized standardized terms, they are tricky to use. Searching by subject will seriously narrow your results. Searching by keyword is the best way to find relevant resources, especially at beginning of your research and once you find a source that is exactly what you need, take a look at the bibliographic record and click on the linked subject headings you find there.