Controlled Vocabulary Design Case Study

Project Context

This project involved creating a controlled vocabulary to support MLIS students training as future school librarians. The goal was to improve metadata quality, consistency, and discoverability of resources across K–12 contexts. The target users included school librarians working with students, teachers, and community stakeholders.

Process

The process began by extracting key concepts from scholarly articles and professional readings. Terms were then normalized, duplicates removed, and synonyms identified. Scope notes were written to clarify term usage, and hierarchical relationships were established (broader, narrower, and related terms). The result was a refined vocabulary suitable for indexing educational resources in a consistent, user-centered way.

Outcome

The final controlled vocabulary provided a professional framework for organizing educational and library resources. It demonstrated how raw keyword lists can be transformed into a structured, reusable taxonomy. This model can be applied to library systems, digital collections, or knowledge management environments.

Controlled Vocabulary (Sample Highlight)

Preferred Term	Synonyms / Variants	Scope Note	Relationships (BT/NT/RT)
Taxonomy	Classification system	Controlled classification system for organizing school library resources.	BT: Knowledge organization; RT: Metadata
Information-seeking behaviors	ELIS; Information behaviors	User patterns in locating and using information, particularly in youth and educational contexts.	BT: User behavior; NT: Everyday life information-seeking
Library services	School library services	Programs, resources, and assistance provided by school librarians to support learning	BT: Library operations; RT: Information literacy

		communities.	
Metadata	Descriptive data	Structured information that describes, explains, or enables retrieval of resources.	BT: Knowledge representation; RT: Cataloging
Usability	Ease of use	Measure of how effectively users can navigate and interact with a library website or system.	BT: User experience; RT: Website design
Information architecture	Navigation design	Structuring and organizing information for clarity and accessibility.	BT: UX design; RT: Taxonomy
Design thinking	Human-centered design	Approach to problem-solving emphasizing empathy, prototyping, and iteration.	BT: Innovation methods; RT: MLIS education
Search engines	Website search tools	Information retrieval systems used to locate and access resources online.	BT: Information retrieval systems; RT: Algorithms
Youth information-seeking	Teen research behaviors	Research patterns and information needs of young adults in school library contexts.	BT: Information-seeking behaviors; RT: Young adults
Collection policies	Selection policies	Formal guidelines for library material selection and reconsideration processes.	BT: Library administration; RT: Intellectual freedom

Visual Example (Before & After)

[Insert screenshot here: Example of raw keyword list → Example of refined vocabulary table.]