Notes:

This chart organizes controlled vocabularies based on complexity and relationships amongst vocabularies; it is based primarily on library science concepts of vocabularies. Controlled vocabularies are often subject headings but can be used for other kinds of terms (e.g., resource types, field qualifiers, languages, places, creator/contributor roles, etc.).

Top Row:

- **Lists** - The least complex kind of controlled vocabulary is a list of authorized terms. It may or may not include unauthorized terms (e.g., *Cats, see Felines*).
- **Hierarchies** - A hierarchy is a list (authorized and unauthorized terms) which incorporates a hierarchical structure to show the relationship of broader and narrower terms.
- **Thesauri** - A thesaurus is one of the most complex forms of controlled vocabularies; it is a hierarchy - authorized, unauthorized, broader, and narrower terms - that includes related terms (e.g., Environmentalism, RT Sustainable living). Related terms connect subjects that have a non-hierarchical relationship.

Middle Row:

- **Synonym Rings** - A synonym ring defines an equivalent relationship among synonymous terms. Instead of having authorized and unauthorized terms, it allows a user to search any of the terms and retrieve results containing all of the synonyms. (For example, a Google search for “~automobiles” will retrieve results containing automobiles, cars, autos, etc.)

Bottom Row:

- **Taxonomies** - A taxonomy is a hierarchical list (roughly equivalent to a “hierarchy”); the term “taxonomy” is often preferred in certain fields, such as the animal and plant kingdom taxonomies in the biological sciences.
- **Ontologies** - An ontology is generally a taxonomy with additional information (e.g., definitions, source notes, relationships, etc.); ontologies are not always defined in exactly the same way across fields of study and may include usage/grammatical notes in addition to terms.

Some Controlled Vocabulary Resources:

- American Society for Indexing Taxonomies & Controlled Vocabularies SIG: http://www.taxonomies-sig.org/about.htm
- Controlled vocabulary/terminology concepts: http://www.dlese.org/Metadata/vocabularies/term_expn.php