Natural language searching is searching in full sentences or phrases like you would ask a person "how many feet in a yard?". Natural language is how most people search Google and other search engines but this type of searching will not work well with Library Databases or the Catalog.

Keyword searching is searching using individual words often taken from the key ideas in a Natural Language search. Keyword searching in databases usually searches the entire record or full text for your terms and will allow for a large number of results. Seemingly irrelevant results occur when your key word is found deep within a record. Using common words in a Keyword search will result in an overwhelming number of results by adding additional Keywords a search can become more focused.

Subject searches use specific predefined or "controlled vocabulary". Each database creates a customize list (aka a thesaurus) of words that are used to tag similar information. By using Subject assigned terms you will be able to find materials that may use historic terms, synonyms, regional spellings and other variations of a topic. Subject searches look only in the Subject Heading or descriptor field for those specific terms. If you do not know specific Subject terms you will not get effective results, often you can discover the Subject terms from the results of a Keyword search.