

How Are ERIC Thesaurus Descriptors Assigned?



The ERIC Thesaurus is a controlled vocabulary of subject terms (descriptors) representing research topics in the field of education. Every item in the ERIC collection is assigned descriptors by a professional indexer.

Indexers analyze each article or document to determine what it is about. They review the title, abstract, and full text (when available) and use their expert knowledge of the ERIC Thesaurus's almost 12,000 terms to select descriptors that accurately represent the subjects of the content. Those descriptors are then added to the ERIC record to allow all content on the same subject to be retrieved during an ERIC search, providing the most relevant and precise results.

ERIC indexers look for specific clues that indicate a document's subject (including who, what, when, where, how, and why elements) and then use their professional judgment to assign descriptors.

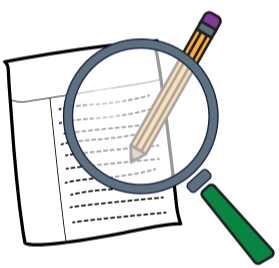


Not all content is straightforward—indexers draw on their knowledge of the education field as well as of the Thesaurus to think through assigning terms:



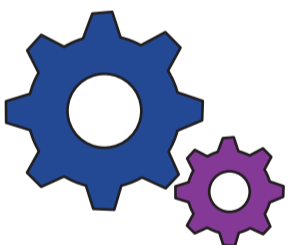
Indexers determine the meaning behind the words an author uses to assign the most accurate descriptors possible.

This document says the research was done with “*students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch*” – that should be indexed as **Low Income Students**.



Indexers examine the document as a whole to determine which descriptors correctly and completely describe the content.

The authors mention using these same methods to teach science, but this document *describes research on teaching algebra* so only **Mathematics Instruction** should be added as a descriptor.



Indexers use and maintain machine-assisted indexing tools to help indexing efficiency.

The location of the study is *Toronto* – so, **Foreign Countries** will be entered automatically as a descriptor when **Canada (Toronto)** is added as the Location identifier.



Indexers use their knowledge of the field of education and the thesaurus to select appropriate descriptors for emerging, international, or out-of-scope subjects.

It says the teachers used the “*jigsaw technique*” – that isn't in the thesaurus yet...but we can use **Cooperative Learning**.



Indexers consult with each other and share their knowledge to promote indexing consistency.

The study looks at whether the *instructional activities help students in their everyday lives...* **Relevance (Education)** is a good descriptor to use for that subject.

For more on how descriptors are developed, and why they are more effective than key words, see the videos, webinars, and infographics on the ERIC website at <https://eric.ed.gov/?multimedia-thesaurus>