

Thesauri

Many databases, catalogues and indexes use a thesaurus or controlled vocabulary of pre-defined subject headings to ensure that all items have standardised terms assigned to them.

They tend to be arranged in families or hierarchies of broader, narrower and related terms to indicate the relationship between concepts. It is the most reliable way of finding information that has already been classified in a given subject area.

It is a more precise method of searching as your chosen keywords may not be the preferred terms used to classify material. The thesaurus will also suggest broader, narrower, related terms and synonyms that you might have overlooked, but which may be helpful in your search.

Examples of Thesauri

Although these may be configured slightly differently within individual resources, the principles of using them are broadly the same as these two examples demonstrate.

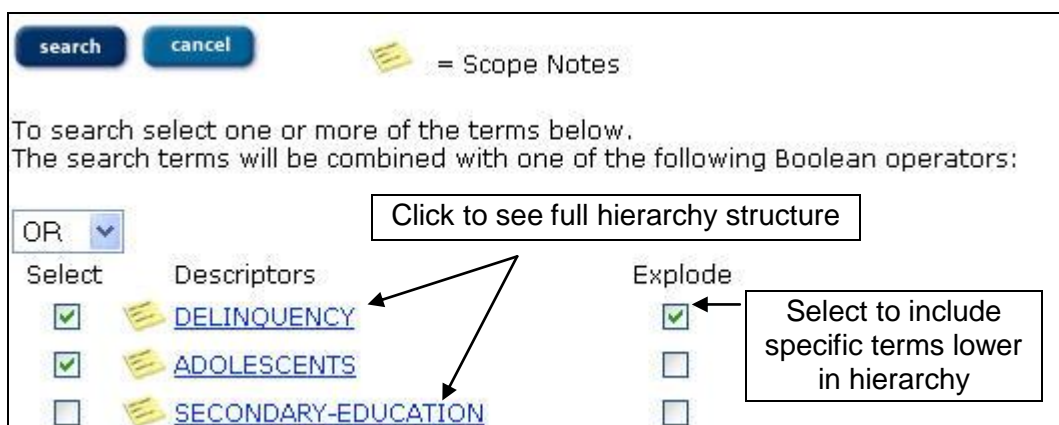
1. British Education Index Thesaurus via Dialog DataStar

www.datastarweb.com/athens


Users can use the thesaurus either by ticking the **Thesaurus mapping** check box when entering a query in the search box or selecting **Thesaurus browse** on the advanced search screen. Both provide scope notes displayed next to all descriptor terms containing information about the term, including the date of inclusion, use of the term and additional synonyms.




Thesaurus mapping

- Available to users searching a single database using either easy or advanced search.
- Links or 'maps' free-text terms to the most relevant controlled vocabulary descriptor in the thesaurus. It is particularly useful if free text terms do not retrieve relevant results, or if you are unfamiliar with the terminology or descriptor terms from the thesaurus.
- Single terms or multiple terms, and complete search strings can be used.
- Explode or collapse the thesaurus tree to add or remove terms to and from a search.



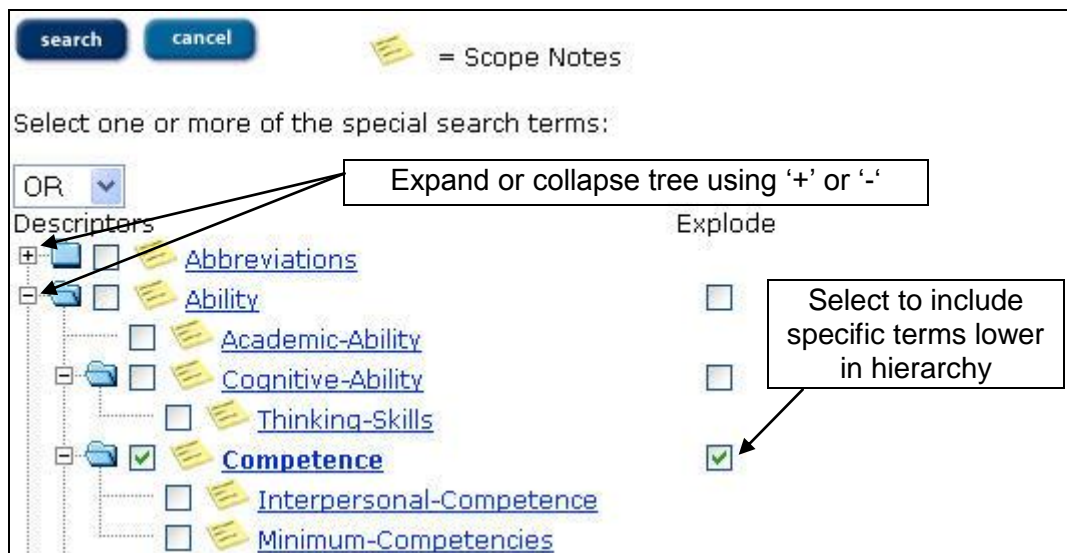
The screenshot shows a search interface with the following elements:

- Buttons for "search" and "cancel".
- A legend:  = Scope Notes
- Instructional text: "To search select one or more of the terms below. The search terms will be combined with one of the following Boolean operators:"
- A dropdown menu set to "OR".
- A table of descriptors:

Select	Descriptors	Explode
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	 DELINQUENCY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	 ADOLESCENTS	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	 SECONDARY-EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Annotations:
 - "Click to see full hierarchy structure" with arrows pointing to the "DELINQUENCY" and "ADOLESCENTS" descriptors.
 - "Select to include specific terms lower in hierarchy" with an arrow pointing to the "Explode" checkbox for "DELINQUENCY".

Thesaurus browse

- Top-level terms within the hierarchy are always visible in the thesaurus.
- The tree can be exploded or collapsed by clicking on the plus or minus sign respectively to add or remove additional terms to or from a search.
- Expand a subcategory in the tree structure to see how the terms are listed hierarchically within each subcategory.
- Search the thesaurus directly by entering a term.



2. ERIC Thesaurus via CSA Illumina

www.csa1.co.uk/htbin/dbrng.cgi?username=edi08&access=edi0808&db=eric-set-c

Users can browse the thesaurus for terms via an alphabetical, hierarchical or rotated index display. Only one may be searched at any time. Selected terms can then be used to search the database descriptors field. The thesaurus is accessible via the 'search tools' tab.

These displays share a number of characteristics –

- Clicking on hyperlinked terms displays the full thesaurus entry and hierarchy of broader, narrower and related terms.
- The [+] symbol appears next to terms that contain narrower terms within their hierarchy.
- Scope notes or brief statements of the meaning or usage of a term, and history notes also display, where relevant.
- Search terms may be linked using **AND**, **OR**. The **explode** capability searches for the marked term(s) and all its narrower terms.
- A search submitted from the interactive thesaurus finds marked term(s) in the descriptors (DE=) field of the database.
- Searches can be further modified to include limits, date range, sorting, and display options.
- Users can navigate both forwards and backwards within the alphabetical and hierarchical indexes.

Alphabetical Index

- A search of this index produces a simple alphabetised list of terms, with selection boxes beside valid, preferred terms.
- There are no boxes beside terms that if searched would not retrieve any results.

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Scoping options

New Search Using Marked Terms

Use **AND** to narrow

Use **OR** to broaden

Explode to include all narrower terms

Search

Delayed Development (Individuals)

Delayed Speech

Delinquency

Delinquency Causes

Delinquency Prevention

Delinquent Behavior

Delinquent Identification

Delinquent Rehabilitation

Click hyperlink to see full hierarchy structure

Searching on these terms will produce no results

Hierarchical Thesaurus

- This display shows the hierarchy of the term in relationship to other terms.
- Non-preferred terms are identified and valid alternatives suggested.

New Search Using Marked Terms

Use **AND** to narrow

Use **OR** to broaden

Explode to include all narrower terms

Search

Delinquency

07/01/1966

Use For

Delinquent Behavior (1966 1983)

10/24/1983

Delinquent Role (1966 1980)

03/05/1980

Delinquents (1966 1980)

03/05/1980

Juvenile Delinquency

07/01/1966

Delinquent Identification (1966 1980)

03/05/1980

Broader Terms

Crime [+]

Non-preferred terms

Indicates narrower terms available

Rotated Index

- Displays an alphabetical list of all thesaurus terms containing the selected word. This does not necessarily have to be the first word but can occur anywhere.
- You can only search for a single word, not a phrase.
- This is often the best place to start your thesaurus search.

New Search Using Marked Terms

Use **AND** to narrow

Use **OR** to broaden

Explode to include all narrower terms

Search

Adult Dropouts

Adults who withdraw from an activity before its completion

07/01/1966

related Adult Counseling

07/01/1966

related Adult Education [+]

Providing or coordinating purposeful learning activities for adults

07/01/1966

Hyperlinked preferred terms

Explanatory notes

Other databases such as **International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)** and the **Web of Science** do not have a browsable thesaurus. However individual fields such as the author, publication name and subject fields (IBSS only) are indexed to help refine searches.

For further IOE Library Guides see <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/services/344.html>