The UNESCO Thesaurus

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Introduction

There are too many ways of expressing or explaining the topic of a document. Document authors, indexers, and users describe the same concepts using different terms. Vocabulary control is therefore essential!
The UNESCO Thesaurus is a hierarchically structured and controlled list of terms used for indexing and retrieving information in UNESCO’s fields of competence.

It is used by the UNESCO library at headquarters and in field offices. Also used worldwide by several organizations such as the UK Records Office. It has also been incorporated in collections management systems such as KE Emu and the PMB.
UNESCO Thesaurus: purpose

The main purpose of the thesaurus is

– to achieve consistency in the description of content objects

– and to facilitate retrieval of pertinent information from the online catalogue

With the help of the thesaurus, indexers choose the appropriate keywords when describing subject content, similarly users identify the most appropriate keywords with which to search.
Historical background

- 1977: 1st edition of the UNESCO thesaurus was published
- 1995: 2nd updated, revised and structured edition was published
- 2000: online version on web Isis was released in English
- 2003: French online
- 2004: Spanish
- 2005: Russian
UNESCO Thesaurus: characteristics

- **Multidisciplinary:**
  It covers the major fields of knowledge that constitute the scope of UNESCO. It also includes the names of countries and groupings of countries.

- **Monohierarchial**
  Except for geographic descriptors.

- **Multilingual:**
  Available in English, French, Spanish and Russian.

- **ISO compliant:**
  Structured according to the ISO standards 2788 and 5964.
UNESCO Thesaurus: structure

- Terms

- Term relationships
  - Equivalence relationship USE/UF
  - Hierarchical relationship BT/NT
  - Associative relationship RT/RT

And also Scope notes (SN)

Relationship between terms are established in such a way that users can easily identify the one they need.
Equivalence relationships: USE / Used for (UF)

Term: GMOs

USE Genetically modified organisms

- Preceded by the tags Use and UF
- Equivalence relationships are used to connect synonyms and near synonyms
- Non-preferred terms act as pointers to preferred terms

Term: Genetically modified organisms [24]
Terme français: Organisme génétiquement modifié
Término español: Organismo modificado genéticamente
Русский термин: Генетически модифицированные организмы

MT 6.50 Manufacturing and transport engineering
UF Genetically engineered organisms
UF Genetically modified crops
UF Genetically modified food
UF GMOs
Hierarchical relationships: Broader term (BT) / Narrower term (NT)

- Preceded by the tags BT/NT
- Are used to indicate terms which are narrower or broader in scope
- They help users to better define, broaden or narrow their search by selecting a more specific or generic descriptor

Term: Natural disasters [366]
Terme français: Catastrophe naturelle
Término español: Desastre natural
Русский термин: Природные стихийные бедствия

MT 2.60 Pollution, disasters and safety
UF Natural hazards

BT Disasters [55]
NT Drought [188]
NT Earthquakes [286]
NT Floods [421]
NT Landslides [62]
NT2 Avalanches [36]
NT Tsunami [287]
NT Volcanic eruptions [96]
RT Cyclones [61]
RT Damage [210]
RT Forest fires [21]
RT Storms [77]
## Associative relationships: related terms (RT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term:</th>
<th>RT Document preservation</th>
<th>RT Documentary heritage</th>
<th>RT Manuscripts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rare books</td>
<td>[58]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terme français: Livre rare</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Término español: Libro raro</td>
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<td>Русский термин: Редкие книги</td>
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<tr>
<td>MT 5.30 Information sources</td>
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<tr>
<td>UF Antiquarian books</td>
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<tr>
<td>UF Incunabula</td>
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<tr>
<td>BT Books [154]</td>
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<tr>
<td>RT Document preservation [160]</td>
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<tr>
<td>RT Documentary heritage [113]</td>
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<td>RT Manuscripts [222]</td>
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- Preceded by the tag RT
- Non-hierarchical relationship
- Invite the users to also consider other terms which are closely related to what they are looking for
Scope notes (SN)

Term: Displaced persons

- Preceded by the tag SN
- The SN defines the term or gives direction on how to use it

SN: Persons who have fled or been driven from their communities to localities within their home country. For persons forced to leave their home country, use "refugees".

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Thesaurus maintenance and administration

- Language changes over time, new concepts emerge, terminology and usage change, and some terms become obsolete. The UNESCO Thesaurus is continuously updated and enriched to reflect the evolution of the Organization's programs and activities.

- It is managed using an in-house application based on Basis.

- Migration to a new web application is foreseen in the near future, to allow working in distance for linguistic versions that are not handled in HQ.
UNESCO Thesaurus: figures

The UNESCO Thesaurus contains:
• 4476 preferred terms.
• 8613 terms in French and 8629 in Spanish
• 7075 terms in English and Russian,
• Around 640 scope notes
• 17050 relationships
• 88 microthesauri

Usage statistics
• The thesaurus receives around 12000 visits per month
• According to Google analytics the Spanish version is the most used, accounting for around 80% of the visits. And visitors originate predominantly from the Latin American region

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UNESCO Thesaurus: projects

- Translation of the thesaurus into Arabic
- Migration to a new thesaurus administration system to allow working in distance for linguistic versions that are not handled in HQ
- Converting the thesaurus into SKOS to facilitate its use in the semantic web
- Measures to comply with the new ISO rules
- Interoperability with other thesauri

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UNESCO Thesaurus: search and display

• [http://databases.unesco.org/thesaurus/](http://databases.unesco.org/thesaurus/)

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