Quick Tips *for Searching ERIC – Using Descriptors*

ERIC has a standardized list, or *controlled vocabulary*, of education-related terms called Descriptors that are maintained in the *Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors*. ERIC uses Descriptors to organize materials in the ERIC Collection by subject. Using Descriptors in your search can help you locate materials of greater relevance to your topic. Consider the following tips to guide your searches of the ERIC Collection from the ERIC Web site.

Tip 1: **Locate a Descriptor.** There are two ways to identify relevant terms:

- Access the *Thesaurus* using the link available on each page of the ERIC Web site. You can locate a Descriptor by searching the *Thesaurus*, browsing an alphabetical list of Descriptors, or browsing a list of categories to see related Descriptors. Select a Descriptor to start your search.

- On either the Basic or Advanced Search form, choose *Descriptors* from the drop-down list, click the Thesaurus button to access the Thesaurus search screen, and submit your term for a search, e.g., *reading*. ERIC will retrieve a list of terms containing the word(s). You can check the box to add the Descriptor to your search, or click the term itself to review details about the term, e.g., scope note or related terms.

Tip 2: **Develop a search using Descriptors.** The search results will be more satisfying because you will:

- Bypass irrelevant records: Use Descriptors to focus the search on your primary subject, not the mere appearance of a word in the bibliographic record. For example, *literacy* may be mentioned in the record, but the focus of the material may be a different topic entirely. Notice the different results attained when searching the term *literacy*, first as keyword and then as Descriptor:

Search String	Number of Results*
Keyword: literacy	~43,100
Descriptor: literacy	~7,700

* Results reflect database content as of June 2008.

Using Descriptors excludes ERIC records in which the keyword has a different meaning. For example, *printing* can occur in a document related to printing as an occupation, handwriting, visual arts, etc. Use the appropriate Descriptor to locate relevant materials. Notice the difference in results:

Search String	Number of Results*
Keyword: Printing	~10,700
Descriptor: Printing *(used for the occupation)*	~700
Descriptor: Handwriting	~700

* Results reflect database content as of June 2008.

- Locate highly relevant records: Use Descriptors to locate materials relevant to a topic or concept, not just those that include the keywords. For example, the keyword phrase *"folk drama"* locates a few relevant materials about the topic. However the Thesaurus directs you to use a combination of terms to locate relevant materials. Notice the difference between results of the previous keyword search, and a search of the Descriptors *drama* and *"folk culture"*:

Search String	Number of Results*
Keyword: "folk drama"	~5
Descriptors: drama and "folk culture"	~100

* Results reflect database content as of June 2008.

Learn More About Searching ERIC – For more information on using the *Thesaurus*, searching the ERIC Collection, and understanding search results, visit the Help section at www.eric.ed.gov.