

## AN ACRONYM EXPLAINS ITSELF: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE ERIC SYSTEM

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The acronym ERIC/RCS stands for the Educational Resources Information Center on Reading and Communication Skills. ERIC is a national information system designed originally by the United States Office of Education and now under the sponsorship of the National Institute of Education (NIE). The Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills (located at NCTE headquarters, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois) is responsible for collecting, analyzing, evaluating, and disseminating educational information and materials related to research, instruction, and personnel preparation in English, Journalism, Reading, Speech Communication, and Theater.

The English/Journalism Module of ERIC/RCS is responsible for educational information related to teaching and learning the English language, to educational journalism, including the learning and teaching of journalism in print and electronic media, and to the training of teachers at all levels.

One needs a working concept of the parts of the ERIC system in order to make the best use of it. The following descriptions and definitions of ERIC terms were written to lead the beginning user of the system to the information he needs.

### THESAURUS OF ERIC DESCRIPTORS

The key to the entire system is the THESAURUS OF ERIC DESCRIPTORS. This volume, which is continuously being updated, is the source of all subject terms (descriptors) used for indexing and for retrieval of documents and journals in the ERIC collections. Each document entered into the system is assigned several descriptor terms selected from the THESAURUS that indicate the essential contents of the document. Descriptors marked by an asterisk delineate the major concepts of the document, while the unmarked (minor) descriptors denote concepts that receive only passing attention or minor emphasis in the document.

(In cases where no descriptor term adequately describes some important feature of a document, an identifier term may be assigned in addition to the descriptors. Any word, name, or phrase may be an identifier. For the most part, identifiers are useful only to information specialists and not to the average user of the ERIC system.)

## RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

Abstracts of documents thus indexed, using the descriptor and identifier terms, are printed in RESEARCH IN EDUCATION (RIE), the monthly journal published by the National Institute of Education. About 1000 documents from all eighteen ERIC Clearinghouses are indexed and summarized in RIE each month. Each volume contains, in addition to the main entry section, indexes arranged by subject, author, and source (institution or publisher).

The subject index is arranged, alphabetically, by descriptor terms. Under each term are found, ordered numerically by ERIC document numbers, all those documents which have been assigned that particular term as a major (starred) descriptor. Thus, a document which has been assigned five major descriptor terms may be found in five places in the subject index.

Most documents abstracted in RIE are available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) in two forms: microfiche (MF), a four-by-six-inch microfilm card containing up to 98 pages of text; or hard copy (HC), six-by-eight-inch, black and white, photographically reproduced pages in a paper binding. A few documents listed in RIE are not available from EDRS. In these cases, ordering information and current price are listed with the abstract in the main entry section.

### CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION

Articles from nearly 600 educational journals are indexed in the same manner in another ERIC publication, CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE). These articles are assigned a six-digit EJ (for Educational Journal) accession number and are often annotated. Semiannual and annual compilations of CIJE are available. Copies of the journal articles indexed in CIJE are not available from ERIC. They must be obtained from your library collection or from the publisher.

### USING THE ERIC SYSTEM

Information may be found most economically in the ERIC system when a simple step-by-step procedure is followed. First, phrase the question you want answered as precisely as possible. Then go the THESAURUS and locate the narrowest descriptor terms that seem most closely related to the topic of interest. To assist the user, most descriptor terms are followed by a list of cross-references to other descriptors, classified as narrower terms (NT), broader terms (BT), and related terms (RT), worth referring to.

Next, refer to the subject indexes in RIE and CIJE and read the titles listed under the descriptor terms you have chosen.

Note the ED and EJ numbers of those documents that seem appropriate for your purposes and locate the document citations in the main entry sections. By reading the abstracts in RIE and the annotations in CIJE, you can decide which documents and articles you wish to read in their entirety. Microfiche copies of most documents indexed in RIE are filed sequentially by ED number.

For further information on how to use the ERIC system consult the librarian in charge of your local ERIC collection. (Most collections have a variety of brochures on ERIC and how it may best be used.) If you wish, you may also write for a copy of an illustrated step-by-step introduction to the system entitled "How to Use ERIC." It is available from the Supt. of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 (Stock Number 1780-0796) / 35¢.

### LOCATIONS OF ERIC COLLECTIONS

There are over 500 complete ERIC microfiche collections and numerous partial collections across the country. Many university libraries and educational agencies have a collection of ERIC microfiche or a list of locations of complete ERIC collections. Write to any ERIC Clearinghouse for further information about the ERIC system.

### FUTURE ERIC/RCS ARTICLES

Future articles by the ERIC/RCS Clearinghouse will deal with current issues in English education. By using the information contained in the present article you will be able to locate the journal articles and documents which can contribute most to your professional development in the various areas to be discussed.

