

AgeLine Database
Gateway to Aging Literature
www.aarp.org/ageline

Using AgeLine's Thesaurus of Aging Terminology

Q: What Is the Thesaurus?

A: AgeLine's *Thesaurus of Aging Terminology* is a 200-page book that lists subject terms related to aging and the 50+ population. These terms (also called descriptors or key words) are used to capture the main ideas of each publication described in AgeLine. About 10-12 Thesaurus terms are assigned to each AgeLine reference.

Q: How Do I Use the Thesaurus?

A: You can use Thesaurus terms in your AgeLine search to get focused results. For example, if you type in the search term "Hispanics" (listed in the Thesaurus), you'll get all references having a major focus on that population; if you happen to search "Latinos" you won't get as good a result because Latinos is not a Thesaurus term.

It's best to use the Subject Search option on the AgeLine search menu when using Thesaurus terms; that way you'll only retrieve references that have that term as a major focus. For example, searching "Hispanics" in the Basic Search mode will give you many references that merely mention Hispanics in passing, rather than only those that focus significantly on that population.

Q: What Else Can I Use the Thesaurus For?

A: The Thesaurus also suggests additional terms that you may want to use. You'll find Broader Terms [BT], Narrower Terms [NT], and Related Terms [RT]. For example, if you were looking for "Home Care," you might also search on the broader term "Supportive Services," the narrower term "Home Health Care," or the related term "Personal Care." The Thesaurus also provides cross references.

Q: How do Thesaurus Terms Relate to the Field of Gerontology?

A: Many terms listed in the Thesaurus come with a definition (also called a Scope Note); this indicates how the term is used in AgeLine and is also helpful for standardizing terms within the field of gerontology. AARP encourages the use of the AgeLine Thesaurus as a standard vocabulary for social gerontology. Please e-mail us for additional information.

Where to Find the Thesaurus:

A PDF version of the [Thesaurus of Aging Terminology](#) is on the AgeLine web site, as is an order form for the print version. You can also browse a list of descriptors (subjects) used in AgeLine by clicking one of the SUBJECT buttons on the Subject Search screen.

For a limited time, you may request a **free copy** of the Ageline Thesaurus from ageline@aarp.org. You must include your mailing address.



Quick Guide to Using the Thesaurus in an AgeLine Search

Step 1: Write down your research topic in one sentence, using your own words.

Example: I want to find information on how health providers communicate with older patients.

Step 2: Identify the key words and phrases in your sentence.

Example: older patients, communicate, health providers

Step 3: Look up these key words in the *Thesaurus of Aging Terminology*. You will see that Thesaurus terms are called descriptors. Find the descriptors that match the key words and phrases you have identified.

Note: Use the “Rotated Terms” section at the back of the Thesaurus to help find your descriptors.

Example:

<u>Your Words</u>		<u>Thesaurus Descriptors</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
Older Patients	→	Patients	Generally, you do not need to use words such as “older” or “aged” or “elderly” because AgeLine is entirely focused on adults aged 50 and older.
Communicate	→	Communication	
Health Providers	→	Health Personnel	You will see 11 narrower descriptors under Health Personnel . To look for a specific type of health provider, come back to those terms later to narrow your search.



Step 4: Go to the AgeLine home page and select Search AgeLine Now.

Step 5: Select the Subject Search option on the AgeLine Search Menu screen.

- Search each of your descriptors separately, to get an idea of how many references each brings up.
- Note any additional descriptors listed in the references which may also be relevant to your topic.
- Remember to click on CLEAR FORM after each search.

Example:

Search Query	Number of References Retrieved	Useful Descriptors Relevant to My Topic
Patients	_____	_____
Communication	_____	_____
Health Personnel	_____	_____

Step 6: Select two descriptors to pair together in a search. Quite often, pairing just two concepts gives you a narrow enough search without having to use a third concept.

Example: You decide that **Communication** and **Patients** are the most important descriptors, since research focusing on patient communication often involves communication with health personnel.

Step 7: Combine the two descriptors you've selected.

- Type **Communication** in one search box and **Patients** in another.
- Select one of the three connectors **AND**, **OR**, or **NOT** to pair your descriptors.

Note: You want to find those references that discuss both patients **and** communication, so you'll select the connector **AND**. This will narrow your search to references that contain both of your descriptors. (The AND connector is the default if no connector is specified between search boxes.)

- Click on SEARCH to see your results.

Step 8: Determine whether you need to further refine your search.

- Browse through some of the references to decide whether you need to combine your two search terms with the third descriptor, **Health Personnel**.
- In this case, you'll see that most of the references are already focused on communication with health personnel, so you don't need to refine the search.

Step 9: Check for relevant material you may have missed.

- Identify some descriptors contained in the retrieved references which you think may bring up additional useful material and try searching on them.

Example:

- You find a descriptor—**Physician Patient Relations**—that you would also like to include in your search. You want to be sure you search **Patients AND Communications** and also search **Physician Patient Relations AND Communications**.
- To do this, type **Physician Patient Relations** in the same search box as **Patients** and separate them with a semicolon (a semicolon between search terms within a search box functions as an OR connector). Leave the term **Communication** in the second search box. Click the SEARCH button.
- You are asking the search engine to find those references that have the descriptors **Patients AND Communication** as well as those that have the descriptors **Physician Patient Relations AND Communication**.

Success! This search strategy retrieved many references targeted to your exact information needs!

Need more help?

Connect to the AgeLine Help Topics page from any AgeLine search screen to see specific instructions on many AgeLine search features.

Contact the AgeLine Help Desk at ageline@aarp.org for search assistance or to request a free Thesaurus.