



Australian Government



NATIONAL  
ARCHIVES  
OF AUSTRALIA

# ***Keyword AAA***

**National Archives of Australia**

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## THE KEYWORD AAA: THESAURUS OF GENERAL TERMS

What is a thesaurus?

In the context of recordkeeping, a thesaurus is a list of keywords used to identify and locate records labeled with these words. The prime purpose of a thesaurus is to provide control and consistency over the words (vocabulary) used for titling and indexing records.

It does this by providing an alphabetical listing of approved terms that may be used for titling and indexing. Knowing which terms to search on means that searches will be more efficient and retrieval of the right records is easier.

What is the Keyword AAA: Thesaurus of General Terms?

The *Keyword AAA: Thesaurus of General Terms* is a thesaurus of general terms designed for use in classifying, titling and indexing most types of records in most technological environments.

It was released by the Archives Authority of New South Wales (now State Records NSW) in November 1995. A second edition was released in June 1998. It is the only thesaurus of its type that the National Archives of Australia has endorsed as being compliant with the Australian Standard for Records Management (AS 4390).

*Keyword AAA* covers terminology common to business functions and activities in most organisations. It should be used in conjunction with a thesaurus of functional terms, relating to the organisation's specific or core business functions, to provide comprehensive, controlled vocabulary coverage.

For more detailed information about *Keyword AAA* and its suitability for application in the Commonwealth sphere, see an evaluation of *Keyword AAA* for Commonwealth on the National Archives' website.

The State Records NSW web page for *Keyword AAA* is available at <http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/publicsector/rk/aaa/keyword.htm>

## DEFINITIONS

### Records and functions

*Keyword AAA* is based on descriptions of functions. The functional approach is embodied in the Australian Standard AS 4390 – 1996, Records Management, where it is applied to all aspects of records management, including continuum management and the electronic environment.

According to the Standard, records are defined as:

recorded information, in any form, including data in computer systems, created or received and maintained by an organisation or person in the transaction of business or the conduct of affairs and kept as evidence of such activity. (Part 1, General, Clause 4.21)

The Standard recognises that records are defined by their relationship to the activities for which they provide evidence. This gives them meaning and context.

*Keyword AAA* is based on the business classification scheme advocated in Australian Standard AS 4390 – 1996, Part 4: Control.

The Standard defines classification as:

the process of devising and applying schemes based on the business activities which generate records, whereby they are categorised in systematic and consistent ways to facilitate their capture, retrieval, maintenance and disposal. Classification includes determining document or file naming conventions, user permissions and security restrictions on records. (Part 1, General, Clause 4.8)

As the Standard states, business classification schemes are derived from an analysis of an organisation's business processes. The analysis focuses on:

- the goals and strategies of the organisation
- the broad functions and activities of the organisation which support the pursuit of the goals and strategies
- the activities of the organisation which constitute the accomplishment of the functions
- the groups of recurring transactions which constitute each activity (Part 4, Control, Clause 7.2), and
- establishing a hierarchical classification scheme, with the top level representing broad business functions, the second level representing the activities constituting those functions and the third and subsequent levels representing the groups of recurring transactions that take place within these activities.

### Structure of Keyword AAA

*Keyword AAA* has an imposed hierarchical structure between the first and second levels of descriptors, called 'Keywords' and 'Activity Descriptors'.

The order of a file title in *Keyword AAA* is imposed for a specific reason. It ensures that the title reflects the business classification scheme and that the function, activity and subject of the file are clearly represented.

Other benefits of keyword classification include effective handling, storage and disposal.

#### Abbreviations used in *Keyword AAA*

*Keyword AAA* conforms, as much as is practicable, to the relevant conventions suggested in ISO 2788 – 1986(E), Documentation – Guidelines for the establishment and development of monolingual thesauri.

However, in *Keyword AAA* the full term of the code abbreviations has been used to ensure that users who are not familiar with library conventions will understand the codes used. For example, the thesaurus uses 'Broader Term' rather than 'BT'.

#### Classification Guide

The Classification Guide is provided as a summary of thesaurus terms and their meanings. The guide can be used as a ready reference guide to select a keyword and its narrower terms. It is hierarchical, reflecting the classification scheme on which the thesaurus is based. This layout may also be represented in more than one way in electronic thesaurus packages into which *Keyword AAA* is loaded.

The Classification Guide has a three column format:

- Column 1: keyword
- Column 2: activity descriptors associated with that keyword
- Column 3: subject descriptors associated with the activity descriptors listed.

## DEFINITION OF COMPONENTS OF KEYWORD AAA

### Keywords

Keywords in *Keyword AAA* are based on the functions of an organisation, not on structure. Occasionally, however, keywords will coincide with structural areas because they have been arranged according to function. Keywords (KW) are identified in hard copy versions of *Keyword AAA* in large UPPER CASE with the word Keyword as the label. A scope note and narrower terms are listed below each entry.

### Activity descriptors

Activity descriptors are identified in hard copy versions of *Keyword AAA* by UPPER CASE with the words Activity descriptor as the label. They appear as narrower terms of keywords and broader terms of subject descriptors. The activity descriptor reflects the activities performed within the function that is represented by the keyword. Activity descriptors (AD) always follow keywords. The activity descriptors must be used in conjunction with the keywords to which they are associated in the thesaurus and Classification Guide. Records management software will determine how many activity descriptors can be associated with a keyword. *Keyword AAA* does not prescribe how many.

### Subject descriptors

Subject descriptors are identified in hard copy versions of *Keyword AAA* by Mixed Upper and Lower Case with the words Subject descriptor at the end of the term line. Subject descriptors (SD) are narrower terms of activity descriptors and further define the subject content of the activities. Terms that describe the subject of the activity descriptor are listed in the Classification Guide. They are also included in the alphabetical listing in the full version of the thesaurus. The subject descriptors listed are the ones most likely to be associated with activity descriptors they are linked to. However, subject descriptors can be free floating, that is, they can be used with any activity descriptor deemed appropriate, not just those they are linked to. In addition, more than one subject descriptor can be added to a file title if desired. The subject descriptors listed are not comprehensive and are offered as a guide only.

### Scope notes

Scope notes provide unique definitions of terms and directions on how to use them. They provide a consistent approach and discourage personal interpretations of the same term by different people across the organisation.

### Broader terms

Broader terms are concepts having wider meanings. In *Keyword AAA*, keywords are broader terms than activity descriptors, and activity descriptors are broader terms than subject descriptors.

### Narrower terms

Narrower terms are concepts having more specific meanings. Narrower terms break down a broader concept to more specific aspects of that concept. In *Keyword AAA* activity descriptors are narrower terms to keywords and subject descriptors are narrower terms to activity descriptors.

### Non-preferred terms

Non-preferred terms are identified in the hard copy of *Keyword AAA* by italics (except when listed under a term) with the words 'non-preferred term' at the end of the term line. They are synonyms replaced by authorised or preferred terms. The USE reference indicates the preferred term. Acronyms and abbreviations are generally non-preferred terms. The full term should be used. This is because acronyms and abbreviations change at a rapid pace. In cases where the acronym or abbreviation has become widely recognised, for example LAN or WAN, the acronym may be used. These are identified in the thesaurus with permitted acronym at the end of the scope note.

### Related terms

Related terms bear a close relationship in meaning to the other terms. Related subject descriptors may be used additionally to subject descriptors already selected. Alternatively, the scope notes of related terms may be read to see if they are a more accurate keyword or descriptor to use.

### Parenthetical qualifiers

Parenthetical qualifiers are used to qualify or specify the context of an entry in order to remove ambiguity. In the case of homographs, only one term is a preferred term, the other(s) are non-preferred terms, distinguished by the USE reference directing the user to a preferred term.

## USING KEYWORD AAA

Keyword AAA supports the classification of electronic documents as well as paper filing systems

*Keyword AAA* can be applied to electronic documents and records as well as paper-based files. One way this can be achieved is by constructing directory structures with *Keyword AAA* titles.

Electronic documents that function as records can be linked to the records management system by using the same classification scheme and/or linking through the file.

Icons can be designed to link users to applications built around specific functions that are of use to them.

The classification scheme can be used as a basis for metadata (data about data)

*Keyword AAA* can be applied in metadata schemes such as the Australian Government Locator Service.

The terms in the thesaurus are controlled to ensure consistency in titling

Meanings and the way in which they should be used together (their relationships) are prescribed. Controlled vocabulary includes:

- Keywords
- Activity descriptors
- Subject descriptors
- Related terms, and
- Non-preferred terms.

The thesaurus is presented in a variety of formats and layouts, in hardcopy and electronic form

- In the thesaurus layout, each term is listed in alphabetical order and each has a label to determine its place in the thesaurus, a scope note and narrower terms listed below each entry.
- This layout may vary depending on the electronic thesaurus package used by the licensee.
- Keywords are linked to activity descriptors and, in the software, may appear as broader terms to activity descriptors.
- Electronic thesaurus packages may also vary in the representation of all the terms in *Keyword AAA* and may need to vary the combination of upper and lower case for data entry and retrieval purposes.

## CUSTOMISATION OF KEYWORD AAA

*Keyword AAA* covers general terminology, that is, terms which are common to the business functions and activities of most organisations. *Keyword AAA* by itself cannot be used effectively to classify all records of an organisation. It is designed to be used in conjunction with functional terminology, that is, those terms that are unique to the individual organisation's business functions and activities.

Bringing the general and functional terminology together into one merged thesaurus provides comprehensive coverage. The functions thesaurus may be merged gradually with *Keyword AAA* term by term using word processing software or thesaurus management software.

The use of *Keyword AAA*, merged with a functions thesaurus, may be built into the organisation's standard operating procedures for the creation, capture and registration of records of all types.

*Keyword AAA* may be amended by licence holders so as to reflect the organisation's functions and activities and any changes to those functions and activities which may take place in the future. Terms and scope notes can be modified by the agencies to suit their needs. Changes may be made by agencies or by service providers engaged by the agency.

However, please be aware that the National Archives of Australia has compiled a General Disposal Authority based on the function and activity levels of *Keyword AAA* – the Administrative Functions Disposal Authority (AFDA). We strongly recommend that when customising your copy of *Keyword AAA*, you only apply changes to the subject/transaction descriptors or 3rd level descriptors. This will ensure that consistency is maintained between your version of *Keyword AAA* and AFDA, and that the two can be used in a complementary manner.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND RELATED SITES

With the completion of the licensing agreement between the State Records NSW and the National Archives of Australia for Commonwealth use of *Keyword AAA*, the Archives would like to thank the National Office for the Information Economy (formerly Office for Government Online) for its assistance in providing half the purchase cost of the licence.

Please the National Archives' website for an evaluation of *Keyword AAA* for Commonwealth use. The State Records NSW web page for *Keyword AAA* is available at <http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/publicsector/rk/aaa/keyword.htm>

For information on compiling a functions thesaurus that you can then merge with *Keyword AAA*, please refer to *Developing a Functions Thesaurus: Guidelines for Commonwealth Agencies*, and <http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/publicsector/rk/rib/mergeaaa.htm>.

For general inquiries on *Keyword AAA* please contact [recordkeeping@naa.gov.au](mailto:recordkeeping@naa.gov.au)

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