

Thema – An overview

What is Thema?

Thema is an international book subject classification scheme that is designed to meet the needs of publishers, retailers, and trade intermediaries in all sectors of the global book business. It enables precise multi-faceted classification of books according to their subject matter and treatment, which enhances merchandising and discoverability, leading to greater potential sales.

Thema can be used to identify physical and digital publications including audiobooks, it can be used domestically and internationally, and can cover just about any subject conceivable. As Thema is created, used, and maintained by those in the global book trade, it is practical, intuitive, and reflects the industry's ever-evolving cultural landscape.

How does Thema work?

Thema is organised by a hierarchy of subjects across 20 sections, with over 3,000 Subject Categories available. For example, Section F Fiction contains Categories such as FH (Thrillers / Suspense Fiction), FM (Fantasy Fiction), FR (Romance), and FL (Science Fiction). Branches of Science Fiction (FL) would then be indicated by a third level, such as FLC (Classic Science Fiction), FLM (Science fiction: steampunk), FLU (Science fiction: aliens /UFOs), and so on.

Thema also contains six sets of Qualifiers, codes that are used in combination with Subject Category codes to provide more specific and detailed information about certain aspects or themes within a book. Qualifiers begin numerically and can specify a place (1), a language (2), a time-period (3), an educational purpose (4), a special interest (5) or a particular style (6). For instance, if a publisher wanted to indicate that a Romance (FR) novel is set in the 17th century, they could add the time-period Qualifier code 3MG. If that novel also had LGBTQ+ themes, they could add the interest Qualifier code 5PS.

A searchable browse tree of all Thema values can be found [here](#).

Thema is what is known as a post-coordinated system, which means that Subject Categories and Qualifiers are designed to be combined to create more detailed and nuanced classifications.

It is important to note that whilst multiple categories can be used, it is essential that a publisher establishes the most appropriate and relevant category based on the content and the focus of the book, so that code should be added first. At the very least, this will ensure that the book makes its way to the correct section of the bookstore or library.

What are National Extensions and how do they work?

Within the Qualifiers are special codes called National Extensions, which allow for the expression of very detailed topics within shared Qualifiers. For example, 1DNN-NO-XS (Oslo) is a National Extension within 1DNN (Norway).

National Extensions are used to adapt and refine the Thema code to meet local needs or preferences. This is an important feature, for it negates the potential problem of local nuances being lost to a global system.

Whilst all National Extensions can be used by all Thema users, those outside the region concerned might not require that level of detail, and so can ignore the extended element: in other words, 1DNN-NO-XS can simply be regarded as 1DNN (Norway).

How does Thema compare to BIC?

BIC, which was launched in 1998, was designed for use in the UK. It was last updated in 2010, has been frozen since 2017 and is being discontinued in February 2024. It is being replaced by Thema, which is designed for global use and therefore more suited to today's publishing landscape.

Thema has experienced wide international participation and adoption since its creation in 2013 by the book industry.

Thema draws heavily on BIC, with input from other established national standards. Thema and BIC share the same basic structure: a set of Subject Categories that describe the main subject matter of the book, as well as several sets of Qualifiers to add detail to the categories and indicate other key elements. Unlike BIC, Thema is regularly updated and expanded and is therefore capable of describing books in much more detail than BIC.

How does Nielsen BookData use Thema?

Nielsen BookData has played a key role in the development of Thema. Clients such as retailers, libraries and educational providers receiving our bibliographic data can use Thema to help tailor their data requirements for use on their websites and/or internal systems. Publishers sending us their title information via ONIX or electronic data file can include Thema classifications as part of their submission, and publishers using Title Editor to upload and edit their title information can also now use the Thema classification scheme (from October 2023).

How do I apply Thema to my titles?

All titles previously submitted to Nielsen BookData through Title Editor have already been classified with Thema. This has been done on your behalf either by our team of expert Classifiers or by mapping from the existing BIC codes. These Thema classifications are now displayed on Title Editor, instead of the BIC codes that were shown before.

Publishers adding new titles to our database are advised to use Thema. Those using ONIX or an electronic data file should already be familiar with doing this. For those using Title Editor, Thema is now the chosen classification scheme and there is an inbuilt category tree to help you make your selections. There is also integrated help at each stage.

Where can I find out more about Thema?

The EDItEUR website provides further useful information about Thema: [EDItEUR](#)