WHAT IS METADATA

The hard answer: data about data
The not as hard answer: organized information about content

standard + schema + values

THE CONTENT

Works of Art
Describing a work of art is unique and differs from the descriptive practices of archived manuscripts, books, films, architecture, and more.

Right: "Salome and the head of Saint John the Baptist" at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

THE STANDARD

Metadata standards are essential descriptive practices that enhance the understanding of the type of content presented. Standards exist for works of art that enhance the uniqueness of the content and create consistency in the ways it is described. Standards include format, definition, structure, tagging, and transmission.

It is essential to select a standard that supports information structure, content, value, and communication. Consider exploring standards such as Dublin Core, VRA Core, and CDWA for works of art. Remain consistent in this use so that the ways in which descriptions are controlled and created remain the same.

> TIP! Standards are like instructions for baking a cake: they are the rules for organizing and using ingredients for the specific type of cake you make. Metadata is like the list of ingredients.

THE SCHEMA

Metadata schemas address standards for common components and fields like dates, names, and places. Schema apply special elements specific to or needed by a given discipline, such as works of art or engravings.

Schemas are the fields you see that provide specifics about the work. These fields are referred to as "tombstones." The quality and level of descriptions in schemas do vary.
The choice of schema to follow differs with data elements, mandatory fields, machine-readable encoding requirements, and values.

SALOME AND THE HEAD OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

Title: Salome and the head of Saint John the Baptist
Artist: Giovita Garavaglia (Italian, Pavia 1790–1835 Florence)
Date: 1815–35
Medium: Engraving
Dimensions: Plate: 12 13/16 × 12 1/8 in. (32.6 × 30.8 cm)
Sheet: 16 in. × 18 1/4 in. (40.6 × 46.3 cm)
Classification: Prints
Accession Number: 41.97.87

> TIP! Controlled values are like ingredient types in recipes. The recipe can recommend the use of an ingredient while suggesting substitutes based on tastes, preference, and style.

THE VALUES

The use of controlled values provides standardized and consistent use of terms for populating metadata fields. Popular and highly developed resources include LCSH, LCNAF, TGM, AAT, ULAN, TGN, and CONA.

Consider using subject-specific vocabularies that strengthen discoverability and relevance. For "Salome and the head of Saint John the Baptist," explore The Women's Thesaurus for values about women, gender, identity, and feminism.

SO YOU WANT TO BE A CATALOGER

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Your main duties will be to organize, categorize, encode, and publish data so users can rely on the described information to search, locate, and discover new and existing content.

YOUR STYLE

Everyone relies on your data
Your style of work as a cataloger is based on your training, past experience, reliable resources, and content.

Understanding the use of metadata is an essential skill in libraries, museums, and archives that sets you apart.

COMMONLY USED STANDARDS AND SCHEMAS

Dublin Core
MARC (Machine-Readable Cataloging)
BIBFRAME schema (Linked Data)
Categories for the Description of Works of Art (CDWA)
Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)
Encoded Archival Description (EAD)
Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS)

CONTENT STYLES

Metadata standards are essential descriptive practices that enhance the understanding of the type of content presented. Standards exist to enhance the uniqueness of the content and create consistency in the ways it is described. Art, archives, libraries, technology, geography, climate science, and conservation are examples of professional focuses that have developed and implemented unique metadata standards.

It may seem impossible to know where to start. Luckily, job postings typically describe the content standards and schemas that apply to the position.

Browse published metadata standards and schemas by subject with this resource:
https://rdamsc.bath.ac.uk/subject-index

LEARNING

Resources for learning how to use and write metadata exist everywhere. While the best place for learning is in a focused Library & Information Science program, there are also resources online for professional development and advanced learning.

TIP! In interviews, show interest and prepare skills by asking what metadata standards and schemas the institution follows. If none exist or the standards are custom, ask if the work can be mapped to one for better understanding and consistency.

The most important thing to remember is that learning takes time and experience. Understanding which standards and schemas to use for what resources will allow your professional skills to improve over time.

LEARNING RESOURCES

PRESERVE THIS
https://preservethis.org/courses/

Library Juice Academy
https://libraryjuiceacademy.com/topic/cataloging/?post_type=projects

Society of American Archivists
https://www.pathlms.com/saa/events/873

...and more!

DON'T FORGET YOUR VALUES (LITERALLY)

All metadata schema and standards benefit from the use of controlled values. They provide standardized and consistent use of terms for populating metadata fields. Popular and highly developed resources include LCSH, LCNAF, TGM, AAT, ULAN, TGN, and CONA.

Using specialized controlled values for critical content like gender, race, identity, and science shows the importance of representation and accuracy. Consider enhancing your work with Homosaurus, Xwi7xwa Library, Anti-Racist Description Resources, and more.

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