How cataloguing and metadata helps

The aim of cataloguing digital collections is to provide maximum discovery and access to the items contained in that collection.

The use of standard descriptive metadata assists online users to discover images and other digital objects through more consistent search results. You can give help tailor a search to a relevant item through using the right kinds of metadata tags.

MARC or Dublin Core are used in the structured cataloguing of digital objects. Some digital asset management systems rely on the use of keywords rather than the use of a controlled vocabulary. The asset management system used to store and display the collection will dictate the form of metadata used to describe the collection.

Dublin Core/Marc

Dublin Core comprises 15 pre-defined elements which provide a framework for metadata which can be used to describe any digital resource. These elements define what is recorded about the objects. There are MARC equivalents of these 15 elements.

NLA discusses metadata which applies to images in Metadata for images created by the National Library of Australia [2].

Some elements should be considered as mandatory:

**Identifier**: a permanent reference to the object such as an image number.

**Title**: a formal name for the resource. The formal title of the object may also include free text. The title should include as much information as possible as it may be the principal or only descriptive data associated with the object.

Other elements are contributor, coverage, creator, date, description, format, language, publisher, relation rights, source, subject and type. The more fields added to the record increases the user’s ability to search successfully. The Dublin Core elements have equivalent MARC fields. The MARC equivalents are available at MARC to Dublin Core Crosswalk - Library of Congress [3].

Descriptive content using a thesaurus or Library of Congress subject headings

The consistent use of a thesaurus such as the Library of Congress subject headings (LCSH) [4] ensures the common description of collections, including pictorial collections, improving the results of user searches.

Personal names and place names are selected from the authorities established by the Library of Congress. For unique Australian names, Libraries Australia authorities can be used. Authorities for local geographic names should be formatted according to Library of Congress subject heading guidelines.

When working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contents consider to use the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Thesaurus [5] in cataloguing the collection, creating metadata and tagging contents. This hierarchical thesaurus which assists description of objects relating to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples. The thesaurus is in three parts - places, subjects and languages.

Examples

1989 Newcastle earthquake
This record demonstrates basic information for the image [6]. It includes the mandatory elements of an image title and an identifier. It also includes details of the creator, the date, and place of creation. The record includes descriptive subjects from the Australian Pictorial Thesaurus and follows LCSH guidelines to formulate local geographic headings.

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This record includes comprehensive details for the image [7]. As well as the mandatory elements of an image title and an identifier, it also includes details of the inscription and the physical attributes of the original image. The record includes a combination of descriptive subjects from the Library of Congress subject headings and the Australian Pictorial Thesaurus.

Newcastle Rugby League team that played against England during their Australian tour, 1950

Additional information can be included in an image record [8]. By listing the players in this team, the names of the players in the notes also become searchable terms. A description of the game provides some contextual information about the image.
'Tags', also known as user keywords, are words added to records to enhance their discovery by others. If you are using a keyword digital asset system, try to describe your object in as much detail as possible.

Some institutions allow users to add tags to records. In combination with a consistent controlled vocabulary in the formal record, tagging broadens the discovery options for the user. An example of this is the Powerhouse Museum [9] which allows the user to tag objects in order to bridge what the Powerhouse has called the 'semantic gap' between the language of the museum and that of the user and make those records more meaningful to the user.

**Resources**

Using Library of Congress Authorities [10], you can browse and view authorised headings for subjects and names. An authority record is a tool used to establish forms of names (for persons, places, meetings, and organisations) and subjects used in bibliographic records. Authority records enable librarians to provide uniform access to materials in library catalogues and to provide clear identification of authors and subject headings.

**Other thesauri which can be useful include:**

*The Powerhouse Museum Object Name Thesaurus* [11] is an hierarchical thesaurus that provides a controlled vocabulary for indexing museum objects within an Australian context.

*Art & Architecture Thesaurus Online* [12] is an hierarchical thesaurus that provides a structured vocabulary for art, architecture, material culture and archival materials.

*The Library of Congress Thesaurus for Graphic Materials* [13] is a tool for indexing visual materials by subject and by genre/format. The thesaurus includes more than 7,000 subject terms and 650 genre/format terms to index types of photographs, prints, design drawings, ephemera, and other pictures.

**Some other useful online resources include:**

*Geographical Names Register* [14]
A gazetteer of geographical names in New South Wales, including traditional place names, localities and roads.

*Gazetteer of Australia* [15]
A database of official Australian place names. Alternate names for localities are also listed.

**Technical explanation**

Further information regarding metadata is available from:

*Metadata for images created by the National Library of Australia* [2]
NLA information on metadata for images.

*UKOLN Metadata* [16]
The UK Office for Library Networking provides advice and services to cultural and information institutions in the United Kingdom. This link includes a brief description of metadata and numerous links to tutorials, articles and research projects involving metadata.

*JISC Digital Media* [17]
The Joint Information Systems Committee provides advice on creating digital media resources specifically still images, moving images and sound resources, delivering digital media resources to users, managing both small and large scale digitisation projects.

*Descriptive Metadata Guidelines for Research Libraries Group (RLG) Cultural Materials* [18]
The Research Libraries Group (RLG), based in New York, provides comprehensive advice to research libraries, archives and museums. This page includes a link to the RLG metadata guidelines that provide a generally accepted overview of metadata standards, *Introduction to metadata: Online edition, version 3.0* [19]