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## Review of Metadata for Digital Collections: A How-To-Do-It Manual

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## Review of Metadata for Digital Collections: A How-To-Do-It Manual

### Cover Page Footnote

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## *Review of Metadata for Digital Collections: A How-To-Do-It Manual* (Second edition)

By Steven Jack Miller. Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2022. 536 pp.  
Softcover. \$82.00. ISBN: 978-0-8389-4748-7

The second edition of *Metadata for Digital Collections: A How-To-Do-It Manual* sees its original author, Steven Jack Miller, reevaluating how metadata is thought about and applied to digital collections. Miller is well qualified to conduct this assessment and provide training on metadata for digital collections. Miller is a Senior Lecturer Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Information Studies and possesses several decades of experience diving into the intricacies of information and knowledge organization. He has given numerous conference presentations, developed workshop materials published by the Library of Congress and OCLC, and has participated in and led national-level professional organizations. From 2017-2020, he taught an online course titled “Linked Open Data for Beginners” which was attended by this author in 2019.

In the decade since the publication of the first edition, digital collections and digital asset management have undergone many changes, most significantly the heightened attention to linked open data initiatives. But what does that mean and how can we support linked open data with minimal training and resources? Miller answers that question and more, presenting the reader with useful information to support building linked open data knowledge in the pursuit of digital collection metadata design and application.

The book opens with a general discussion of metadata best practices for digital collections and the unique considerations that arise when describing digital objects that correlate to physical resources. Miller discusses at length the application of the Dublin Core Metadata Element Set (DCMES) providing plenty of examples using CONTENTdm records, a common digital asset management system. Miller fairly balances the pros and cons of Dublin Core, the most widely used metadata schema for digitized cultural heritage. Miller discusses both a theoretical and practical approach to the application of the Dublin Core metadata schema, presenting several variations of how the schema can be applied. He acknowledges that best practices do not always address the intricacies and limitations of local systems and resources, and encourages users to tailor the schema to meet the unique needs of local collections.

Metadata creators for digital collections have long grappled with the question: “What am I actually cataloging? Am I cataloging the object, or the digitized surrogate of the object?” Miller discusses the pitfalls of the DCMES one-to-one principle when describing digitized resources, acknowledging that the theoretical practice is not in

alignment with the integrated content and digital asset management systems that those in the archival profession often find themselves negotiating between. Understanding that in practical usage the one-to-one principle fails to address the realistic application and use of digital collection metadata as it pertains to digital asset management, Miller presents ways that metadata can support both the description of the physical object as well as its digital surrogates, and offers solutions to contextualizing that metadata in a way that is both informational and useful to users who might be accessing your digital collections on an aggregate site.

Throughout the text, Miller compares this widely used DCMES schema with MODS (Metadata Object Description Schema) and VRA (Visual Resources Association) Core. Both MODS and VRA Core get their own dedicated chapters later, but Miller insists that a true understanding of the DCMES requires a comparison with other more nuanced and granular metadata schemas. This is key in that it frames metadata creation as a present and future practice: a part of caring for digital collections that requires anticipation for future applications, schemas, and user needs. To that end, Miller presents crosswalks between the three schemas, highlighting the advantages and considerations of each. As MODS and the current version of VRA Core are XML encoding schemas, Miller takes a chapter to briefly acquaint the reader with XML structure.

Miller's lengthiest chapter is an immersion into the Linked Open Data movement as it applies to metadata and the Resource Description Framework (RDF) data model it employs. This comprehensive introduction into Linked Open Data ontologies is an excellent primer in creating linked open data. Perhaps more importantly, it complements the recurring theme of the book that metadata is a data string comprised of properties (elements) and values, that should be structured consistently, in compliance with standards, utilizing controlled vocabulary, and that the overall goal is to support interoperability between systems and expand the connections between collections on a global scale.

The culmination of the book leads the reader through the process of creating and documenting a metadata application profile, from analyzing the content of a unique collection, selecting schema and standards, establishing controlled vocabularies, and developing content guidelines. This helpful exercise prompts the reader to think about the comprehensive purpose of the metadata being generated. Metadata, of course, supports many functions, from administrative and technical, to discovery, access, and use. Good metadata is metadata that not only supports the administrative and technical needs of your digital assets, but that allows users to browse, facet, navigate, and understand the context and content of digital collections. This final chapter also stresses the importance of the metadata application profile as a means to document descriptive decisions. This helps to ensure consistent practice across your collections, in addition to providing those who come after a blue print for understanding how legacy collections were described.

Since the initial publication of the first edition of this text in 2011, the need for interoperability with systems external to local institutions has greatly increased. The

dominant theme in this manual is to create and manage metadata with interoperability in mind. This means thinking about metadata as *meta-data*, i.e., elements and their values are data strings that can be interpreted in a machine-readable format. When creating or revising metadata, Miller stresses doing so with an eye towards how your metadata will support discovery, search, retrieval, and use outside of your local institutional discovery system. Although each collection will require the application of local practices, interoperability can be achieved by ensuring that collection metadata adheres to a metadata schema, that a controlled vocabulary is used when possible, and that metadata creators adhere to some prescriptive style guide for description. Adhering to metadata schemas and structured content standards additionally supports the future potential for data validation with a linked open data ontology.

This incredibly approachable book is designed with a teaching focus in mind and it provides aspiring and current information specialists with the foundational knowledge necessary to understand key concepts related to metadata creation and management for digital collections. However, I don't think this book should be relegated to the land of textbooks. This manual can truly be of use to anyone involved with digital collections, regardless of one's level of metadata knowledge and expertise. As an example, I am currently overseeing the review and revision of all metadata across my institution's digital collections. Although I have more than a decade of experience creating and managing metadata for digital collections, this book has given me just the insight I need to make the most of this remediation project, ensuring that existing collections are described consistently and in a way that supports long-term meaningfulness, use, and interoperability with local and external systems.

On the heels of a global pandemic which solidified the importance of creating and maintaining digital access to physical resources, archivists and others in the archival profession increasingly find themselves responsible for creating and maintaining digital collections. Presenting this work as a textbook in some ways expands its usefulness as it makes approachable for both novice and expert metadata specialists. The book can be employed as a traditional textbook, as each section builds on the one preceding, ending with a culminating exercise employing the learning outcomes of the various sections. Metadata professionals already engaged in managing digital collections will be excited to see more integration with linked open data and metadata best practices. Regardless of your background in metadata, this text will either inform or refresh your knowledge about metadata for digital collections and leave you feeling confident to tackle your next big digital collection project.

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