

Metadata

The term metadata is commonly defined as "data about data."

Usually, metadata are standards-based and serve a particular purpose in data processing and machine-to-machine interoperability. Three broad categories of metadata are:

- Descriptive - common fields such as title, author, abstract, keywords which help users to discover online sources through searching and browsing.
- Administrative - preservation, rights management, and technical metadata about formats.
- Structural - how different components of a set of associated data relate to one another, such as tables in a database.

Things you need to know about metadata

- The difference between documentation and metadata is that the first is meant to be read by humans and the second implies computer-processing (though may also be human-readable).
- Metadata may not be required if you are working alone on your own computer, but become crucial when data are shared online. Your data management plan should determine whether you need to apply metadata descriptors or tags at some point during your project.
- Metadata help to place your dataset in a broader context, allowing those outside your institution, discipline, or software environment to understand how to interpret your data.

Useful links

- ❑ Documentation and metadata. [MANTRA](#) Research Data Management Training Online course.
- ❑ Day Michael. “[Metadata](#)” in Digital Curation centre (DCC) Curation reference manual, 2005. Viewed 17 March 2014.
- ❑ MIT Libraries. [Documentation and metadata](#). Viewed 18 March 2014.
- ❑ Australian National Data Service (ANDS). [Metadata guide](#) (working level). Viewed 18 March 2014.
- ❑ JISC Digital Media. [Approaches to describing images](#). Viewed 19 March 2014.

How we support you?

If you need help with metadata, please email IS Helpline at: IS.Helpline@ed.ac.uk with “Help with metadata” in your subject line.

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact Cuna Ekmekcioglu by phone on (0131)6515261 or email at cuna.ekmekcioglu@ed.ac.uk