

Metadata for Digital Collections: A How-To-Do-It Manual. STEVEN J. MILLER. New York: Neal-Schuman, 2011. xxiii, 343 p. ISBN 978-1-55570-746-0.

Metadata for Digital Collections: A How-To-Do-It Manual by Steven J. Miller is a detailed step-by-step resource on how to create and document a metadata scheme for cultural memory institutions like archives, libraries, and museums. While many manuals on metadata are very technical and rely on knowledge of computer programming, Miller has written a clear, concise guide that makes it possible for a person with no cataloguing experience to make sense of metadata. Miller does not explain how to compile a digital collection, nor how to scan archival materials or what software to use. Nevertheless, this book will be indispensable to any institution seeking practical guidance on designing and documenting a descriptive metadata scheme for its resources.

While there are numerous other books that address metadata or the creation of digital collections, few provide the specifics and detailed focus of this manual. Miller focuses only on intellectual access, or descriptive metadata, for digitized physical collections. Although he states that the first step in creating a digital collection is to establish a metadata scheme, the book does not start there; in fact, that task is not addressed until the second last of the eleven chapters. Instead the author first looks at the foundational knowledge that is essential for designing a metadata scheme. Beginning with a basic introduction and definitions, he explains the important concepts in resource description: the reader is introduced to fundamentals such as granularity of description, element repeatability, the one-to-one principle, and the functions of elements.

Because it starts with the basics, *Metadata for Digital Collections* makes a very useful textbook for library science or archival studies programs, as well as a beginner's guide to descriptive metadata and digital collections. A companion website with class exercises, further reading, and teaching exercises adds to the value of this educational resource. In addition to its suitability for novices, the manual can also serve as a refresher for institutions that have

growing collections and use sustainable practices. It would also benefit institutions that wish to make sure that their practices are in keeping with current trends while also ensuring their viability into the future. As more and more institutions begin to share their collections in consortia and collaborative databases, it is essential that they make use of consistent and well-constructed metadata. Miller offers guidance for institutions of all sizes on how to implement best practices for their metadata.

In order to provide a detailed step-by-step manual, Miller chooses three commonly used metadata schemes as examples: Dublin Core (DC), Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS), and Visual Resources Association (VRA) Core. Dublin Core is often the lowest common denominator in metadata description. While it is a very simple scheme, it provides the basis for other schemes to build more complex schemes from these core elements. With an emphasis on sustainability and interoperability, Miller explains the importance of adopting standards for sharing metadata and maintaining its viability over the long term. But he also points out the common misconceptions about various DC elements and how to use them as they were intended. Some elements, like “title” or “author,” are obvious, but others, like “source” or “type,” can have numerous meanings and are often misused. By carefully and concisely describing each element as it was intended to be used, Miller guides metadata creators along the straight path to best practices. Through comparisons of DC to MODS and VRA Core, he gives us the pros and cons of schemes that are more complex and have their own descriptive purposes.

While *Metadata for Digital Collections* emphasizes the use of standards, Miller also recognizes that each institution and each collection, because of its unique nature, will need to customize its metadata scheme, and he acknowledges that ideal practices have to be balanced with practical usage. He encourages institutions to document the content rules, elements chosen, and other criteria for creating their scheme, in order to sustain it over time. This can often mean mapping a local scheme or a more complex scheme, such as MODS or VRA Core, to Dublin Core if the metadata will be shared. Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH) requires, at minimum, a set of simple Dublin Core metadata elements encoded in XML. Software updates, changing metadata schemes, and the movement of systems toward consortium or collaborative catalogues make the use of standards more important than ever. It is crucial that local database needs are not the only factors considered when creating a metadata scheme.

The book’s design not only allows for it to be read in its entirety, with each chapter building on the previous one, but also for it be consulted as a how-to reference for specific topics. Miller provides numerous tables, illustrations, and screen shots to convey the issues of metadata creation. Some examples are repeated as the topics become more and more complex; by revisiting tables that the reader has become familiar with, Miller makes complex concepts

clear and easy to understand. Throughout the text, he refers to other aspects of given topics, making it easy for readers to find a path to relevant chapters, no matter where they start reading in the manual.

Metadata for Digital Collections provides an overview of a number of topics essential to creating a metadata scheme. While this manual cannot tell metadata creators everything they might need to consider about controlled vocabulary, Miller does raise key points to consider and notes the most commonly used thesauri and other vocabularies. Although Miller does not discuss specific software programs for displaying and searching your digital collection and its metadata, he does provide an overview of XML coding. This topic is addressed in one short chapter, but it is the perfect foundation for continuing the planning of a metadata scheme. The manual ends with a discussion about linked data and the Semantic Web. Although this is an emerging topic in the fields of archives and digital collections, Miller guides the reader to consider future possibilities when designing a scheme. A bibliography is included at the end of each chapter for further reading. *Metadata for Digital Collections* should be added to every archive's reference shelf.

Jennifer Whitlock
Indianapolis Museum of Art