



Metadata

Metadata is often referred to as the data that describes other data or information. Records management and information systems rely on metadata to manage information.

Records metadata is broadly categorised into a number of different categories and may include:

structural metadata – used to describe the relationship between records, such as a file or container, or the format of the record

- administrative metadata – used to manage a resource, such as access permissions, and
- descriptive metadata.

Descriptive metadata is deliberate, structured data which provides information about the content or context of the record which may not otherwise be recognised by full text searching.

Descriptive metadata includes:

- unique identifier
- title
- subjects/keywords
- author
- document type
- description
- dates

There is a direct relationship between the metadata assigned to a record and the discoverability of that record.

Metadata is generally defined in a schema and encoding scheme or controlled vocabulary.

- A metadata schema shows the relationship between metadata elements and establishes rule for use, e.g. is the element *optional* or *mandatory*, which element takes precedence.
- An encoding scheme is the controlled list of terms used and includes rules for how the terms should be entered, e.g. Surname, First name; date formats, etc.

What metadata do I require?

Requirements for the use of metadata depends on the needs of the users and the functionality of the system being used. Does the system:

- allow for full text searching?
- use containers?
- automatically generate metadata through the capture process?
- use templates that have specific metadata embedded, e.g., a leave application or accident report form?
- use artificial intelligence or have machine learning functionality?

Automating the capture of metadata where possible reduces the need for manually entering information and enables more consistent classification.

When deciding what metadata to capture you should also consider the value of the records. Are they:

- of long-term value to the organisation?
- of archival value?
- vital for the continuation of business functions?

The volume of metadata kept will also depend on the level at which you document the information. For example, low value or low risk information may be documented at the box or series level, whereas high value or high-risk information may be documented at the file or folder level.

Minimum metadata set

The SRO's minimum metadata requirement for information is:

Table 1

Name	Obligation	Description
Author / Creator	All Information	Creator and modifier of information (individual name, business unit or agency name for transfer)
Date/s	All Information	All relevant dates of action upon information (creation, modification, transfer)
Identifier	All Information	A unique value that identifies the information
Information Classification	All Information	A classification label to denote the sensitivity of the information
Disposal	Long term / Vital / Archival	Information about the disposal action that relates to the information. Whether the information is archival.
Description	Long term / Vital /	Description of the information and / or its



	Archival	content. May be as simple as a title.
Format	Long term / Vital / Archival	Description of the information's format

Managing metadata

Metadata should never be created on an ad-hoc basis, it should be managed.

Properly managed metadata promotes the entry of meaningful, standardised, and consistent metadata by the users. This contributes to record quality, discoverability, assists in record sharing and reuse, and increases the efficiency of machine learning where available.

Like all information management functions, metadata and its use should be documented. This information is critical for ongoing systems management and for facilitating system migration in the future.

The more information you have in a collection the more critical the metadata becomes.

As an organisation's business activities change, the metadata schemas and encoding schemes should be reviewed to make sure they still meet the organisation's needs.

Retention and disposal of metadata

If organisations kept all metadata indefinitely, they could end up maintaining more metadata for destroyed records than they do for existing records.

Metadata should be treated like a record and kept with the associated record for the minimum retention period specified for the record in the relevant Retention & Disposal Authority (RDA) for that record.

An organisation must assess the risks associated with their functions and determine if there are temporary records for which metadata should be kept for longer.

Organisations must ensure they retain sufficient evidence of records that have been disposed of including:

- record/file number if applicable
- title/description
- date range
- Disposal Authority number
- destruction due date

Metadata for permanent value records, including State archives, must be kept with that record, and migrated across systems where necessary, indefinitely.



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Sources

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