

Common and Useful Information Elements for Cataloging Pictorial Materials

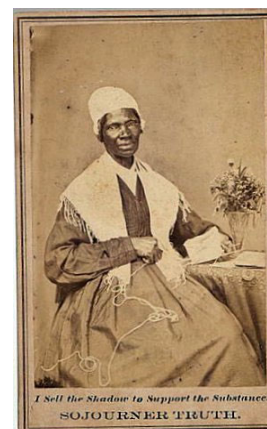
Compiled by Helena Zinkham, June 2004

Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20540-4730

The following ideas come from both formal cataloging standards and from practical experience with large collections as well as single images in digital imaging projects. Published guidelines, such as *Graphic Materials (GM)* and *Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACs)*, should be consulted for more detailed advice. The “Tips for Useful Description of Pictures” (on the last page) explains why some information elements are especially important for visual materials.

Common Elements for Description & Cataloging

The information elements are equally applicable to catalog records and finding aids. The elements appear in most encoding schemes (although the data name differs), including MARC21, Dublin Core, and EAD. The collection-level example is for a fictional group of photographs. The item-level example uses a real photograph (shown at right) associated for teaching purposes with the fictional collection.



Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-6165

Area	Element(s)	Collection-Level Example	Item-Level Example
CREATOR & CONTEXT	Creator names & roles (access points and notes)	South, Cole, collector. Askew, Thomas, 1850?–1914, photographer. Van Vechten, Carl, 1880–1964, photographer. Includes works by many different photographers, with numerous images by Thomas Askew and Carl Van Vechten.	Unidentified photographic studio in Detroit, Michigan.
	Administrative / biographical history	Cole South began assembling this collection in the 1970s to visually document African American history, life, and culture for the bicentennial celebrations in 1976.	(not used for this example)
IDENTITY	Title	Cole South collection of African American history photographs.	Portrait photo of Sojourner Truth.
	Date	1850–1975, bulk 1860–1930.	1864.
	Extent & physical description	circa 600 photographs.	1 photographic print on carte de visite mount; 4 x 2.5 in.
	Reference code	US-AkAX-PH100	US-AkAX-PH100.22.3
	Repository name & location	ABC Archives, Anchorage, Alaska, US	ABC Archives, Anchorage, Alaska, US
	Level of description	Collection	Item

Area	Element(s)	Collection-Level Example	Item-Level Example
CONTENT & STRUCTURE (includes subjects and work types)	Scope & content	Photographs showing African Americans in different situations including military life, schools, and civil rights activities. Also many portraits.	Portrait shows Sojourner Truth, an African American abolitionist and women’s rights advocate, holding her knitting while seated by a table. She sold this portrait to raise money to support herself.
	Arrangement	Arranged in 2 series: 1. Portraits (alphabetical by sitter); 2. Subjects (alphabetical by topic).	(not used)
	Access points: subjects	African Americans—History. African Americans—Military life. Civil rights. Schools.	Truth, Sojourner, d. 1883. African Americans—Women.
	Access points: work types	Portraits. Photographs.	Portrait photographs. Cartes de visite.
ACCESS & USE (restrictions)	Access conditions (general, physical, and technical)	Access to the original photographs is limited to special appointments because the images are fragile.	(not used for this example)
	Rights & reproduction status	Rights status of individual images varies. For general information see reference aid: “Copyright ...”	No known restrictions on publication.
	Language	Captions are in English; the collector wrote most.	(not used for this example)
	Finding aids	List of portraits, subjects, and photographers is available in a finding aid.	(not used for this example)
ACQUISITION & APPRAISAL	Immediate source & custodial history	Gift, Cole South, 1996.	(not used for this example)
	Appraisal & accruals	Additions are expected.	(not used for this example)
RELATED MATERIALS	Copies & originals	Photocopies provided for general reference use. Selected items have been digitized for viewing at ...	Digital reproduction available at http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3g06165 .
	Related archival materials	(not used for this example)	Forms part of the Cole South collection of African American history photographs.
	Publications	(not used for this example)	Published in: Sojourner Truth / Nell Painter. N.Y.: Norton, 1996, p. 185–199.
GENERAL NOTES	Notes on source of title, condition, exhibition, etc.	(not used for this example)	Printed below photo: I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance—Sojourner Truth.
CONTROL of DESCRIPTION	Processing work, name, date, and rules.	Described by ABC, Jan. 1997, using <i>DACS</i> ; last rev. 2000.	Described by Elisabeth Parker, Feb. 2004, using <i>Graphic Materials</i> .

“USEFUL” Description of Pictorial Materials

- **Use a word that identifies the broad type of material, such as “pictures”**

The general word for the type of visual material should appear in the description even when specific media or format terms are also used. Most users ask for pictures using general vocabulary. Stating the broad “object type” or “work type” early in a description helps distinguish visual materials from the many other ways that information is expressed, such as in text, music, maps, or sound recordings.
- **State the physical media/format and quantity**

Photographs, prints, drawings, etc., come in so many shapes and sizes that researchers rely on designations such as “2,000 photographs: slides” or “1 drawing: 50 x 30 cm” to gauge the nature of the information. Will the images be hard to view? Will there be clear visual detail? How many items need to be looked at?
- **Express the subject and specific work type, media, or genre**

Expand on broad work types (e.g., photographs) to provide direct information about subject content, genres, and specific media (e.g., trees, landscapes, cyanotypes).
- **Favor names of creators**

Mentioning the names of the lithographers, photographers, and other visual creators, even when they are only partially identified, helps researchers gauge the nature of the visual information, such as amateur, commercial, corporate, or personal viewpoints.
- **Undertake rights statements**

A rights statement in or linked to the descriptive record, even if the statement says “unknown,” can simplify a researcher’s choice of which materials to request or reproduce. Getting copies is often the goal for picture researchers.
- **Link to digital reproductions**

At least selectively, try to show users what the pictures look like. Viewing an image conveys lots of information beyond what reading a verbal description can accomplish.