

NSW Department of Education & Communities

Improving your online metadata

Corporate communication

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Introduction

This document will help you create and improve metadata for your online content. Often people can't find content via search because it has not been labelled with the right kind of metadata.

This document deals with metadata that is attached to the following:

- web pages (HTML etc)
- Microsoft Office documents and PDF documents etc

This document will help you write your metadata. Once your metadata is written it needs to be inserted into your content management system (probably Teamsite) or attached to your content. You can contact your Teamsite administrator for help with this if necessary. This document does not cover that process.

What is metadata?

Metadata (or meta tags) is a means of tagging content so that it can be categorised and found. Metadata is often referred to as information about information.

When done well, metadata is a powerful way of connecting users to the information they need.

To improve your contents search engine ranking and help people recognise the value of your content, you should ensure these three meta tags are filled in correctly.

- title
- description
- keywords/subject

Adding metadata

It's a good idea to write metadata at the same time as your content. That way metadata can help validate page content and vice versa. Writing a page description is a good way to check the page content has a clear subject or purpose. If it doesn't, summarising the page can be quite hard and you know you have to improve your page as well as your metadata.

It is not always possible to write content and metadata at the same time however. Sometimes you may have to add metadata to a page that has none, or improve the metadata that already exists. If this is the case, read the page first. The title should be the page title, the description will be a summary of the page and the keywords will be words you anticipate people will use to try to search for the page.

Title

The title is a short phrase that describes the subject matter of the web page or document. This is not like the title of a newspaper article that tries to entice the reader in, but an opportunity to summarise the page content in three or four words.

The title needs to stand alone, that is, make sense irrespective of whether someone browses to the web page or document, or finds it via search results.

Good examples of titles

- SAP finance training
- OHS risk audit
- DET organisational chart 2008
- TAFE library services
- Marketing Directorate contacts

Note that these titles include at least a location and an object name. Sometimes a date or another descriptor is also appropriate.

Description

The metadata description allows readers to quickly get a sense of what the page is about. Imagine you only have one or two sentences (250 words maximum) to describe to a colleague what the page is about. Start with the subject of the page and make sure you include any terms that you anticipate staff will search for. The key to a good description is to include the top search words or terms that you anticipate staff will use when searching.

A poor description can be very frustrating for the searcher and cause them to miss your page.

The focus should be on the subject of the page, not where the page lies in the site hierarchy, for example:

- Do write: The State Library of Victoria is the major reference and research library in Victoria, responsible for collecting and preserving Victoria's documentary
- Don't write: This is the home page of the State Library of Victoria's website.

Good examples of descriptions

- Your questions about OHS Consultation Training answered. What is it, how to book, where is it held and reimbursement of expenses.
- Learn how managers can build a great work team that results in a happy, motivated and productive workforce. Understanding team functioning and yourself will help you do this.
- Environmental and energy resources for teaching school students about energy saving, waste management, caring for our built environment, transport and food production.
- Download DET stationery and customise them for your needs. Letterhead, fax and with compliments slips.

Keywords

Keywords are words or (two or three-word) phrases that you anticipate staff will use when trying to find your information. Don't use more than 25 words and don't repeat them. Use a mixture of common and specialised words and try to include common misspellings of words.

Good examples of keywords

- OHS consultation course, training, online course application, risk management, reimbursement of expenses, casual relief, Work Cover, OHS committee members, occupational health and safety, OH&S
- Building a team, successful, motivation, team leader, manager development, productivity, benefits, team members, confidence, morale, efficiency, motivation
- Energy, waste, building, transport, food production, sustainable, sustainability, environmental education, water management, teaching, resource
- Letterhead, letter head, fax, with compliments slip, templates, customise, DET logo, black and white, stationary, stationery

Office documents and PDFs

Don't forget to update the properties of your Office documents or PDFs before uploading them. Title, description and keywords/subject should be completed. In some Teamsite templates it is possible to add metadata to documents in the same way you would to HTML pages. Please check with your technical support to find out if this works for your area.

More information on metadata

- BBC: HTML Metadata Standards v1.2
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/futuremedia/desed/searchmetadata.shtml>
The BBC has put together a very helpful guide to writing metadata. Not always applicable to DET, but useful as a reference nevertheless. Good metadata examples.
- Inside Knowledge: Metadata: a writing skill, not just part of the code
<http://www.ikmagazine.com/xq/asp/txtSearch.Taxonomies/exactphrase.1/sid.0/articleid.A142CF82-7AAB-4E69-B850-8641E79C191B/qx/display.htm>
This journal article talks about the importance of metadata in our daily lives as well as in website creation. It strongly advocates the value of metadata.
- National Library of Australia: Web Site Metadata Strategies and Guidelines
<http://www.nla.gov.au/metadata.html>
This is a factual description of the Libraries metadata strategy. Interesting in terms of a broader approach to metadata management.