

# AN INTRODUCTION TO VRA CORE

## Purpose/Role of VRA Core

VRA Core is a data standard for the description of works of visual culture as well as the images that document them. Works of visual culture can include objects or events such as paintings, drawings, sculpture, architecture, photographs, as well as book, decorative, and performance art. It is an internationally recognized metadata standard that is used both as a standalone format, and as an approved extension schema to METS for objects that contain cultural heritage resources.<sup>1</sup>

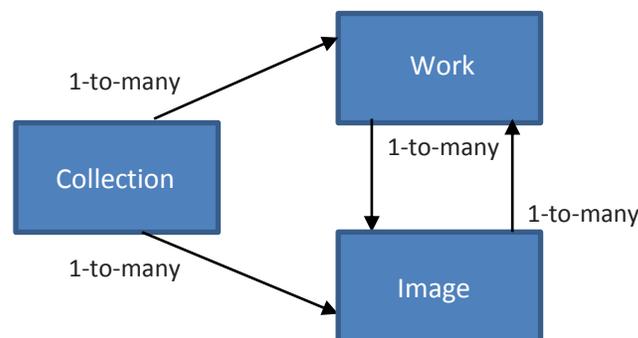
## History and Adoption of VRA Core

VRA Core was first developed in 1996. The current version 4.0, that was released in 2007, is expressed as an XML schema in order to support the interoperability and exchange of VRA Core records.

Today, the data standard is widely used throughout the globe by art and architecture schools, libraries, museums, archives and organizations that need to manage information about and provide access to cultural heritage works and their images. The [Implementation Registry](#) is a select list of some of the institutions that have adopted VRA Core.

## Data Model

There are 3 primary entities in the VRA Core 4.0 data model: collection, work, and image. The primary focus of description in VRA Core is the work record which can then be affiliated with one or more images via the Relation element. By the same token, a single image can relate to one or more works when for example a documentary image is taken of an exhibition and that image portrays multiple works. A collection record can be used to aggregate multiple work or multiple image records.



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<sup>1</sup> VRA Core 4.0 documentation and schemas - [Copyright \(c\) 2007 Visual Resources Association \(VRA\)](#). Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License. The standard is [hosted](#) by the Network Development and MARC Standards Office of the Library of Congress (LC) in partnership with the [Visual Resources Association](#). It is developed and managed by the VRA Core Oversight Committee. Inquiries can be made to [vracore@vraweb.org](mailto:vracore@vraweb.org).

## Elements, Sub-elements and Attributes

An element in Core 4.0 is unit of metadata and is the equivalent of a field in a database (e.g. **agent**). Some elements contain sub-elements which are parent:child hierarchical relationships (e.g. **agent:dates**). Attributes further qualify the information in the elements and sub-elements (**agent:dates:type**). VRA Core contains 19 elements, namely record type (collection/work/image), agent, culturalContext, date, description, inscription, location, material, measurements, relation, rights, source, stateEdition, stylePeriod, subject, technique, textref, title, and worktype. In addition, there are 9 global attributes which can be used to qualify any element or sub-element. They include: dataDate, extent, href, pref (preferred value), refid (link to internal identifiers), rules, source, vocab, xml:lang. For more details see supporting document [VRA Core 4.0 Element Outline](#).

## Schemas

Version 4.0 has both a restricted and unrestricted schema. The *unrestricted* schema imposes no requirements on the values entered into any of the elements, sub-elements, or attributes, and may be useful for those who want to exchange legacy data. The *restricted* schema imposes requirements on the data values entered into the *type* attributes (see supporting document [Restricted Schema Type Values](#) for a list of allowed values and their definitions.) The restricted version may be more appropriate for those wishing to aggregate VRA Core data from multiple sources into a common repository or shared cataloging environment.

## Display and Indexing

VRA Core 4.0 was designed to accommodate both display of data for human consumption and indexing and retrieval of data via computers. To this end, it allows for two additional units of metadata - display and notes. These display elements, along with one or more index values contained within the element tags, are nested within an outer "wrapper" known as a *set*. For example, the MATERIAL set would be encoded as follows:

```
<materialSet>
  <display>oil on canvas</display>
  <notes source="Art Bulletin, v.87, no. 1 (March 2005)">Medium originally thought to
    be tempera. Oil medium discovered in tests at Uffizi in 2003</notes>

  <material type="medium" vocab="AAT" refid="300015050">oil paint</material>
  <material type="support" vocab="AAT" refid="300014078">canvas</material>
</materialSet>
```

## For more Information

The official schemas and documentation can be found at <http://www.loc.gov/standards/vracore/schemas.html> and user support materials at <http://core.vraweb.org/>. A VRACORE listserv has been established so that the community can ask questions and share knowledge <http://listserv.loc.gov/listarch/vracore.html>.