

Training Opportunities for Cataloging Pictorial Materials

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People interested in describing and indexing photographs and other visual materials should develop the following abilities, knowledge, and skills. Cataloging work requires the

- ability to
 - analyze and organize information;
 - assess a collection's value, use, and condition to determine appropriate level of description;
 - pay attention to details;
 - read photographs (visual literacy);
 - research photographs;
 - translate visual information into textual descriptions; and
 - verify information and solve problems.

- knowledge of
 - archival bibliographic principles and the nature of visual information;
 - audience or user community research interests and methods;
 - basic photographic processes, history, and formats;
 - data content, value, and interchange standards;
 - description, cataloging, and information system principles;
 - general history and the repository's subject area;
 - local library or archives mission and policies;
 - procedures for access, rights management, and other administrative issues addressed in description; and
 - subject indexing principles and methods.

- skill in
 - proofreading;
 - synthesizing complex information and writing concise, accurate, easy-to-comprehend statements;
 - using controlled vocabularies such as name authority files and subject thesauri;
 - using descriptive guidelines and standards such as *Graphic Materials and Describing Archives: A Content Standard*;
 - using encoding schemes such as MARC21, MODS, Dublin Core, EAD;
 - using information technologies;
 - using reference sources and online catalogs to track down information; and
 - writing finding aids, catalog records, and guide entries;

TIP: Good catalogers don't just know lots of rules. They use catalogs frequently and know what works well. They use common sense and good judgment to represent pictures in ways that connect them effectively to researcher needs.

Resources for Learning about Cataloging & Description

Educational opportunities are available by arranging for special internships and attending the meetings of archival organizations. Graduate school programs in information science and archival studies often include cataloging and description in courses about information technology, bibliographic control, or archival processing. You can also create a self-education program by monitoring listservs, reading the published literature, and visiting sister institutions.

Extensive formal training that focuses on cataloging is uncommon. The following courses, resource lists, and manuals represent what to look for.

Examples:

- Workshops
 - National Archives and Records Administration's weeklong Modern Archives Institute covers general arrangement and description practices.
http://www.archives.gov/preservation/modern_archives_institute.html
 - Rare Book School at the University of Virginia began sponsoring a weeklong course on "Cataloging Visual Materials," including photographs, in 1995.
<http://www.virginia.edu/oldbooks/bulletin/libraries.html#zinkham>
 - Society of American Archivists sponsors several one and two-day workshops: "Archival Cataloging as a Component of Description," "Arrangement and Description," "Encoded Archival Description." The continuing education catalog is available at:
http://www.archivists.org/prof-education/course_catalog.asp#description
- Tutorials online
 - *Managing Archives*, by Michael Cook (London: International Records Management Trust, 1999), includes a chapter on "Arrangement and Description" for government records. Written in a training program lesson style, this 50-page chapter features hands-on activities and study questions at <http://www.irmt.org/download.html>.
 - *Thesaurus Construction*, maintained by Tim Craven (Ontario: Faculty of Information and Media Studies, University of Western Ontario, 1997-2002), guides students through the process with many examples and review quizzes at <http://instruct.uwo.ca/gplis/677/thesaur/main00.htm>.
 - *Understanding MARC Bibliographic: Machine-Readable Cataloging* by Bettie Furrie (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Cataloging Distribution Service, with the Follett Software Company, 2003, 7th ed) is a guided tour through the MARC21 format at <http://www.loc.gov/marc/umb/>.
- Listservs
 - AUTOCAT is a forum for discussing cataloging and authority control issues. To subscribe: <http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/units/cts/autocat/>
 - RADMEMO hosts discussions of archival description standards, including *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)*. To subscribe: listserv@yorku.ca
 - Visual Materials Listserv (Society of American Archivists) covers cataloging issues at times. To subscribe: <http://www.lib.lsu.edu/SAA/vmelist.html>.