TITLES AND DESCRIPTIONS

Best Metadata Practices for Photograph Collections

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PHOTOS ARE THEIR OWN UNIQUE CATEGORY…

▶ Not traditionally titled

▶ Often dependent on context

▶ Naming and describing a photo can feel redundant…

but both are IMPORTANT and need to be

DISTINCT

Each field has a purpose. Both need to be included.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES?

Title

- *Most basic essence* of what a photo depicts
  - Short, sweet, simple
  - Selling pitch (info the viewer will use to determine if the photo is of interest)
  - Identifies the central focus of the photo
- Free text, but specific format
  - *Who, What, Where, When*
  - Apply as the photo's content allows

Description

- The title embellished!
- All the details the title can't capture
  - Outside context
  - Background details
  - Angles/views/perspectives (e.g. aerial shots)
  - Transcriptions
  - Specific details (e.g. individual names for members of a group)
- Free text all the way!

Related in focus but distinct in treatment and purpose.

OBSERVE, REFLECT, & RELATE!

Animal science research on Guernsey cow--Photo 1

Animal science research on Guernsey cow's ear.

Animals--Research; Oklahoma A & M College

Animal science research on Guernsey cow--Photo 2

Animal science research on Guernsey cow's back.

Animals--Research; Oklahoma A & M College

Architectural sketch of Quonset Style Diesel Laboratory, circa 1949

Drawing of projected Quonset Style Diesel Laboratory architecture. Construction of Quonset

Drawings; Oklahoma A & M College

circa 1949

➢ Reflect on your own research!
- ➢ What do you look for first?
- ➢ Where is the eye first drawn?

➢ Think of a traditional book on a shelf
- ➢ What part of the book do you see first?
- ➢ Where do you have to go to get a description?

Trust your experience and intuition as a researcher!
You can draw on that here!

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COMPONENTS OF TITLE

What's most central to the image?

A FLEXIBLE RULE

- We have people
- We have an activity
- We have a place
- We may have a time

- No people
- No activity
- Just a building (a "what" and "where")
- We may have a time

Consider "Who, What, When, Where" based on what you have and/or know!
That's all anyone can ask of you!

#1) WHO?

- Question 1: Are there people in the photo?
- YES
  - Do you have names?
    - Individual(s)
    - Group
  - If yes:
    - Who matters more? Individuals or greater group?
    - How many names? More than 3?
  - If no, who are they generally?
    - Professional(s)
    - Men, women, children
    - Just people
- NO
  - Proceed to 'what'

- Question 2: Are people the main focus of the photo?
  - Is the photo taken for the sake of a photo?
    - Are the people posing? Looking at camera?
    - Is the photo a portrait? Staged?
  - Are they performing an activity?
    - What's more important?
      - The group performing the action?
      - The action being performed?
    - Is it an activity or an event?

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KNOWN VS. UNKNOWN

L. D. Harrison and Red Tarver on Lewis Field

Pair of WWI soldiers, portrait--Plate 1

- ➤ Names are provided/contributed
- ➤ 3 or less: Can list them comfortably
- ➤ Photo for the sake of a photo
  - ➤ Posing

- ➤ Names unknown
- ➤ Profession identifiable
- ➤ Photo for the sake of a photo
  - ➤ Formal portrait

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INDIVIDUALS VS. GROUP

Dick Hutton lifting Bill Jernigan, circa 1948

J. G. Griffith and football team, circa 1917

➤ Names are provided/contributed
➤ 3 or less: Can list them comfortably
➤ Persons of established individual reputation

➤ Group photo
➤ Individual player names not known
➤ Team vs. individual reputation

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#2) WHAT?

4 concepts of 'what'

1. 'What' as **action/activity**
   - Person *doing something*

2. 'What' as **event**
   - Specific named persons/group at [*name of a known event*]
   - [*Name of a known event*] (where 'who' is not so important/central to the photo)

3. 'What' as **function**
   - Considered in the context of a photo taken for a photo's sake
   - Formal portraits: "Person, *portrait*"
   - Posing for a photo: *Skip the what*.

4. 'What' as **object**
   - When the main focus is not a person or an activity/event
   - Example: *Buildings and landscapes*

What's happening in the photo?
What's the purpose of the photo?

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'WHAT' AS ACTION

Man studying apples

DeWitt Hunt and two men working with airplane models in the Industrial Arts Building, circa 1950

- An established 'Who'
- Action expressed as a present participle ("-ing")

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'WHAT' AS EVENT

College Homecoming or Harvest Carnival Parade in Stillwater--Plate 5

Cooking class in the Domestic Science Building kitchen, circa 1912--Plate 1

- An established/named occurrence
- Activity is implied
- Action takes precedence over people present

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'WHAT' AS FUNCTION

Edward C. Gallagher, portrait--Photo 3
ttps://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/cunningham/id/634

Man with Hereford bull

- Persons/objects posed for sake of a photo
- Specific genre of photo is noted (portrait)
- "Standing," "sitting," "posing," "holding": passive verbs we can exclude
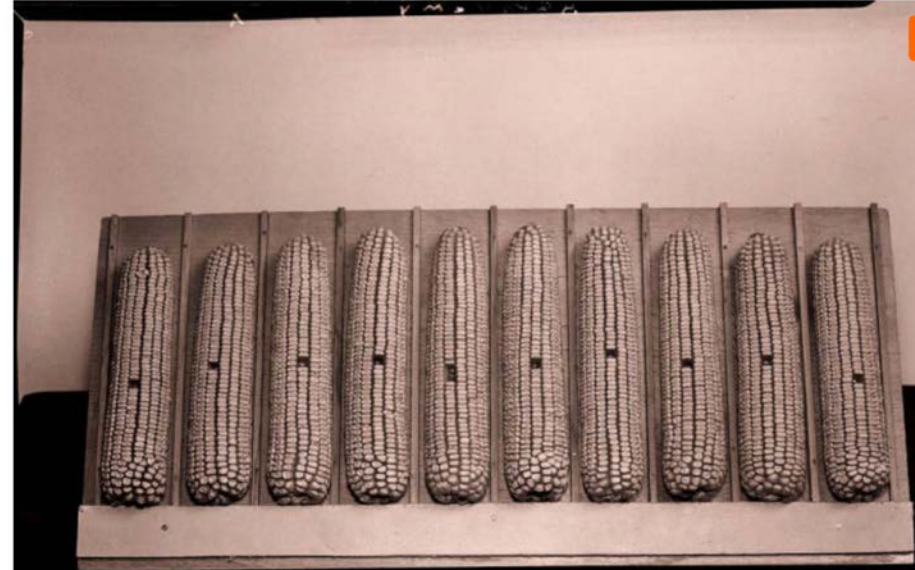
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'WHAT' AS OBJECT

Cotton gin building on Agricultural Experiment Station--Photo 1

Corn cob display

- "Still life"
- Buildings, landscapes, objects. No people. No actions.

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#3) WHERE?

- Depends on context of image and collection
- Location can consist of:
  - City, state, country
  - Building
  - Landmark
  - Region (mountains, woods, fields)
- If collection/images are consistent in location, can be more selective with what to include
  - Ex) Cunningham collection majorly in Stillwater, on Oklahoma A&M Campus
    - Focused on building names, regions of campus (Agricultural Experiment Farm, Cordell Residence Hall)
    - Excluded mention of "Oklahoma A&M" and "Stillwater" to description
    - Mentioned cities only when outside of Stillwater (Shawnee, OK)
- If more variable, be as precise with location as necessary

NOTE: Concept of "place" can blend "Where" with "What" (e.g. campus buildings)

#4) WHEN?

- Almost ALWAYS DEPENDENT on CONTEXT
- If you know "when" specifically, with certainty:
  - Text for the TITLE:
    - YYYY
    - Month YYYY
    - DD Month YYYY
  - Value for the DATE field:
    - YYYY
    - YYYY-MM
    - YYYY-MM-DD
- If there is an estimated "when," confident but not wholly certain
  - Follow same formats above
  - BUT precede with "circa"

If you don't know "when," that's okay. Leave it out.

REVIEW PROCESS

▶ Conquer and divide. One person creates. Another person reviews.

▶ When reviewing:

1. Do all images have a title AND a description?
   ▶ Descriptions should not merely repeat the titles!
2. Titles:
   ▶ Are they short, pithy, cut down to the most fundamental details?
   ▶ Do they follow Who, What, Where, When?
   ▶ Do they capture the central/main focus of the photo?
3. Spellcheck. (F7 when working with CSVs)
4. Names
   ▶ Are names standardized according to the appropriate designated registry?
   ▶ Names reference in titles and descriptions should all be formatted consistently
   ▶ Library of Congress Name Authority File (http://id.loc.gov/authorities/names.html)
5. Document patterns of error!
   ▶ Identify the trouble spots, common patterns of correction
   ▶ Share with the creator. Help them know and improve.

Have a support system in place. Lot of work for one person!

FINAL SUGGESTIONS

1. Reverse the approach
   - Write the description first. Capture everything!
   - THEN, draw out the title from that description.
     - Pare down to the most essential details/focus of the photo
     - Format accordingly (*Who, What, Where, When*)
   - "Write drunk. Edit sober." (Ernest Hemingway)
2. Be open with your colleagues
   - Broader scope of whole collection can sometimes inform title practices
   - If describing similar content
     - Can better identify related photos/content
     - Develop consistent titling/numbering system for related content
     - Get a better sense of what topics are most relevant to the whole collection
3. Have a system of review in place!
   - Help each other out!
   - Help each other improve!

THANK YOU!

Any questions?

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