

Minnesota Reflections New Metadata Entry Guidelines

Writing an **Item Description**

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Welcome! My name is Greta Bahnemann and I am the Metadata Coordinator at the Minnesota Digital Library.

In this short tutorial we are going to review how to write a description for items in the Minnesota Reflections database.

Handouts & Links:

Click to view:

[Tutorial Handout and Script](#)

[Minnesota Reflections Metadata Guidelines 2.0](#)

Here are two links that may prove to be useful:

1. The first link is to a copy of today's presentation and my script (<http://www.mndigital.org/training/tutorials/DescriptionTutorialHandout.pdf>).
2. The second link will take you to the PDF of the Minnesota Reflections Metadata Guidelines located on the Minnesota Digital Library's website. In the Guidelines you can find additional information on writing on item description located on page 10 (<http://www.mndigital.org/digitizing/standards/metadata2010.pdf>).

Writing an Item Description:

- What is an item description?
- Description length: Too short? Too long? Just right?
- What should be included in a description?
What should NOT be included in a description?
- Examples in *Minnesota Reflections*
- Enter information in the Excel spreadsheet

In this tutorial we are going to review how to create a description for items in the *Minnesota Reflections* database.

I will first define what an item description is.

I will discuss how long an item description should be.

I will then discuss what should be included in an item description – AND what should NOT be included in an item description.

We will then look at some examples of item descriptions in the *Minnesota Reflections* database

And finally, I will show you where to enter this information in the Excel spreadsheet that you will use to submit your metadata.

What is an Item Description?

A narrative textual description of the item. Use the Description field to record information about the people, places, events and themes depicted in the item. The description is a more detailed extension of the information recorded in the **TITLE** field (click here to view the **TITLE** tutorial).

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When do I create a Description?

ALWAYS! Every item in Minnesota Reflections requires a description.

How long should a Description be?

Limit your description to what is visible. Don't describe more than what is visible.

When do I create an Item Description?

You ALWAYS create an Item Description! Every item in *Minnesota Reflections* requires a description.

How long should an Item Description be?

It can be difficult to strike the right balance between too little and too much information. Limit your description to what is visible and relevant. It might be tempting to include any and all information that is known about an individual, place, building or event - but don't describe more than what is visible in the item. For example, if the image shows a general city view, don't feel compelled to include the names of every owner of every building seen in the photograph. Users interested in that level of information will probably want to contact you directly for a research appointment.

What grammatical rules should I follow?

Write in complete sentences. Capitalize the first word in each sentence. Proper names of individuals, companies, and place names should also be capitalized. End each sentence with a period.

Dr. Charles Mayo - **CORRECT**

St. Paul - **CORRECT**

Steamboat "Puritan" loads passengers - **CORRECT**

Lake of the Woods Co. - **INCORRECT**

Hennepin Ave. - **INCORRECT**

What grammatical rules should I follow?

The Description should read as a single block of text. Write in complete sentences and end each sentence with a period. Do not use ampersands or paragraph or line breaks. Maintain standard capitalization rules throughout. Capitalize the first word in each sentence. Proper names of individuals, companies, and place names should also be capitalized. Do not abbreviate words like county, company, avenue or street. One exception to the abbreviation rule: You may use the grammatically correct abbreviates for titles such as Dr. Mr. or Mrs. You should also use S-T-period for place names that use the word "Saint." Use should also use double quotation marks to denote the names of a steamboat or ship, farm, train, etc.

I have provided some examples of the correct use of abbreviations – here using the D-R-period abbreviation for Doctor. The S-T-period abbreviation for the word SAINT in the city name of St. Paul. And the use of double quotation marks to denote the name of a steamboat.

I have also provided two examples of the incorrect use of abbreviations. Do NOT use C-O-period to abbreviate the word County and do not abbreviate the word Avenue.

What should be included in a Description?

- Expansion of any information in the **TITLE**
- Names of people
- Places
- Activities
- Events
- View type

What should be included in the description?

The description field is a more detailed extension of the information recorded in the TITLE field. Here you can expand on any information included in the title – such as the names of individuals in a group portrait.

The following is a list of things that can be included in the Description:

- Names of people. In the case of a portrait of an individual or group, record what is known about the individual or group in a few sentences. In the case of individual portraits, provide the individual's birth and death dates if known and any significant information about the person – such as the individual's profession or role within the community.
- Places. Include any geographical information here that is not recognized in Minnesota Place names – such as lakes, city parks, etc.
- Activities: describe activities shown in the image – such as farm work, threshing, plowing, harvesting, etc. or recreational activities such as boating, hiking, picnicking, berry picking, etc.
- Events: describe community events as shown – such as holidays activities like a Fourth of July parade, Memorial Day picnic, Veterans Day speeches, etc.
- View type: when describing works of architecture and the built environment, you can differentiate between interior and exterior views.

What should **NOT** be included in a Description?

- Provenance and donor information
- Information beyond what is depicted in the image

Examples in *Minnesota Reflections*:



What should **NOT** be included in an item description?

- Provenance and donor information – any information about the individual, family or corporation that donated this particular item to your collection should **NOT** be included here.
- Information beyond what is depicted in the image. Don't describe people, buildings, and places not captured by the camera.



Now let's look at some examples in *Minnesota Reflections*. These two images are from the Minnesota Streetcar Museum's collection.

I'm going to talk about the image on the left, which is of the Steamboat Puritan (<http://reflections.mndigital.org/u?/msn,388>).

You can come back at anytime and view both images on your own by clicking directly on the image.

The 2nd example of a description can be found here:
<http://reflections.mndigital.org/u?/msn,124>

Steamboat "Puritan" on Lake Minnetonka, Spring Park, Minnesota



Title Steamboat "Puritan" on Lake Minnetonka, Spring Park, Minnesota
Description The Lake Minnetonka steamboat "Puritan" loads passengers at the Spring Park dock.

The image that you see is of the Steamboat "Puritan" on Lake Minnetonka. You will notice that the description provides more information than what is listed in the title.

The description states that the steamboat is loading passengers at the Spring Park dock. You will also notice that the description is written in a complete sentence, and uses proper punctuation.

Practice Cataloging:



Pioneer Mine
Mine buildings
Ore cars
Headframe
Exterior view
Power house

Exterior view of the Pioneer Mine, showing the mine buildings and the headframe. Ore cars are visible near the smokestack.

This is the same photograph we used to practice creating a TITLE. Let's use this same image to practice writing an Item Description.

As you may recall, this is a photograph of the Pioneer Mine in Ely, Minnesota from the collection of the Northeast Minnesota Historical Center in Duluth.

The TITLE we created for this image is: Oliver Iron Mining Company, Pioneer Mine, Shaft A, Ely, Minnesota.

Based on what we see in this image our description should include something about the mine buildings including the headframe and the power house, the ore cars, and the smokestack. So our description could read like this:

Exterior view of the Pioneer Mine, showing the mine buildings and the headframe. Ore cars are visible near the smokestack.

Now let's go to the Excel spreadsheet – just the like the one you will be using to enter data.

Questions? Comments?



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[Minnesota Reflections Metadata Guidelines](#)

We have now reached the conclusion of today's tutorial.

To briefly recap – An item description describes what is visible and relevant in the image.

Don't forget to refer to the *Minnesota Reflections* Metadata Guidelines available in PDF form on the Minnesota Digital Library website. You can access the Guidelines by clicking on the link shown here.

And finally, don't hesitate to contact me – either via telephone or e-mail – if you have any questions at Greta Bahnemann, bahne002@umn.edu or 612-625-6497.

Thanks for listening!