

Info-byte: Metadata

What is metadata?

- Metadata means “data about data”
- Metadata means the organisation, classification, indexing and retrieving of records – it’s easier to search metadata than to search through all the documents. It is essentially core descriptive information about a record, originally used only for electronic records but now generally applied regardless of media.
- Metadata includes the context and in which the records was created and used and explains how it relates to others in a group of documents.
- Metadata must be managed in a way that prevents it from being separated from the record or being changed after the record has been created.
- As records contain other records and contain data from a variety of sources in any possible data format, metadata must identify or “register” a record uniquely. This is how to know what was in and what was out of a transaction and that the data is being declared a record.
- Documentation forms a part of the records’ metadata, it is the information necessary to develop, use or maintain hardware and software to permit access and retrieval of data. Documentation explains how systems or programmes operate.

Examples of Metadata

- Author
- Sensitivity/access conditions
- Retention period
- Title
- Date of creation/use/retirement
- Keywords
- Abstract
- Details of hardware and software in which records were created

Types of Metadata

- Resource discovery which helps to locate information of interest, for example keywords
- Resource description which helps to identify and control records once they have been located, for example title or access information

