

Subject Cataloging in Special Collections

Remember your users:

- Librarians – performing collection management, retrieval, research, reference work, etc.
- Researchers – students, graduate students, faculty, scholars
- The World – anyone with a computer who lands on our stuff (intentionally or *serendipitously*)

User tasks (FRBR and RDA) the metadata should support:

1. **Find** the resources that correspond to the user's search criteria
2. **Identify** that the resources described correspond to what the user wants
3. **Select** a resource appropriate to the user's needs
4. Obtain access to the resource described

Getting started:

Method 1: What is the work of/about?

Who? (personal, corporate, family names)

What? (general topics)

Where? (geographic locations)

When? (events)

Method 2: Simple to complex

1. **Describe** what is presented (general)
2. **Identify** persons, locations, events, buildings, etc.
3. **Interpret** – does the resource/image convey any important meanings, themes, or concepts?

Good practice:

- Headings should reflect the predominant topic(s) of the item/collection.
- For collections of materials, subjects assigned should characterize the collection as a whole, though subjects can be used to highlight important components as necessary.
- Try to match the specificity of the heading to the topic. (e.g. Roads vs. Toll roads; Flowers vs. Roses)
- Complex topics will likely require multiple headings.
- Consider the resource objectively and consider the intent of the creator.
- Creators can also be subjects.
- If you don't know, don't guess - broad and accurate is better than specific and incorrect.
- Don't forget the user's needs.
- For abstract visual works, use subjects to describe elements of the composition and thematic or symbolic meanings.