Lightning Source® Sharjah

Title Metadata Best Practices

Hints and tips to improve book discovery and sales

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Introduction

Good quality metadata is key to ensuring the discoverability of your titles and is too often overlooked by self-publishers and even by some traditional publishers. Plain and simple, without good metadata, your audience can't find your content. If your audience can't find your content, they can't *buy* your content. Therein lies the importance of mastering metadata. This guide is designed to help you do that.

We'll start by offering a brief explanation of what metadata is and then break down each individual piece and offer you quick tips as to how to optimize it so that it can continuously work in the background to help your book succeed. Because it's always working, you can't just set it and forget it. If you're seeing sales and everything seems to be working out well for your book, you can assume your stellar metadata input has something to do with it, but if you're not, it's time to reevaluate the information you've entered into the fields we'll cover to make sure it's helping you get noticed for the right reasons. And the right reasons as far as you're concerned would ultimately be sales of your book.

What is Metadata?

The job of search engines everywhere is to answer the questions, phrases, and keywords people type into search bars all over the Internet. Metadata helps those search tools return the most accurate results, using key words and phrases. The better your metadata, the better organic search you can achieve beyond the other marketing efforts you employ. If your metadata describes your book correctly, using terms for which your ideal audience frequently searches, your book will display when they search for anything resembling your book, whether they were originally looking for a book or not. For example, if someone is looking for information about a particular event, location, social situation, or activity, there's no reason your book can't be the perfection solution.

In addition to searches performed by all online, metadata is also critical to industry professionals in the field such as booksellers and librarians. They use metadata to appropriately categorize your book in their online databases as well as on their physical shelves. They don't have time to read every single book they stock, so be sure your metadata tells them the correct location to place your book so that customers and patrons looking for a particular type of story can find yours.

Metadata Fields

Here are some of the metadata fields that can help increase your title discoverability, all of which are available to you within your online IngramSpark account during your title setup process.

Title

The primary title of the book

- Enter the main title of the book as it appears on the product cover and title page.
- Keep the title consistent across formats. (The title should be the same across all works that reference the same parent ISBN.)
- Include title prefixes and leading articles (ex: *The Call of the Wild,* not *Call of the Wild* or *Call of the Wild, The).*

- Do *not* include any subtitle, series, edition, or format information. (These data elements are captured in separate fields.)
- Use all caps only when appropriate for acronyms or stylization.

Subtitle (optional)
A secondary, often descriptive or explanatory title for the book

- Enter the subtitle of the book, as it would appear on the cover of the book or on the title page.
- Use the subtitle to differentiate the book. This is especially helpful for works with otherwise generic titles or with a title similar to other works on the market.
- Keep titles succinct. The longer a title, the more likely you are to lose a potential buyer's attention. (Amazon recommends that title and subtitle together remain under 60 characters, though this is not a hard rule.)
- Do not include series name or number. (These data elements are captured in separate fields.)

Series Name and Number (when applicable)
Thematic, character, or plot-driven grouping of titles

Series are great for marketing and promotion and can help to signal to readers that titles are part of a larger story or thematic collection.

Series Name:

- Specify a series name for titles that feature an ongoing story (e.g. *A Song of Ice and Fire*), recurring character (e.g. Nancy Drew), or other organizing principle (e.g. Penguin Modern Classics).
- Series name may be added or updated post-publication for titles that have come to be known as part of a larger series or set.
- Be consistent with the name and spelling of the series name for all titles within the series.

Series Number:

- For numbered series, specify the ordered place (number) of the title in the series. Ex: *The Lightning Thief* (*Percy Jackson and the Olympians, Book 1*). This should be entered as an integer (1, 2, 3).
- Series number is optional for series where it isn't necessary to read the books in order. Readers often search for "books in order" for popular series. Including a series number in cases where titles can stand alone may be useful for potential buyers and facilitate some discovery, but it is entirely at the publisher's discretion.

Edition Description (when applicable)
Used to distinguish materially different manifestations of the same work

- Editions are differentiated in several ways:
    - *Substantial changes in content*, including revised or additional content. This includes numbered editions of academic and reference works (e.g. *MLA Handbook,* 7th Edition). Typically, at least 20% of the content should be different or new to qualify as a new edition.

- *Special packaging or content* that isn't included with or that is substantively changed from the primary edition of the work. This includes media tie-ins and special editions (e.g. anniversary or signed editions) as well as illustrated, enhanced, annotated, and abridged editions.
- *Intended use by a special market*: This includes Braille, large print, and teacher and student editions of a work.

- Different formats (e.g. ebook, hardcover, mass market) and reprints of the same content are not different editions.

Edition Description

- This is a clear and concise text description of the edition.
- If used, include Edition Number and Type information in the description as appropriate. This should be written for potential buyers to understand what distinguishes the edition. (e.g. "3rd Edition, completely revised and updated"; "25th Anniversary Collector's Edition"; "Enhanced edition with video interviews").

Contributor Data

Information about the author, illustrator, editor, and/or other parties responsible for the creation of the work

- Provide all relevant contributors to a work (or as many as your publishing platform allows)
  - Authors and co-authors
  - Illustrators and artists (including inkers, colorists, and letterers for comic books)
  - Editors (for anthologies and collections)
  - Contributors of additional content (such as introductions, forewords, and epilogues)
  - Translators or other adapters of a work (including for abridged and revised editions)
  - Readers and narrators (for audio books and dramatizations)
- For each contributor, select the appropriate role.

Contributor Name

- Enter each contributor's name completely and accurately *as it should appear publicly and as it shows on the cover.*
- Ensure consistency. For example, if the author name sometimes includes a middle initial and sometimes does not, it is best to choose one and keep it consistent.

Contributor Bio

- Enter a brief bio for each contributor, highlighting key information that potential buyers (and searchers) might want to know.
  - *Notable attributes*, including relevant credentials and experience (particularly as pertinent to this work)
  - *Prior work and success*, including other books, awards, and critical reception
  - *Related properties or associations*, including businesses, institutions, media, or people the contributor is connected to

- *Other activities and information* that potential readers may find of interest, such as country or hometown, hobbies, personal and professional pursuits

- Keep bios concise but be sure to include all relevant information. The overall recommended length for the bio is 50 to 150 words. Maximum length: 4,000 characters.
- Avoid time-sensitive language, so that your bio does not become outdated. E.g. Do not say "latest", "soon", "forthcoming", or "most recent", and do not refer to "last year" or an author's "next book".
- Bios may contain HTML markup (for bold, italics, or bullet points).
- Do not include active hyperlinks, though you may include URLs (for an author website, for instance, one could use www.authorsite.com).

Contributor Location

- If a contributor is strongly connected to or associated with a particular location (a country, region, state, or city), this data can help drive publicity and promotion as well as attract readers interested in locally influenced works.
- Enter the most specific location name that is relevant.

Prior Work

- List additional works by the contributor.
- Be sure to include any popular or important works that potential readers may be familiar with. These may be specific titles, series, characters, or collections.
- *This field does not replace the need to include important works by name in the Contributor Biography.*

Affiliations:

- List important corporate, organizational, or institutional affiliations for the contributor. These may include:
  - Businesses or non-profits that they have worked with
  - Schools where they studied, taught, or conducted research
  - Clubs, groups, or professional associations
  - Media or publications they have written for
- *This field does not replace the need to include important affiliations by name in the Contributor Biography.*

Description

Detailed descriptive copy appropriate for public display, used for marketing, discovery, and sales purposes

- The description is critical for helping potential buyers find and understand your book. It drives search engine optimization, and it is your best chance to pitch the book and get people interested.
- Describe the book in simple, straightforward, and consumer-friendly terms.
- We recommend the description be at least 150-200 words long.

- Give readers enough information to understand what the book is, what it's about, if they'll like it, and to make a decision about whether or not to buy.
- Use paragraph breaks, bold and italic fonts, and other structural elements like ordered lists (bullet points) to provide emphasis and highlight key aspects of the book. Short paragraphs and bulleted lists are better than a single block of text.
- HTML markup should be limited to: <p>, <br />, <ul>, <ol>, <li>, , (and/or <b> and <i>), and corresponding end tags. Ensure that any code is clean and valid. Do not include active hyperlinks in your description.
- Avoid time-sensitive language, so that your description does not become outdated. E.g. Do not say "latest", "soon", "forthcoming", or "most recent", and do not refer to "last year" or an author's "next book".
- To get ideas for good descriptive copy, read the top consumer reviews for some titles comparative to yours. Great reader reviews often are very effective at explaining books in an enticing and engaging way.

Structure

- Start with a clear and punchy **headline** that highlights the big things that matter about the book from a reader perspective (genre, key topics and themes, major brands, awards). Get them to want to find out more or simply purchase based on what they've read already.
  - Maximum of 200 characters (roughly 25-30 words). This is what will be seen on retailer pages (desktop and mobile) before consumers are prompted to "read more".
  - Make it bold and follow it with a paragraph break.
  - It should have a strong selling focus. Think of this as the "elevator pitch"—less about plot and the specific details and more about why a busy reader should want this book. If someone didn't know the book existed, what might they be looking for that would bring them to this book? (Something like "A beautifully illustrated picture book about bullying, friendship, and learning to stand up for what's right" is better than "Sam and Sally don't get along.")
- The headline should be followed by **detailed exposition**. If a consumer clicks to "read more", you want them to find rich detail about the book.
  - 100+ words detailing the notable topics, themes, plot elements, and features of the book.
  - For fiction titles, this is where you can describe the plot, settings, and key characters.
  - For nonfiction, detail the subjects covered and important people, places, and things.
  - This is where you can "set the mood" and give readers an idea of style and tone of the book.
  - Use paragraph breaks and bulleted lists as appropriate to add structure and break up large blocks of text.
  - Finally, the copy should end with a **strong close**, emphasizing the value and why someone should buy this book. If someone has read this far, they are interested. Now make the sale.

- At least 25-50 words.
- Who the book is for? “Fans of …”, “Great gift for…”.
- Consider including awards and nominations, and/or a strong review quote.

Content

- While it is not essential to incorporate every element listed here, these are the major components that impact online discovery and consumer purchasing decisions. It’s strongly recommended that they’re included in the descriptive copy when and as appropriate. Remember: these are things potential buyers might be looking for or interested in.
  - *Genres, topics, and themes* (e.g. historical romance, urban fantasy, Medieval history, sisterhood, finance)
  - *Important and directly related people and brands,* including well-known contributors or characters, related series, and affiliated organizations, institutions, or media properties
  - *Locations and time periods,* including settings, historical eras, and events important to the book
  - *Special features and selling points specific to the edition or format* (e.g. new foreword, full-color illustrations, book group or teaching guides, previews of other books, special binding or cover design)
  - *Contributors’ other titles, series, and awards,* especially for books or other work closely related to the topic of the book
  - *Audience or age-appropriateness in prose* (who is the book right for?), including recommended age/grade range and/or leveling information (for children’s and educational titles), comparable authors and books, and other audience guidance as appropriate
  - *Adjacent people, organizations, experience, media properties, and other important connections* (e.g. background experience or relationships, academic affiliations)
  - *Bestseller history, critical reception, and awards* should be added after publication
- Use consumer keywords, topics, and phrases to align your description with the ways in which potential buyers talk about and look for books. Speak their language and prioritize (earlier in the copy) the “bigger” things that matter for discovery and what consumers are likely to care about most – the brands, the key themes, genres, and characteristics of the book.

Short Description

Brief description appropriate for public display, used for marketing, discovery, and sales purposes

- This is a straightforward and concise “handle” or “elevator pitch” about the book, similar to the **headline** of the long description.
- Keep it to 200 characters or less to ensure maximum visibility across devices and screens.
- Tell potential buyers what the book is (a fast-paced thriller from a bestselling novelist; an easy-to-follow diet program for busy parents; a fantasy-inspired coloring book with perforated

pages; a comprehensive SAT study guide).

- Highlight the big things that matter about the book from a reader perspective (genre, key topics and themes, major brands, awards), and focus on what potential buyers might be looking for that would bring them to the book.
- Ensure that both the short and long descriptions stand alone. They are not typically displayed together. They can carry some of the same information and should reinforce each other. (The short description should not be the exact same text as the headline of the long description, but they may be similar.)

BISAC Subject Codes

Content-oriented classification, intended to guide shelving, categorization, merchandising, and marketing. BISAC codes help signal to potential buyers, retailers, distributors, and search engines what your book is about – the primary genre(s), topic(s), and theme(s) that matter.

- Using three BISAC codes is considered best practice to help ensure the broadest reach for the book. Books are seldom about just one thing. Look for codes that reflect the breadth and depth of the content.
- Select BISAC codes that accurately and clearly describe the content of your book as a whole. (Do not select codes that pertain to only one chapter or reflect only a peripheral topic or theme of the work.)
- The first subject code should be the best, most accurate, and most specific code possible. (e.g. **HEALTH & FITNESS / Diet & Nutrition / Weight Loss** is better than **HEALTH & FITNESS / General**)
- If possible, select codes from multiple top-level BISAC categories to broaden discovery.
- For instance, you might classify actress and comedian Mindy Kaling's memoir under both **BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY** and **HUMOR.**
- Avoid "**General**" codes whenever possible.
    - You do not need to include a "General" code if you have already selected a more specific code for a given category or subcategory.
    - Never use **FIC000000 FICTION / General.** Use a more specific code.
- BISAC codes should be consistent across different formats of the same work.
- Works intended for children ages 0-12 should have **JUVENILE FICTION** or **JUVENILE NONFICTION** codes.
- Works intended for young readers and teens ages 13-18 should have **YOUNG ADULT FICTION** or **YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION** codes.
- For a full list of available BISAC codes, see BISG's Complete BISAC Subject Headings List (updated annually).

Regional Subject Code

Information used in conjunction with BISAC codes to identify the primary geographical location of a book's content (not any contributors), helping readers find books set in specific regions.

- This is especially useful for books where the setting is important to the story (e.g. *To Kill a Mockingbird* in Alabama or *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* in Paris), or where a particular geographic region is a meaningful subject of the content (e.g. for travel guides or regional cookbooks).

- Select the most accurate relevant region. It's better to select a broader, more inclusive region if the book covers multiple locales. For example, for a book about a backpacking trip through Central America, select Central America rather than one particular country or city. However, if the content is very focused on just one city, state/province, or another sub-region, then select that.

Thema Subject Codes

Content-oriented classification, intended for international and multilingual discovery and sales. Similar to BISAC, Thema is a classification scheme to identify the major categories for a work, including genre(s), topic(s), and theme(s). Thema is used internationally by global distributors, aggregators, and retailers and can help improve global discovery and sales.

- In addition to codes for specific book subjects, Thema also includes special qualifier codes for:
  - *Place:* locations and regions important to the work
  - *Language:* languages or dialects the book is about, not the language that the book is written in
  - *Time period:* eras, centuries, and important historical events
  - *Educational purpose:* e.g. school/grade level, language learning, or training materials
  - *Interest age and special interest:* reading age/level (for children's books); holidays, special events, and seasonal interest; intended use by particular groups or cultures (e.g. women and girls, ethnic or religious groups.
  - *Style:* artistic or creative styles either covered by the work (e.g. Art Deco, pop art, tango) or exemplified by the work (e.g. postmodernism, elegy, avant-garde).

    So, for a history book about the U.S. military during WWII:

  - Your BISAC codes might include **HIS027110 HISTORY / Military / United States, HIS027100 HISTORY / Military / World War II**, and /or **HIS036060 HISTORY / United States / 20th Century**
  - While your Thema codes might be **NHWR7 Military history / Specific wars & campaigns / Second World War** with location qualifier **1KBB United States of America, USA** and time period qualifier **3MPBLB c 1938 to c 1946** (World War Two period)
- The first category selected should be the primary category for the book – the best, most specific code that accurately describes the subject of the book. (Broader subject codes can and should be used for books that cover a broad range of topics.)
- Only a subject category is required, though you should select qualifiers as applicable to more specifically describe the content of the book.
- Select additional subject codes as required. Look for codes that reflect the breadth and depth of the content. (Do not select codes that pertain to only one chapter or reflect only a peripheral topic or theme of the work.)
- You don't need to include higher-level subject or qualifier codes if you have already selected a more specific code for a given category or subcategory. (e.g. **JPSD Society & Social Sciences / Politics & government / International relations / Diplomacy**) is understood to be about society and social sciences (J) , international relations (JP), and politics and government (JPS).
- Works intended for children should include at least one relevant interest age qualifier.

- EDItEUR provides more information on Thema, its history, instructions, and details on all available Thema subject categories.

Audience Information

Designation of the appropriate, intended audience for the book

Audience

- Select the most appropriate primary audience for the book.
- Audience codes work in tandem with BISAC codes. Any book with a primary intended audience of children or young adults should have corresponding BISAC codes.

Audience Age and Grade Range

- Mandatory for juvenile and young adult titles, and highly recommended for educational titles.
- The intended audience range may be specified by age and/or grade level. Both age and grade level should be specified when appropriate.
- An age range is also recommended for mature graphic novels or other works that may be mistaken for children's titles.
- Age and grade ranges should be realistic and as specific as possible. Your potential buyers are using this guidance to understand the primary intended audience for the book.
- Keep ranges narrow, particularly for younger children (just two years or grade levels). For teen audiences, ranges may be broader (up to four years or grade levels).

Keywords

Additional topics, categories, and consumer search terms related to the book. Keywords are used by online retailers to better understand and categorize your book. They should be complementary to, and not duplicative of, your BISAC and Thema subject and audience codes.

- Enter at least seven keywords and key phrases, separated by semi-colons.
- These should be terms and phrases that potential buyers may search for, including things such as:
    - Specific retailer product categories or subcategories that don't have an equivalent BISAC code and for which you would like your book to rank. (These should be exact match phrases, copied directly from the retailer site.)
    - Important topics and themes from the book (e.g. Mediterranean diet, coming of age)
    - Important locations or time periods from the book (e.g. Victorian era, American Southwest, War of 1812)
    - Story tone, writing style, and/or genre (e.g. psychological thriller, verse novel, heartwarming romance)
    - Character types and roles (e.g. female protagonist, immigrant kids, working mom, Arab family)
    - Format or audience notes (e.g. baby board books, coloring books, motivational books for women)
- Do not put quotation marks around the keywords.

- There is no need to include common misspellings or simple deviations in punctuation or capitalization (e.g. You would not need to include both “Caribbean” and “Carribean” or “JK Rowling” and “j.k. Rowling”.)
- However, you may wish to include different versions of a word or phrase if they are each used in different contexts by consumers. This is useful for incorporating different acceptable variations of the same word into your metadata. For example, “MD” and “doctor”. Or, if you have a book on great apps for iOS, you might list different Apple devices and operating systems: iPad, iPad mini, iPhone 6, iPhone 6s, etc.
- A useful way to identify potential keywords is to pretend you’re searching for a book like yours. If you didn’t know it existed, what might you be looking for that could lead you to the book? Try typing potential search terms – slowly—into Amazon and Google to find auto-complete suggestions that map to your book. Those suggestions are based on real searches by real people and can give you some good insight into what potential buyers might be looking for.

Table of Contents

An outline of the book’s content, including parts or chapters, appendices, and all introductory and supplementary materials

- The TOC can help potential buyers and search engines better find and understand your book.
- This is especially helpful data for nonfiction and reference titles, as well as for fiction titles with supplemental materials, reading guides, author interviews, and other extras.
- Enter the Table of Contents as a structured list.
- For each part/item, include the title and subtitle where applicable.

Review Quotes

Praise for the title and/or contributor(s)

- Include two to eight positive review quotes. These should be from a variety of sources and should highlight different aspects of the book. Ideally, reviews will come from people and publications known by and influential with potential buyers.
- Quotes should be brief (no more than 50 words each). You may provide excerpts from longer reviews.
- Separate quotes with a paragraph break.
- List the most powerful and/or effective review quote(s) first.
- Include accurate source information for each review quote, including the full name of the reviewer and/or the title of the publication in which it appeared, if applicable.
- Ensure consistency in formatting. Use quotation marks around each quote, and use the same punctuation (a hyphen, em-dash, tilde, or other) when attributing quotes.
- Quotes may be used across formats and editions if they are about the content and not about the specifics of any particular edition.

Conclusion

You are now ready to get out there and conquer your book metadata and reap the rewards. This guide covers your title metadata but understand that metadata exists in more places than just your title. There are many other places that can drive traffic to you and your books such as your ISBN record, your author website, your blog posts and guest blog posts, your social media profiles, and much more. Keep these same principles and tips in mind for all of the things you share online in order to prove to search engines and their users that your book could be exactly what they're looking for.

For more info on specific discoverability metadata, download our Metadata Checklist.