Putting Descriptive Standards to Work is another useful addition to the Trends in Archives Practices series published by the Society of American Archivists (SAA). These books are designed to expand core archival knowledge and fill a gap in the literature, while covering a specialized topic. Arguably, nothing is more essential to archival knowledge than description. As stated in the introduction by Kris Kiesling, “Description is the foundation of archival work. Everything else archivists do...flows from good descriptive work” (1). In this selection are four modules: Implementing DACs: A Guide to the Archival Content Standard; Using EAD3; Introducing EAC-CPF; and Sharing Archival Metadata.

Module 17: Implementing DACS, written by Cory L. Nimer, explores the evolution of the standard before delving deeply into the second edition of Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS). This module makes up the majority of the volume. The purpose is “to contextualize the process of archival description and suggests approaches that archivists might consider to make their records more accessible for the larger cultural heritage community” (12). Each element is reviewed in detail, such as questions to ask and Resource Description and Access (RDA) considerations to make, along with whether it is required or adds value. Each element section ends with examples to further illustrate what the element requires.
This is a nice companion to the official DACS rules, which can be tedious to read unless you are in the act of describing. This module puts into prose the reasons for description and may even stick around in one’s mind for the future. It also points to some informative case studies. The module ends with a lengthy and informative list of further readings, as well as an appendix of acronyms. After working in the field for over a decade, this was a great refresher in DACS rules and I was able to think upon my work experience, both past and present, to apply it.

Module 18: Using EAD3, by Kelcy Shepherd, focuses on the 2015 revision of the Encoded Archival Description (EAD) schema, which is the third update to the standard. Ms. Shepherd was actively involved in the revision process of this schema and is uniquely situated to comment on it. This module is broken into six sections, such as a background on EAD and why it should be implemented with a comparison to other standards, as well as recommendations for use. The simplified examples are especially valuable here, particularly for someone who has not had to encode by hand. It was refreshing to read the portion that although it is nearly impossible to implement all of EAD, EAD3 reduced some of the complexity and has potentially made it more useable on a smaller scale. A simplified approach is acceptable as long as it is consistent with repository policies.

This module also ends with a sizeable series of appendices. The first pertains to further readings which itself is split into sections, including general EAD resources and its history; general Extensible Markup Language (XML) resources; EAD3 reports and
guidelines; EAD implementation and tools for creating, processing and publishing EAD; user studies; and other complementary standards and vocabularies. Following that is another list of acronyms and case studies, and finally pages 204-238 offer code examples.

Module 19 by Katherine Wisser, *Introducing EAC-CPF*, meaning Encoded Archival Context: Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families, delves further into description. While archivists have traditionally included this information in the overall description, this module makes the case for a different approach where contextual information is recorded separately from descriptive information. EAC-CPF describes the people or institutions creating the archival records we collect. Ms. Wisser tracks the development of the standard and how it reflects information from other, related standards. “The greatest impact of a standard like EAC-CPF is that it forces us to reexamine our understanding of archival description and the ways that that description interacts with information in systems” (277). Although it will take time to fully implement this standard, it will be worth it in the end.

This module also offers a strong set of appendices, containing further readings, case studies, and crosswalks. The crosswalks match to Functional Requirements for Authority Data (FRAD) conceptual model, RDA, DACS, International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families (ISAAR-CPF), Machine-Readable Cataloging (MARC) Authority and EAC-CPF.
Module 20: Sharing Archival Metadata closes out the volume and is written by Aaron Rubinstein. It portrays a number of structured data standards including MARC, Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML), and XML; the module goes on to explore what structured data is and how we might use it, among other brief topics. It succeeds in its goal to introduce the potential of structured data. As with the other modules, number twenty ends with a list of further readings and case studies.

The four modules build one on top of the other. A concept that stood out throughout the modules was the fact that archivists need to document and work consistently with their repository policies. Although this is not new, it was a good reminder - there are standards and best practices, and while each repository is different, we can all do something with our descriptive work. Acting consistently is the key.

Archivists, library professionals and students alike would benefit from this book. It does not need to be read straight through, but can instead be used depending upon your or your institution’s needs. I think it would especially benefit those who are just starting to learn about these practices and want to grasp the foundation; or those beginning an implementation of the standards in the book, and could use examples and case studies to understand what others have done. The case studies on EAD were especially useful. One suggestion would be to translate the case studies and EAD examples into a wiki page so it could be more interactive for those learning or using the tools. I could see this book being open next to one’s computer, or perhaps read in a class before trying these concepts out. Although it is sure to change again, these
modules work for where we are now and lend themselves to a deeper understanding of
descriptive tools.

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