

Level Down to Level Up: The Impact of Item Level Description on Finding Aid Discoverability

LIZ WOOLCOTT, PAUL DAYBELL, ANDREA PAYANT, and BECKY SKEEN

Utah State University Libraries Cataloging and Metadata Services unit investigated the discoverability of local Encoded Archival Description (EAD) finding aids using different levels of description. The research team created two nearly identical versions of the same finding aid for five collections and posted them online. The only difference in the finding aids was the level to which the collection contents were described. For each collection, one version of the finding aid was described at the file (box or folder) level and the other version was described at the item level. Over a year later the team pulled the analytics for each guide and assessed which descriptive level was most frequently accessed along with what search terms were used and where those terms were found in the finding aid. Data showed that finding aids described at the item level were, on average, 61x more discoverable than finding aids described to the file (box or folder) level. Additionally, when search terms were known, they were most often found in the container lists <c> and were significantly likely to be personal names. Presenters will briefly discuss the methodology of the project, dive into the major results discovered, and look at how the outcomes will be used to better inform workflow and processes.

About the authors:

Liz Woolcott is the Head of Cataloging and Metadata Services for Utah State University Libraries and the co-founder of the Library Workflow Exchange. Her research interests include digital content reuse and metadata standards assessment.

Paul Daybell is the Archival Cataloging Librarian for Utah State University Libraries His research interests include user-search behavior and discoverability of archival resources and technical services outreach.

Andrea Payant, Metadata Librarian for Utah State University since 2017, manages the creation and maintenance of Digital History Collections metadata. She earned an MLIS degree from San Jose State University and has been working in the cataloging and metadata field since 2008. Her research interests include metadata quality benchmarks, metadata workflow efficiencies, and user-search behavior.

Becky Skeen is the Special Collections Cataloging Librarian for Utah State University Libraries. Her research interests include outreach for technical services, assessment of special collections cataloging training and professional development, assessment methods for cataloging and metadata services, and optimizing cataloging records based on user search behaviors.