TITLE METADATA
BEST PRACTICES

IngramSpark®

Title Metadata Best Practices
Hints and tips to improve book discovery and sales

INTRODUCTION

Good metadata is essential to ensure the discoverability of your titles. Too often it's 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 re-evaluate the information you've entered into the fields we'll cover to make sure it's helping you get traction with your audience. And traction isn't just about discovery – it's also about sales. Good metadata should help you achieve both.

WHAT IS METADATA?

Metadata is all of the information that describes your book. In fact, your metadata does the job of several sales representatives. It describes your book to librarians and bookstore buyers, telling them where it belongs on the shelf and which customers might be interested in it. Metadata is also used to describe your book to consumers online. And, behind the scenes, it tells search engines where your book belongs in a search.

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 more likely your book will be to turn up in your audience's search results. If your metadata describes your book correctly, using terms for which your ideal audience frequently searches, your book may display in a search for anything resembling your book. In fact, with great metadata, you might be able to reach a customer who is not even looking for a book. For example, if someone is looking for information about a particular event, location, social situation, or activity, your book might be the perfect source of information. Your metadata is the key to access those customers who you might not reach with other marketing efforts.

If you've ever sold a product before or worked in customer service, you know how important customer satisfaction is to your reputation, and your book is no exception. For self-published authors in particular, who rely on word-of-mouth marketing and social media mentions to gain traction, it's important that your book receive positive mentions. Some of that has to do with the content of your book, but your metadata also plays a vital role in upholding your great reputation. In fact, your content and your metadata work hand in hand. It's important that your content deliver on the promise you make to customers in your metadata. For example, if you describe your book as being full of vibrant images, but then you print your book in black & white, your customer might be disappointed.

In addition to its role in consumer marketing, metadata is also critical to book-industry professionals such as booksellers and librarians. They use metadata to appropriately categorize your book in their online databases and also 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 are delighted to find yours. As with consumer marketing, it's also important that your metadata accurately represents your content, contributing to a positive reputation and brand for yourself among your fellow book-industry professionals.

METADATA FIELDS: THE ESSENTIALS

Now that you understand a little more about the important role of metadata, you can begin to create the metadata for your book, or update existing metadata for your book. We're going to start with the fields that are the most essential to the discovery and sales of your book. These are all available to you within your online IngramSpark account during the title setup process. Let's get started!
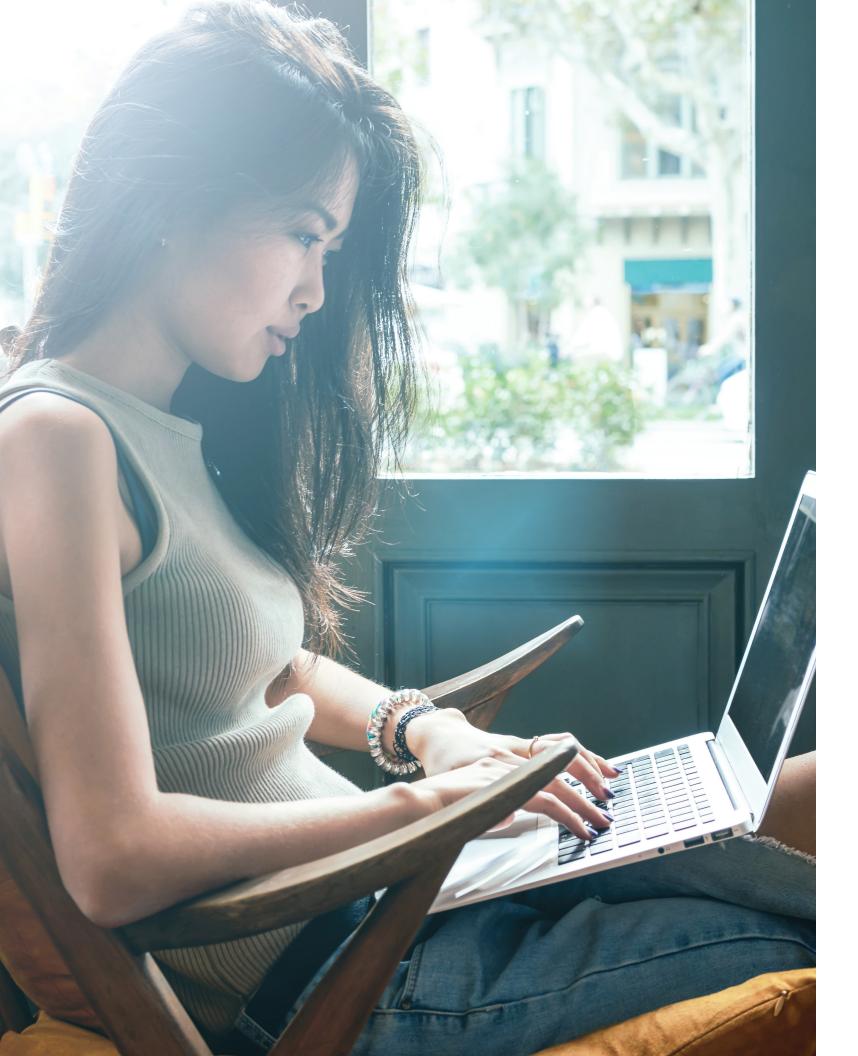
Title

This is the primary title of your book.

- Make sure your title matches your book cover and the title page of your book.
- Keep your title consistent across formats, including paperback and eBook.
- Include title prefixes and leading articles, for example, *The Call of the Wild*, not *Call of the Wild*, unless the platform you are using specifically requires a different format.
- Do not include any subtitle, series, or format information. This information is captured in different fields. So, if your book is *The Call of the Wild: Buck Returns*, simply provide *The Call of the Wild* as your title name, and provide *Buck Returns* as your subtitle later on.

Subtitle

An optional and secondary title for your book, often descriptive or explanatory.

- You can use a subtitle to differentiate your book, especially if your title is generic or similar to other works on the market, for example, *The Girls: A Novel*.
- Incorporate important consumer keywords in your subtitle to improve discovery (such as important brands, major characters, themes and topics), for example, *Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX, and the Quest for a Fantastic Future*
- Keep subtitles succinct. The longer a title is, the more likely you are to lose a potential buyer's attention. Try to keep title and subtitle fewer than 80 characters long.
- Do not include series name or number. (This information is captured in different fields.)
- Enter the subtitle of your book as it appears on the cover and the title page of your book.

Series Name and Number (when applicable)

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

- Specify a series name if your book features an ongoing story (for example, *A Song of Ice and Fire*), recurring character (for example, Nancy Drew), or other organizing principle (for example, Penguin Modern Classics).
- You can add or update the series name of your book after it's published – even years later – if you make your book part of a larger series or set.
- For numbered series, specify the ordered number of the title in the series. This should be entered as an integer (1, 2, 3), for example, *The Lightning Thief (Percy Jackson and the Olympians, Book 1)*.
- Series number is optional for series where it is not necessary to read your 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.

Author or Contributor Data

Information about the author, illustrator, editor, or other parties responsible for creating your book. In IngramSpark, you can select three contributors when setting up your title.

- All relevant contributors to your book should be listed, including:
  - 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.
- Be consistent. For example, if the author name sometimes includes a middle initial and sometimes not, choose whether you want to use the initial and then follow that as a rule.

Contributor Biography:
- Enter a brief biography for each contributor, highlighting key information that potential buyers (and searchers) might want to know, including:
  - Relevant credentials and experience (particularly as pertinent to this book)
  - 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 do be sure to include all relevant information. The overall recommended length for the bio is 50 to 150 words. Try not to exceed 4,000 characters or your information may get cut off on certain platforms.
- Avoid time-sensitive language, so that your bio does not become outdated, for example, 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. You should really avoid URLs altogether, or you risk distracting a prospective customer from buying your book. Consider using URLs in social media marketing.

Description

Detailed descriptive copy good for public display, used for marketing, discovery, and sales purposes.
- Your description helps potential buyers find and understand your book. It is your best chance to pitch your book and get people interested. And it drives search engine results.
- Describe your book in simple, straightforward, and consumer-friendly terms.
- Your description should be at least 150-200 words long.
- Give readers enough information to understand what your book is, what it's about, and if they'll like it – key factors in deciding whether to buy your book.
- Consider: a prospective online customer hasn't read the book, can't physically pick it up, and may not know anything about it yet. If they don't know the book exists, how would they look for something like it?
- 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, the tags used to tell web pages how to display your text, should be limited to: <p>, <br />, <ul>, <ol>, <li>, <em> or <i>, <strong> or <b>, and corresponding end tags. You can add the HTML tags by using the editing tool associated with the metadata field in IngramSpark. 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. For example, 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 your 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.
  - The headline should be a maximum of 200 characters (roughly 25-30 words). This is what will be seen on retailer pages 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 your book? (Something like, "A beautifully illustrated picture book about bullying, friendship, and learning to stand up for what's right" beats "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 your book.
  - For fiction titles, this is where you can describe the plot, settings, and key characters.
  - For non-fiction, detail the subjects covered and important people, places, and things.
  - This is where you can "set the mood" and give readers an idea of the style and tone of your book.
  - Use paragraph breaks and bulleted lists where 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 your book. If someone has read this far, they are interested. Now make the sale.
  - At least 25-50 words.
  - Who is the book for? "Fans of …", "Great gift for…"
  - Consider including awards and nominations 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. Remember: these are things potential buyers might be looking for or interested in.
  - **Genres, topics and themes** (for example, 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 your book
  - **Special features and selling points specific to the edition or format** (for example, new foreword, full-color illustrations, 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 your 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** (for example, 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

A brief description appropriate for public display, used for marketing, discovery, and sales purposes.

- This is a straightforward and concise "handle" or "elevator pitch" about your 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

Genre codes 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.

- One BISAC code is required, but three is considered best practice to help ensure the broadest reach for your book. Books are seldom about just one thing. Look for codes that reflect the breadth and depth of the content.
- Choose 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. (for example, HEALTH & FITNESS / Diet & Nutrition / Weight Loss is better than HEALTH & FITNESS / Diet & Nutrition / General or 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.

- Or, you might classify an inspirational novel as FICTION and RELIGION or possibly even BODY, MIND & SPIRIT or SELF-HELP depending on the content of the book and which aspects you think are most likely to resonate with potential buyers.
- 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.
  - Do not use FIC000000 FICTION / General unless there is no better, more specific code.
- BISAC codes should be consistent across different formats of the same work.
- Works intended for children ages 0-11 should have at least one JUVENILE FICTION or JUVENILE NONFICTION code.
- Works intended for young readers and teens ages 12-18 should have at least one YOUNG ADULT FICTION or YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION code.
- For a full list of available BISAC codes, see BISG's Complete BISAC Subject Headings List (updated annually).

Audience Information

Designation of the appropriate, intended audience for your book.

Audience:

- Select the most appropriate primary audience for your book.
- Audience codes work in tandem with BISAC codes. Any book with a primary intended audience of children or young adults should have at least one corresponding BISAC code. Professional, educational, ESL, and other works should also be reflected in both the selected audience and BISAC codes.

Audience Range:

- Mandatory for juvenile and young adult titles, and highly recommended for educational titles.
- Keep juvenile age ranges to two years or grade levels, and young adult titles to up to four years.
- An age range is also recommended for mature graphic novels or other works that may be confused as 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 your book.

Keywords

Additional topics, categories, and consumer search terms related to your book. Keywords are used by online retailers to better understand and categorize your book.

- Enter up to seven keyword phrases, separated by semi-colons.
- These should be terms and phrases that potential buyers may search for, including things like:
  - Specific retailer product categories or subcategories that do not have an equivalent BISAC code and for which you would like your book to rank.
  - Important topics and themes from the book (for example, Mediterranean diet; coming of age)
  - Important locations or time periods from your book (for example, Victorian era; American Southwest; War of 1812)
  - Story tone, writing style, or genre (for example, psychological thriller; verse novel; heartwarming romance)
  - Character types and roles (for example, female protagonist; immigrant kids; working mom)
  - Format or audience notes (for example, 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 (for example, You would not need to include both "Caribbean" and "Carribean" or "JK Rowling" and "j.k. Rowling.")
- However, you might 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, "Hanukah" and "Chanukah," or "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 were 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.

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 your book. Ideally, reviews will come from people and publications known by and influential with potential buyers.
- Quotes should be brief (fewer than 50 words each). For longer reviews, just provide an excerpt.
- 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.

METADATA FIELDS: MORE TO DISCOVER

You've covered the most important metadata elements. If you're lucky enough to have more time, or a helper or two, here are a few more fields you can focus on to improve discovery and sales of your book.

Table of Contents

An outline of your 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 non-fiction 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

More Contributor Data

Some supplementary information about the contributors (see essential author info on page 7).

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 doesn't replace the need to include important works by name in the Contributor Bio.

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 doesn't replace the need to include important affiliations in the Contributor Bio.

Image & Illustration Details

Information on any images that may be included in the content of your book.

- Specify whether your book contains any images. (These may be illustrations, photographs, maps, charts, diagrams, tables, or any other drawings or pictures. This doesn't include cover images.)
- Specify whether the images are in black-and-white or color and how many there are total.

Regional Subject Code

Information on the primary geographic location of the book to be used in conjunction with BISAC codes to identify the primary geographic location of the book (not any contributors).

- This is especially useful for books where the setting of the book is important to the story (for example, *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 (for example, for travel guides or regional cookbooks).
- Select the most accurate relevant region. It is 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 other sub-region, select that.

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 discovery tips beyond your title metadata, download our **Book Discoverability Guide**

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