



the national archives

# Interpreting the Metadata Standard: Recommended values, form and content

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## **Introduction**

The table provided contains a breakdown of each metadata element / sub-element under the following headings:

- Number & Element / Sub-element
- e-GMS 2 & e-GMS3
- Aggregation
- Obligation
- Database Field Data Type
- Recommended Format
- Example
- Default Value
- Inappropriate Value
- Recommended Population Method
- Alternative Population Method
- Inappropriate Population Method
- Source
- Comment

The e-GMS 2 published in 2002, is the metadata standard associated with the Requirements for Electronic Records Management 2002. Following the publication of an updated version of this metadata standard The National Archives has taken the decision to include a comparison of the two to indicate the changes that have been made.

## **Table structure**

The table in the accompanying document has been structured to provide not only a comparison of the metadata standards, but also provide recommendations on metadata format and population methods.

Where a "-" appears in a column it indicates that there is no alternative to the values provided either because the element / sub-element will be populated with a freetext entry, or because the metadata must be tightly controlled and can only be a specific value. Specifically the columns where it is used are:

- Inappropriate values. Where there is no inappropriate value, or no other value is possible under the e-GMS.
- Alternative Population Method. In some cases this will be because there is no other alternative to the recommended population method.
- Inappropriate Population Method. In some cases there will be many possible methods of population and as such no inappropriate methods.

## Column Header Details

### Number and Element / Sub-element

The identifying number and name given for each metadata element as per the relevant e-GMS. It should be noted that the numbering used is from e-GMS 2 and not e-GMS 3. As some elements have been removed, added, and in the case of sub-element **16.1 Preservation. Originating Format** denigrated within e-GMS 3 to a separate element **18. Originating Format**. Where this is an issue a comment has been made in the table.

Some metadata sub-elements marked with an "\*" instead of a number because they do not fit into the numbering for e-GMS 2.

The Element / Sub-element column provides the name of the element, and where sub-divided, the sub-element.

### e-GMS2 & e-GMS3

These two columns indicate whether or not the element / sub-element is present in either metadata standard. For ease of use where an element is **not** present the entry has been shaded purple to quickly identify them.

### Aggregation

This column indicates which fileplan objects (e.g. class, folder, part or record) the metadata may be allocated to. Not all the metadata is applicable to every level, this column is intended to indicate at what level the metadata should be applied it should be applied.

### Obligation

This column indicates whether or not population of this metadata is mandatory in accordance with the relevant e-GMS. There are a number of permutations of obligation:

- Mandatory; where the metadata must be populated.
- Mandatory if present; where the metadata must be populated if something exists (e.g. **9.4 Relation. Copy / Pointer**)
- Mandatory where applicable; where the metadata is not normally used, but where it is the value must be populated (e.g. **8.1 Type. Record\_Type**)
- Optional; where it is for the organisation to decide if they need to populate this field.

Whilst the population of the field may be optional the field must be present for the purposes of exporting or importing data from another system that may have a value for that metadata element.

**Note:** The text for Repeatability has been updated for version 2 of the Interpreting the Metadata Standard spreadsheet.

## Repeatability

In order to more accurately indicate the repeatability of metadata elements, this column has been updated using a new format. The Metadata Standard uses a simple "Yes" or "No" to indicate where an element is repeatable. This however was not always clear and consistent. To avoid this problem The National Archives have introduced a clearer format for indicating repeatability.

This format also provides greater clarity with regard to understanding the obligation status of an element and its repeatability.

This table provides detail of the new values and a brief note on what it means.

Repeatability Value	Interpretation	Example
1 only	The metadata element must always have <b>one</b> and only <b>one</b> value at all times.	A record must always be assigned a unique <b>System ID</b> value. During its lifecycle within the ERMS the record can only ever have <b>one</b> System ID. Therefore the metadata sub-element <b>System ID's</b> repeatability is 1 value only.
0 or 1	Some metadata elements may <b>not always require a value</b> , but where populated the metadata element must only ever have <b>one</b> and only <b>one</b> value at all times.	A folder may or may not be assigned a <b>Case ID</b> value. Therefore the metadata sub-element <b>Case ID's</b> repeatability is 0 or 1 value only.
1 or many	Some metadata elements must always have at least <b>one</b> value but there may be instances where there <b>can be more than one value</b> .	A record must have <b>one Creator</b> . However more than one creator may be associated with the record. Therefore the metadata element <b>Creator's</b> repeatability is 1 or many values.
0, 1, or many	Some metadata elements <b>may not require a value, or may have one or many values</b> .	A record may not have a <b>Subject</b> value so the field will not be populated. Alternatively there may be 1, 2 or more allocated values. Therefore the metadata element <b>Subject's</b> repeatability is 0, 1 or many values.

## Source

This column gives an indication of where the ERMS typically gets the value for the metadata. The source will be one of three possibilities.

1. The ERMS automatically provides a value for the element.
2. The user may provide a value by means of a pick list, freetext, etc
3. The user provides a value within set parameters controlled by the ERMS controls. For example element **2. Title** where the user selects what the title, but the ERMS may control the value where a naming pattern has been pre-defined

## Database Field Data Type and Recommended format

When created each metadata element must be in a form recognised by the underlying database. This column indicates what that data type should be. The Database Field Data Type column indicates the recommended data type expected for every metadata element / sub-element.

In most cases the Database Field Data Type and Expected Format will be the same. For example the term "varchar" is expanded to its full name "variable-length character string", indicating that the value for the element may be of any length and using any number of characters. It should be noted that by default the varchar data type will normally be a maximum of 255 characters, but in some cases an ERMS, or organisation may need to either increase, or decrease the number of characters allowed.

Some however will not be exactly the same. As an example **6.1 Date Created** has been given the database field data type "date". In real terms a date could be displayed in many ways. The Expected Format column clarifies this by indicating that the sub-element should be displayed in the form of day/month/year.

## Example

This column provides a real value for the metadata providing a clearer indication of a typical value for every database data type. The purpose of this is to focus on best practice and providing meaningful metadata.

Where there is more than one example that can apply at any level of aggregation the lines between each cell will not be visible.

Number	Element / Sub-element	Aggregation	Database Field Format	Expected Format	Example
13.1	Protective Marking	Class	VarChar	Variable length character string	Top Secret
		Folder			Secret
		Part			Restricted
		Record			Confidential
					Unclassified

Where the example is specific to that level of aggregation there is a hard line between each cell.

Number	Element / Sub-element	Aggregation	Database Field Format	Expected Format	Example
2	Title	Class	VarChar	Variable length character string	Trademarks
		Folder			Protection available
		Part			Part 1
		Record			Cross Border Protection

### Default Value

A default value has been given where applicable.

For example e-GMS 2.0 sub-element **13.13 FOI Disclosability Indicator** (**13.12** in e-GMS 3.0) is a Boolean field, and must be either "Yes" or "No". Its Default Value will be "Yes" as there is an expectation that all records are disclosable under the Freedom of Information Act 2002, but this is not specified within the legislation's text.

This column is also used to indicate where inheritance is used to provide the value for a part. For example a part may not always have its own value for a metadata element but will inherit it directly from its parent folder. Where this is the case the Example has been italicised and the Default Value will be "Inherits from folder". This is of particular importance in relation to the export of metadata.

### Inappropriate Value

In some circumstances in which it is recommended certain values should not be used to represent an element / sub-element. In many cases the inappropriate value would be a multiple value that could cause a conflict in the management of a class, folder, part or record.

Some examples will be more specific. For example element **13.1 Rights. Protective Marking** could have a value of:

- Top Secret
- Secret
- Restricted
- Confidential
- Unclassified

But as the element is not repeatable, it should only ever have one of the values.

In addition it would be inappropriate to provide any other form of value that represents this classification system, for example by populating the metadata with a number to indicate the level of protection. Whilst an organisation is free to choose a numerical code for a value, on export the ERMS must indicate what that number means (i.e. 1 for unclassified or 5 for Top Secret).

### **Recommended Population Method**

All elements / sub-elements will have a specific way in which they must be populated.

For example the population of sub-element **1.1 System Id** is controlled by the ERMS to ensure a consistent error free application of the serial number.

The population of Element **3. Subject**, however, will normally be a decision by the user. It is recommended that a pick list be used as the recommended population method, as this encourages consistent population of values.

### **Other Population Method**

Whilst it is desirable that the recommended population method be adopted, it is accepted that not all systems, or organisations will be able to use the recommended population method. Where this is the case other population types are suggested in this column.

### **Inappropriate Population Types**

In some cases there are specific population types that are inappropriate and problematic in terms of managing the metadata element / sub-element's value.

For example sub-element **13.1 Rights. Protective Marking**, it is recommended that this field be populated by choosing from a pick list of five recognised national security classification terms. Allowing users to enter anything else, such as a number from 1 to 5 that might represent these values could lead to a number of problems. Using a simple number instead of a more meaningful text could lead to an inappropriate level of security being applied. In addition were the metadata to be imported into another ERMS, the numbers would not provide any useful information without a script.

### **Comment**

This column is included to provide further explanatory information regarding the expected behaviour or detail on a metadata field.