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My name is Denise Wallace. Welcome to my capstone presentation, a requirement toward the completion of the Master of Library and Information Science degree program at Valdosta State University that explains my approach to the final research paper in the Capstone course.

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Paper Topic: Enhancing end-user access to digital image collections: assessing the use of item level description in archival digital image projects.

My paper topic explores how item level descriptions in archival digital image projects are used to enhance access to the images for end users.

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Item level description: a detailed explanation based on the context of the image within a collection.

Item level description is a detailed description that explains what the image is 'of' and what the image is 'about'. Item level description is a combination of prose and index terms that provide information and access at the same time.

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Here is an example of an image from the Library of Congress Print and Photograph Online Catalog and a brief item-level description with index terms.

Ex: Photochrome of elderly woman working a wooden Irish spinning wheel (Ireland, ca.1890-ca.1905, spinning wheel, woman, photochrom, women's work, making thread or yarn)

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Why did I choose this paper topic?

In my current vocation, I am in the process of building a large digital image library and wanted to learn more about how to make the images more accessible to end-users through the use of item level description.

My personal experience has discovered that finding image resources in digital collections is made easier when item level description has been used; however I have also learned that item level description is the most time consuming and costly level to use when describing archival collections.

I wanted to find out what are the best practices in image description to provide adequate end-user access to image collections; and how I could tailor these practices to meet the needs of my project and my end-users.

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My approach to the research process is three fold with the first step encompassing a review of the literature from peer reviewed, scholarly journals that concentrated on image indexing practices, image digitization projects, user experience studies with digital image collections, and alternative image indexing topics.

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The second step in my research process includes a review of the guidelines and standards from professional organizations that work with photographic images and includes a review of manuals, thesauruses and cataloging rules from the Society of American Archivist, the Visual Resources Association, and the Library of Congress: Photographic Prints Division.

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The final step in my research process is to review how other digital collections are describing images and to analyze my experience in locating images within these collections to approximate a generic end-user experience. Review and analysis will look for ease or difficulty in retrieving images; any browsing options; level of description for images; copyright information and authority control; additional features for image review such as zooming, downloading, or requesting alternate sized images for publication; what system or type of software is being used; and whether or not a thesaurus is being used to assist in searching.

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The digital collections under review will include those from well funded institutions such as the Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Online Catalog and the National Archives & Records Service; to medium sized institution such as those found at the collegiate level and larger public libraries; rounded out with collections from smaller institutions such as small colleges, organizations, and history groups.

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The research question fueling this investigation is whether or not a compromise exists between full item level description and adequate end-user access; and if so, what level of description is needed for effective image retrieval?

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Over the course of my research I hope to discover what users are expecting in a digital image collection, what standards are being used by most digital collections, and what the minimum and maximum levels are for item level description.

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Thank you for attending my capstone presentation, if you have any questions please feel free to contact me. The image used in this presentation can be found on the Library of Congress Prints and Photograph Online Catalog by using a basic search for 'Irish spinning wheel'. The bibliographic information is much more detailed than my example, but lacks the index terms or subject headings I applied.