

Metadata | Part D

Most modern image formats support something called “metadata” which you might have seen referred to as “EXIF”. You might have noticed on photo hosting sites a small button saying “View EXIF” or perhaps, you saw that the make of the camera that took that shot was shown. This information was not typed in manually when the picture was uploaded, it was recorded by the camera itself.

Those learning to take better pictures always strive for best combination of exposure and diaphragm, so it is useful for them to see which settings were chosen for the pictures that turned out well. Previously, photography students would have to keep a paper diary on what they did to get their best pictures.

Metadata is data about data. It describes the file’s format – is it compressed or not, what compression was used, GIF or JPG, and so on. It might also contain data about where and when you took the picture and other relevant bits of information.

Another use of metadata - it can contain instructions for image editing and viewing programs.

For example, you might have seen something like this. Now this is a corrupt image file, metadata contained in this file has been lost through a bad transmission. The computer doesn’t know what to make of its bits. It looks at a bit and doesn’t know – is this a pixel or is it a colour? Therefore, it is not enough to transmit a flow of zeros and ones and call it an image file, it has to contain metadata about the file such as its height, width and the colour depth.