FDMentor

In practice: How to start with data documentation?

1. Do not panic. Much documentation is simply good research practice, so you are probably already doing much of it.

2. Start early! Careful planning of your documentation at the beginning of your project helps you to save time and effort. Do not wait till the end of the project to start the documentation. Remember to include procedures for documentation in your data management planning.

3. Think about the information that is needed in order to understand the data. What will other researchers and re-users be needing in order to understand your data?

4. Create a separate documentation file for the data that includes the basic information about the research data. You can also create similar files for each data set. Remember to organize your files so that there is a connection between the documentation file and the data sets.

5. Plan where to deposit the data after the completion of the project. The repository probably follows a specific metadata standard that you can adopt.

6. Document continuously throughout the project. Data documentation provides contextual information about your records. It records the objectives of the project and contains explanatory material, including the data source, methodology and data collection process, data set structure, and technical information. Comprehensive and structured information helps you to identify a data set and make decisions about its content and usability.

TIP: Use English language for the documentation. It increases the likelihood that your data will be understood and reused.