## Controlled Vocabularies

One key type of data standard is controlled vocabularies, which have been defined as “an information tool that contains standardized words and phrases to refer to ideas, physical characteristics, people, places, events, subject matter, and many other subjects” ({{Harpring 2010|1}}). Controlled vocabularies range in form and complexity from simple word lists to hierarchical, multilingual thesauri. They are essential to help ensure that data creation is consistent and valid, and thus are frequently used in defining drop-down values in an inventory database.

The application of controlled vocabularies in data creation can be extremely powerful in the retrieval of inventory information within modern information systems through the indexing of records. For any particular inventory, controlled vocabularies are often created through agreement among subject-matter experts. Those controlled vocabularies should be closely managed over time, as the need for new or variant terms may emerge.

In some cases, it is useful to give thought to sharing controlled vocabularies, or even parts of them, across multiple inventories, such as when a regional inventory needs to provide data to a national inventory, or when searching across multiple inventory information systems is desired. For example, in England one official set of controlled vocabularies is used by all local, regional, and national inventories through the UK Forum on Information Standards in Heritage (FISH; see <https://www.heritage-standards.org.uk/>) , which includes a terminologies working group. This collection facilitates cross searching more than sixty separate information records ({{FISH n.d.}}) through an online information system known as Heritage Gateway that offers local and national information relating to England’s heritage; see <https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/>.