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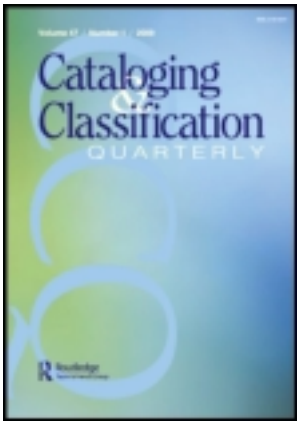

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RDA Simplified

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RDA Simplified

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This article summarizes a presentation on Resource Description and Access (RDA) given at the Reaching Forward conference in Rosemont, Illinois, in May 2011. The presenters felt that, with all that has been written about RDA, a look at practical considerations would be welcome. After a brief look at the historical background and the reasons for developing a new code, the presentation focused on some notable differences between Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Second Edition (AACR2) and RDA in structure, terminology, the treatment of certain classes of access points, and various aspects of description as reflected in bibliographic records.

KEYWORDS Resource Description and Access (RDA), cataloging, catalogers, descriptive cataloging, types of materials

We know that much has been written about *Resource Description and Access* (RDA). In this article we will be focusing on the everyday basics of RDA.

First, a brief history. Cataloging "formally" began in 1841 when Sir Anthony Panizzi wrote the ninety-one rules that were printed in the British Museum Catalog. Charles Ammi Cutter answered in 1876 with his rules that were revised in 1889, 1891, and 1904. The American Library Association and the Library Association in the United Kingdom worked together but issued separate rules in 1902 and 1908. Other historical highlights include the International Conference on Cataloguing Principles (Paris Principles) and the International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD) in the 1960s along with the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (AACR). The second edition, published in 1978, was a major revision that became known as AACR2 and was

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itself revised periodically through 2005.[1] The initial work on RDA was based on the development of a product with the title of "AACR3: Resource Description and Access." The Joint Steering Committee decided on a change of direction after the April 2005 meeting reviewing the feedback of the draft of part 1 of AACR3.[2]

WHY RDA?

> . . . we see an opportunity to simplify the code and to establish it as a content standard for resource description.[3]

> We want to address current problems with uniform titles and GMDs (general material designators), and the code will include new conceptual and procedural introductions to assist users and to link rules to the functions of catalogs, especially improving collocation in displays, building on the strong foundations of international cataloging traditions.[4]

The Joint Steering Committee and the Committee of Principals state that the purpose of RDA is to "be a new standard for resource description and access, designed for the digital world." That "built on foundations established by the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* (AACR), RDA will provide a comprehensive set of guidelines and instructions on resource description and access covering all types of content and media." And "RDA will enable users of library catalogues and other systems of information organization to find, identify, select, and obtain resources appropriate to their information needs."[5]

COMPARISON

What are some of the differences, then, between AACR2 and RDA? Two major differences, immediately evident, are scope and organization. AACR2 was first published in 1978, still well within the age of the card catalog. It is both a content and a display standard, prescribing such details as dashes or indention between fields, the order of elements in the description, and the ISBD punctuation used to designate those elements. By contrast, RDA appears in a predominantly online environment with relatively little standardization in how records are displayed, and it is a content-only standard. RDA's Appendix D gives guidelines on ISBD specifications, and it is anticipated that U.S. libraries will continue to use them, but this is optional.

The organization of the two codes is so different that a user's first encounter with RDA can be confusing and intimidating. AACR2's division, first into one description and then into choice and form of headings, and within Part I into a general chapter on description and format-specific chapters whose rules parallel the general rules, was a great step forward. Compared

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to the previous *Anglo American Cataloguing Rules*, it went much further in bringing all formats into parity in a principle-based descriptive code, but it still has its limitations. Notably, when a new format or a new variant of an existing format comes on the scene, a new chapter has to be added to Part I or an existing chapter has to be revised. RDA is conceived as a means of description and access to resources regardless of their form, and departs from a format-driven structure entirely. Instead, its structure derives from the entities and attributes of FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records) and FRAD (Functional Requirements for Authority Data).

It is not within the scope of this article to summarize FRBR and FRAD, but a basic understanding of these models is necessary to understand RDA in depth and—eventually, depending partly on technological capabilities and the development of an encoding standard more friendly to relational databases than Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC) in its current form—to exploit fully RDA's intended power to delineate entities and relationships between them. Resources that the authors have found very helpful as introductions to these models are cited below under "Further Reading: FRBR and FRAD."

RDA TERMINOLOGY

As with structure, much of the terminology of RDA originates in FRBR and seems unfamiliar at first. Some of the traditional cataloging terms we are used to will change under RDA: "heading," "main entry," and "added entry" all become "access points," for example. The Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA maintains that the term "main entry," originally developed in the context of card and book catalogs, is not applicable in the online environment, using "preferred access point" instead and clarifying more precisely its relationships with works and expressions. The term "authorized heading" or "controlled heading" that we are accustomed to use in AACR2 cataloging becomes "authorized access point" in RDA; the traditional term "uniform title," with its ambiguous functions under AACR2 (and previous cataloging codes), is designated in RDA as an "authorized access point" representing either a work or an expression; and "see" references become "variant access points." In all of these shifts of terminology, wording that originated in print (book and card) cataloging conventions is superseded by terms that are both more abstract (less evocative of physical catalog formats) and, in many cases, more specifically suggestive of relationships between FRBR entities.

PERSONS

Another noticeable change is how persons, fictitious and otherwise, are transcribed. RDA says to transcribe the name as it appears including personal

titles, occupational titles, and other terms. In other words, Miss Piggy, Geronimo Stilton, Richard Castle, or Jessica Fletcher can now be access points. And if the person is a Jr, Sr, or IV, that information is included. An example is "John F. Kennedy" and "John F. Kennedy, Jr." Under AACR2 there is not a clear way to distinguish them without using the date qualifier.

DESCRIPTION

RDA mandates three major changes in the way information is recorded in the description: information can be taken from anywhere in the source without special designation; information is to be transcribed as it appears in all cases; and all names appearing in statements of responsibility are to be transcribed.

In the past the title page and title page verso were the main sources from which to record information. Over time, as publishers began to creatively display their works, catalogers were allowed to indicate that the information found was not on the title page by enclosing the data in square brackets. With RDA, information can be anywhere on the source, and the cataloger only uses the square brackets for information recorded from outside sources (Web sites, etc.).

Transcribe the information as it appears, mistakes and all. Previously the correction with [sic] was the indicator that a word was misspelled or missing. With RDA you record the information exactly as it appears and add notes and access points as appropriate.

The rule of three was designed as a space saver in the card catalog environment. With the advent of the online environment that rule is no longer a necessity. Thus the rule has gone away with RDA. The cataloger is encouraged to transcribe all names but with the option of continuing with AACR2 continuity by transcribing the first name and then adding the statement " . . . [and 6 others]".

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

One of RDA's aims is to replace specialized bibliographic terminology with terms understandable across many information environments. The traditional cataloging abbreviations "[S.l.]" and "[s.n.]" (*Sine loco* and *sine nomine,* respectively) are conspicuous examples of specialized terminology that might well be obscure even to many librarians. RDA replaces them with the phrases "[Place of publication not identified]" and "[Publisher not identified]."

The changes mandated under RDA in the transcription of publication and copyright dates have a less dramatic effect on the appearance of the bibliographic record than those mentioned above, but are significant as reflections of another of RDA's aims, namely, greater precision in the

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identification of FRBR entities. AACR2 implicitly recognizes the conceptual distinction between the two types of dates (in rules 1.4F1–1.4F7), but places them in the same element (date of publication, distribution, etc.) of the publication, distribution, etc. area and provides for copyright date to be recorded in the place of an unknown publication date (rule 1.4F6). RDA maintains this distinction more consistently in the transcription of the data: publication date and copyright date are recorded as separate elements, with the former treated as a core element during the national test period. Therefore, in records constructed according to RDA, you should not see a copyright date standing alone where date of publication has not been determined; instead you will find an inferred date of punctuation in brackets, with or without a question mark depending on the cataloger's level of confidence in the date, and (in the test records produced by the Library of Congress at least) the year of copyright as well, even if it is the same, for example [2010], ©2010. Note that RDA directs us to use the actual copyright symbols, C or P inside a circle, not the lowercase c or p used up to now. By the way, if a publication date cannot even be approximately estimated, the RDA phrase is "[date of publication not identified]." Both the use of this English-language phrase, written out in full, and the prescription of internationally recognized copyright symbols instead of the corresponding lowercase letters (a specialized cataloging convention) reflect the preference for widely understood terminology.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

As with the transcription of publication data, physical description under RDA moves away from specialized bibliographic usages. Notably, with two exceptions, abbreviations are replaced with words and phrases fully written out. (In these examples, the first and second columns list RDA and AACR2 terms, respectively.)

pages	p.
volumes	v.
unnumbered pages	1 v. (unpaged)
color illustrations	col. ill.
black and white	b&w
illustrations	ill.
maps (some color)	maps (some col.)

The two exceptions are the abbreviations for inches (in.) and centimeters (cm); they should still be used for, respectively, the diameter of discs and the height and width of printed and manuscript materials and containers (but note that "cm," conforming to international convention, does not use a period).

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CONTENT, MEDIA, AND CARRIER TYPE

One of the notable differences in description between AACR2 and RDA is the replacement of the General Material Designation by three new elements—content type, media type, and carrier type—each using a controlled vocabulary. Content type is an expression-level attribute (the other two are manifestation-level) designating "the fundamental form of communication in which the content is expressed and the human sense through which it is intended to be perceived."[6] Examples include "performed music," "text," and "two-dimensional moving images." Media type is "the general type of intermediate device required to view, play, run, etc., the content of a resource."[7] Examples include "audio," "computer," "microform," "unmediated," and "video." Carrier type can be considered a more specific category than media type: "the format of a storage medium and housing of a carrier in combination with the type of intermediation device required to view, play, run, etc., the content of a resource"[8]; for example, "audio disc," "online resource," "microfiche," "videocassette," and "volume."

BOOK AND CONTENT, MEDIA, AND CARRIER TYPE

Figure 1 is a selection from one of the Library of Congress test records that illustrates the use of these three "type" elements in the description of a printed monograph—under RDA, they are required even for eye-readable text. So the content here is "text"—that's the form of communication, perceived through vision. The media type is "unmediated" because you do not need a device in addition to the book itself to access the content. And "volume" is what stores and houses the content.

All of these terms are controlled vocabulary; the subfield $2 in each field designates what list supplies the term. In this case, as in all the RDA records we have seen to date, the lists are the lists of prescribed content, media, and carrier terms found in the appendices of RDA itself.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: AV

The major changes are that "audio" disc is used instead of "sound" disc. "Computer" discs refer to CD-ROMs and "videodisc" remains the same. But

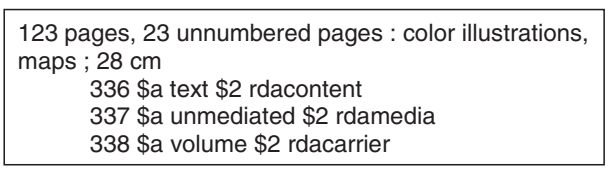

FIGURE 1 Book and Content, Media and Carrier Type.

note that "videodisc" refers to both DVDs and Blu-rays. How they are distinguished is covered in the next section.

GMD = CONTENT, MEDIA, AND CARRIER TYPE

The General Material Designation (GMD)—sometimes supplemented in local practice, especially in public libraries, with a specific designation, is very useful in brief catalog displays, letting the patron or library staff see quickly which titles are sound recordings, videorecordings, and so on. One of the concerns about the transition to RDA is how we will be able to translate the information in the content, media, and carrier type fields into an equally useful and understandable display. We wish we could assure everyone that this is all taken care of, but it is still under discussion.

Figure 2 shows two examples of physical description and content, media, and carrier type for audiovisual (AV) materials. In the first example, note that RDA actually gives us more information than the GMD: the content type is "performed music" (rather than, for example, a spoken word or sound-effects recording). And as noted earlier, the carrier is designated in both fields 300 and 338 as "audio disc" rather than "sound disc."

The second example again shows how RDA conceptualizes content—"two-dimensional moving image"—while the media and carrier type tell us that the description refers to a video disc. To get more specific—"Blu-ray," in this case—we have to use a note. Some libraries, to help the patron, may place this information in an edition statement.

OTHER CHANGES

The series statement sees the series transcribed as it appears. For example, if the roman numeral IV, the arabic numeral 4, or the word "four" is used

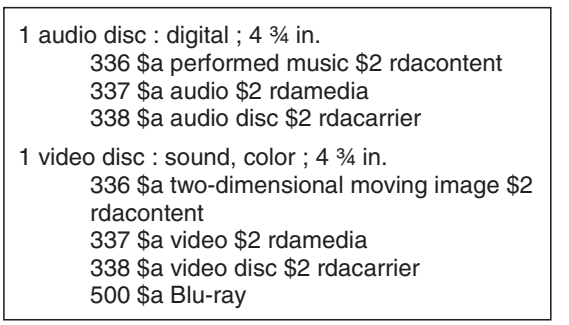

FIGURE 2 Content, Media, and Carrier Type.

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to number the series, use what is on the source. Also, if "volume" or "v." is used, that is what is transcribed.

THE BIBLE

One of the very significant changes in access points under RDA will involve sections and books of the Bible. First, the abbreviations "O.T." and "N.T." are replaced by the terms in full: "Old Testament" and "New Testament." Second, subdivision from "Bible" to individual books will be direct, rather than through one of those sections. Instead of "Bible. O.T. Genesis" and "Bible. NT. Matthew," RDA will have "Bible. Genesis" and "Bible. Matthew." The terms "Old Testament" and "New Testament" are reserved for complete editions or selections of those major divisions of the Bible.

CONCLUSION

Major changes in the way institutions and professions do things are never simple. Certainly this is true of the transition to a new tool for bibliographic control, especially one whose foundations have been reconceptualized as in the case of RDA. At the same time, RDA was designed so that RDA-created records would be compatible with records created under AACR2[9]; and while catalogers (especially original catalogers) need to familiarize themselves with FRBR and FRAD to understand RDA fully, in practical terms the RDA-derived bibliographic record need not be overly intimidating. Many of the more obvious changes in the record derive from two operating principles of RDA: information should be recorded as found, and terminology should be understandable across a wide range of information environments, not just in the library community (or, as with some of our traditional terms and abbreviations, the even narrower cataloging community). If change is not simple, it can be manageable.

BREAKING NEWS

Subsequent to our presentation, on June 13, the Library of Congress (LC), National Agricultural Library (NAL), and National Library of Medicine (NLM) issued a statement recommending that RDA be implemented by LC, NAL, and NLM no sooner than January 2013, contingent on substantial work being done on a list of tasks and action items.[10] Among the reasons for recommending a delay in implementation, the U.S. RDA Test Coordinating Committee stated that while some of the goals set for RDA were shown by the nationwide test to have been met, others were met only partially or not met; that some participants in the test reported struggling with using and navigating

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the Toolkit; and that many participants found the structure, organization, and vocabulary of RDA confusing.[11] If the Committee's recommendation is adopted, libraries, vendors, and educators will have some extra time to prepare; we may also see further changes in RDA itself, since one of the tasks is "Rewrite the RDA instructions in clear, unambiguous, plain English."[12]

NOTES

1. Joint Steering Committee for the Development of RDA, "Early English Language Cataloguing Codes," http://www.rda-jsc.org/history.html

2. Joint Steering Committee for the Development of RDA, "Historic Documents," http://www.rda-jsc.org/docs.html

3. RDA: Resource Description and Access presentation prepared by the Joint Steering Committee for the Development of RDA, slide 2, http://www.rda-jsc.org/docs/rdapptjuly2005.pdf

4. Ibid.

5. Joint Steering Committee for the Development of RDA. Strategic Plan for RDA 2005–2009, last modified July 1, 2009, http://www.rda-jsc.org/stratplan.html

6. RDA Toolkit (http://access.rdatoolkit.org/), Glossary.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA. RDA FAQs, 9.6, http://www.rda-jsc.org/rdafaq.html#9 (last modified January 18, 2010).

10. Response of the Library of Congress, the National Agricultural Library, and the National Library of Medicine to the RDA Test Coordinating Committee, June 13, 2011, http://www.nlm.nih.gov/tsd/cataloging/RDA_Executives_statement.pdf

11. Report and Recommendations of the U.S. RDA Test Coordinating Committee, Executive Summary, June 13, 2011, http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/rda/rda-execsummary-public-13june11.pdf

12. Ibid., 3.

APPENDIX

Further Reading: RDA

Elrod, J. McRee. "Cataloguing Cheat Sheets," http://special-cataloguing.com/cheats (accessed August 5, 2011). Specifies changes from AACR2 to RDA.

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Oliver, Chris. *Introducing RDA: A Guide to the Basics*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2010. Includes an overview of FRBR and FRAD and their relationship to RDA.

Schiff, Adam L. "Changes from AACR2 to RDA: A Comparison of Examples," originally presented at a pre-conference of the BC Library

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Conference, April 22, 2010, http://faculty.washington.edu/aschiff/BCLAPresentationWithNotes-RevMay2011.pdf (latest revision May 7, 2011).

Further Reading: FRBR and FRAD

Maxwell, Robert L. *FRBR: A Guide for the Perplexed.* Chicago: American Library Association, 2008.

Taylor, Arlene G., ed., *Understanding FRBR: What It Is and How It Will Affect Our Retrieval Tools.* Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2007. Includes an introduction to FRAD and a discussion of the relationship between FRBR and FRAD.

Tillett, Barbara. *What is FRBR?: A Conceptual Model for the Bibliographic Universe.* Washington, DC: Library of Congress Cataloging Distribution Service, 2004, http://www.loc.gov/cds/downloads/FRBR.PDF. This eight-page document is one of the most concise and clear introductions to FRBR and is recommended as a starting point for anyone who is completely unfamiliar with the model.

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