Changing to RDA

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What is RDA?

RDA stands for "Resource Description and Access" the new standard that will replace AACR2.[1] Although it is still in development, the fundamental change in direction is evident.

What does this mean?

Gone are the rigid set of rules, to be replaced with theoretically based guidelines that have a broader applicability and a user-centred focus. RDA is the successor to AACR2, but not in the sense of a simple linear progression that adds more to an existing set of rules. RDA supersedes AACR2: it builds on what was good in AACR2 but it takes a radically different approach to resource description. It is a distinctly new standard.

RDA focuses on users and the information they need. The guidelines are based on principles that guide, not rules that constrict. The goal is to facilitate the process of resource description by following a logical decision process. The standard is designed to be easy to use and to generate records that contain data that is relevant and important to users.

User focus

One of the most important documents for the library user is one that the user is probably totally unfamiliar with, a report entitled *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records*.[2] It analyzes the data in bibliographic records from the perspective of how the data is used and presents a conceptual model that identifies the entities in the bibliographic universe that are of interest to users (works, items, persons, etc.), the attributes of these entities and their relationships to each other. This entity-relationship model, known as FRBR, focuses attention on how the data in records relates to what a user needs. User needs are summarized in the following user tasks: find, identify, select and obtain. To these tasks is also often added the task of navigating through large retrieval sets. FRBR has illuminated the deep bones of the bibliographic record and has underlined the centrality of the user's needs. It has changed the perspective of cataloguing from a cataloguer looking at the record in isolation to a user seeking the record within the context of a large database or catalogue.

The focus on users and their needs has been a guiding principle during the development of RDA. RDA is shaped by the conceptual framework expressed in the FRBR model and also by the one expressed in the *Functional Requirements for Authority Data* (FRAD) model.[3]

FRAD follows from FRBR and shares the same focus on the user's needs. While the community that is developing RDA pays attention to the customs and common usage in the bibliographic universe, RDA is not the codification of unrelated usages and customs. RDA is founded on principles and theory, because it takes the conceptual models FRBR and FRAD as the basis on which to build the guidelines, to structure the organization of the guidelines and as the means to test the guidelines to see that they are logically consistent and theoretically sound. The statement from the draft Statement of International Cataloguing Principles produced by the IFLA Meeting of Experts on an International Cataloguing Code (IME ICC) expresses well the guiding principle that has governed the development of RDA: "The highest principle for the construction of cataloguing codes should be the convenience of the users of the catalogue."[4]

Continuity and change

One question that might be asked is: why not throw AACR2 out and start from scratch? AACR2 is a widely used standard for resource description and access, used not only in the English-speaking library world, but around the globe, as can be seen by the fact that there are

translations in 24 languages. It has been the resource description standard used to create millions of bibliographic records that are shared electronically around the world. AACR2 has certain characteristics that have made it an attractive standard, such as the way it aims to reflect common usage for citations of works and recording authorship. Its rules closely follow actual publication practices; it has encouraged consistency of practices and enabled record sharing; and it has had a robust amending process to change or add rules as publishing practices evolved or new types of resources became common additions to library collections.

But one of its drawbacks is that it is reactive, in the sense of reacting to change after the change has happened. At the end of the 20th century, we witnessed the start of a proliferation of new publication practices and new methods of scholarly and creative communication. AACR2 was not able to accommodate these changes in a logically consistent and theoretically coherent way. AACR2 is not inherently extensible, and this slowness to accommodate new types of resources led to a major re-evaluation, which had its formal beginning with the 1997 Toronto conference: International Conference on the Principles & Future Development of AACR.

Following the Conference's recommendations, work began on a major revision. It soon became evident that there were some fundamental problems with the way AACR2 was organized, and revisions were not going to be enough. AACR is amended and revised through an international consultation and decision-making process that hinges on consensus. To achieve a major reorientation of a shared standard requires frequent testing of the waters with new models, and building on what is clearly demonstrated to make sense. The early revisions were good because they pushed toward a new direction. They demonstrated that the new ideas were solid but that the actual proposed changes were not sufficient. The conclusion became that if you are going to change, do it thoroughly and go for logical consistency. The new name of RDA was adopted as a signal of the shift to a thoroughly reworked standard that would aim to have broader applicability.

RDA focuses on content

RDA is a content standard, not a display standard and not a metadata schema. RDA is a set of guidelines that indicates how to describe a resource, focusing on the pieces of information (or attributes) that a user is most likely to need to know. It also encourages the description of relationships between related resources and between resources and persons or bodies that contributed to creation of that resource.

RDA has no guidelines within the main body of the text relating to the display of information to the user. It is independent of display conventions. RDA focuses on what information needs to be recorded and how it should be recorded in order to help a user navigate through large databases or catalogues, and then to find, identify, select and obtain a resource that will be appropriate to the information need. The appendices will offer options for the presentation or display of descriptive data and data relating to access points. The tool will offer a selection of templates that can be used to follow different display conventions. But the text of RDA distances itself from any recommendations or suggestions. This focus on content rather than display opens the possibility for RDA to be used by a wide range of metadata communities.

The description created can be contained in a MARC record, or a Dublin Core record or many other types of metadata records. RDA is designed to be used with a variety of metadata encoding schema. RDA records can be stored and transmitted in MARC format or metadata schema such as Dublin Core or MODS (Metadata Object Description Standard).[5] To increase RDA's usefulness as an Internet metadata content standard, work is currently underway toward developing an RDA application profile and an RDA element vocabulary.

Most library catalogues use the same descriptive standard (AACR2) throughout North America. This has meant that a user is likely to find (and expect) a certain degree of consistency, whether searching one library catalogue or doing a federated search of many library catalogues. Metadata communities have detailed schema, but do not necessarily have content standards. If many metadata

communities were to share the same content standard, this would likely improve federated searching results across different repositories and databases, to the user's benefit.

Consistency across metadata communities can also generate benefits by enabling the efficient reuse of metadata. If metadata coming from outside sources were created using the same content standard, it would not require manipulation or adaptation. It might require the addition of other meta-data elements, but this is easier and faster than reworking metadata or having to start from nothing. An example would be sharing common metadata standards between the publishing and library communities. Currently, work has already begun on a joint initiative between the organizations responsible for RDA and ONIX. ONIX is an international standard for representing publishing industry product information in electronic form (published and main-tained by EDItEUR). The objective of this initiative is "to develop a framework for categorizing resources in all media that will support the needs of both libraries and the pub-lishing industry and will facilitate the transfer and use of resource description data across the two communities."[6]

New features of RDA

The aim of RDA is to produce records that will help users get to the resource or set of resources that they need. There are several new perspectives that reflect this user focus. As mentioned before, records

are understood to be used within the context of large databases. The scope and purpose of each element is clearly stated so that information is recorded with an awareness of its relationship to the user tasks.

RDA also encourages the recording of elements that can produce meaningful clustering in retrieval sets. RDA aims to clarify the nature of relationships between bibliographic entities (between works, expressions, manifestations and items, and between them and the persons, families or bodies responsible for creating them, or having some other relationship to them). For example, a cataloguer might record data about the nature of the role of a contributor, so that a search engine could cluster result sets. Thus, when searching with the name of a prolific playwright, the result set could cluster into the plays the playwright wrote, performances of those plays, parodies of those plays, etc. This clustering could then be used to present clearer displays for the user so that the user might intuitively select and drill down to the needed resource. However, it will be up to system designers and vendors to create OPACs or other search engines that can take advantage of the data stored in bibliographic and authority records.

RDA is designed to be easily extensible to cover new types of resources that have not yet been invented. Rather than follow AACR2's reactive course of amendments, much attention has been focused on creating a categorization of content, media and carrier types that can be

easily used or extended to cover the description of new resources. There has been a conscious effort to generalize the guidelines wherever possible so that the same instruction applies to a range of resources, regardless of content, media or carrier type. Where necessary, specialized instructions follow the general guidelines.

Compatibility with existing records is essential. Records created using RDA as the standard must be able to integrate in the same data-bases with AACR2 records, without causing major disconnects and split files. Thus, the guidelines relating to the form and choice of access points are unlikely to deviate much from AACR2 unless there are very convincing reasons for such deviations. RDA will probably encourage the addition of data to access points rather than changing the way access points are made – for example, adding information about the role of a contributor to enable a clear display of the relationship between the contributor and the resource. RDA guidelines are written with the awareness not only that a record will be part of a large database, but also that the database will not be one made up solely of RDA records.

Easier to use and easier to teach

And how will this affect cataloguers and cataloguing managers? The organization of the guidelines in RDA has been structured to lead the cataloguer through a logical decision process. When this structure is translated into a web tool, it will

become even more evident how easy it is to move through the steps required to produce a useful record. RDA is written as a web tool, and thus it is hard to read as a linear, static text. When RDA is called a content standard for the digital world, this also means that it is particularly well adapted to be used as a digital tool.

RDA is a set of principle-based guidelines. By making clear the theoretical foundation on which the guidelines rest, it provides the cataloguer with the conceptual frame-work within which the cataloguer can exercise judgment. RDA equips the cataloguer to make decisions based on principles. Thus, even if a particular case is not explicitly covered by the guidelines or examples, the principles and theory that show up in the introductions, the scope and purpose statements, etc., should enable the cataloguer to make a decision that is logically consistent with existing RDA guidelines.

How soon? 2009!

On the current timeline, the first release is scheduled for early 2009. It is expected that after the release there will be a period of time to pre-pare for implementation. The national libraries of Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the United States will implement about six months after the first release. Thus, a possible implementation date is June 2009.

To check on progress toward RDA and on the latest activities of the Joint Steering Committee, visit the JSC website at www.collections canada.ca/jsc/rda.html.

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Notes

1. AACR2 = *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules,* 2nd edition. This is the current standard governing resource description and access, and is used by libraries in Canada, the United States, Australia and Great Britain, as well as many other libraries around the world.
2. *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records: Final Report,* IFLA Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (München: K.G. Saur, 1998), available on the IFLA website at www.ifla.org/VII/s13/frbr/frbr.pdf (accessed July 25, 2007).
3. *Functional Requirements for Authority Data: A Conceptual Model,* IFLA UBCIM Working Group on Functional Requirements and Numbering of Authority Records (FRANAR), draft of 2007-04-01, available on the IFLA website at http://www.ifla.org/VII/d4/FRANAR-ConceptualModel-2ndReview.pdf (accessed July 25, 2007).

From the April 6, 2007, draft, www.nl.go.kr/icc/down/070412_2.pdf (accessed July 26, 2007).

More information about Dublin Core: http://dublincore.org/. More information about MODS: www.loc.gov/standards/mods/.

"RDA/ONIX Initiative Update" (on the News & Announcements section of the JSC website), www.collections canada.ca/jsc/rdaonixann.html (accessed July 22, 2007).