

RDA, Resource Description and Access, is a set of instructions for the description of library materials. It is intended to replace AACR2. The Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules have been revised and updated many times since its initial publication in 1967. One of the goals behind those changes has been to create an environment where cooperation and sharing between cataloging agencies could become the rule. The idea for RDA emerged from the International Conference on Principles and Future of AACR, which was held in Toronto in 1997. As they were trying to figure out how AACR2 might be further revised in order to meet some of the challenges that new technologies and changing informational environments were creating, it was felt by many that revising AACR yet again would not be the direction that cataloging ought to move if it was to remain responsive in the 21st century. It was recommended that a study be made of underlying principles and that we find ways to deal with

- New types of resources

- Changes in existing resources

- New metadata creators

It was felt that new norms were needed for their treatment, especially in view of the fact that materials collected by libraries have increased greatly in formats other than printed materials, and AACR, despite the many revisions made to it, had been conceived in a very different information environment.

RDA is based on foundations that were established in AACR2 and the cataloging traditions on which they were based, but has been created with the digital world in mind. It is meant to cut across language barriers, no longer favoring English. A key difference in RDA's design is the use of the FRBR (Functional Requirement for Bibliographic Records) model as its framework.

FRBR is a data model that attempts to create a new way of looking at library materials. It reinforces the basic objectives of catalogs and the importance of relationships to help users perform what it defines as users' tasks:

- Find

- Identify

- Select

- Obtain

the information that they want.

FRBR was created as an entity-relationship model for the way the bibliographical universe should operate. The FRBR entities, attributes and relationships are used for bibliographic description. These are the elements used in RDA, and the rules are organized to relate bibliographic description to the FRBR entities, attributes, and relationships to better aid the library user in completing the tasks. In practical terms, what this means is that as catalogers, we will be looking at the things we catalog in a different way.

Right now, we are still using MARC to record RDA information, even though it was designed for a card catalog universe. This means that the information must still look very similar to the way it did in AACR2, and must be organized in the fields we have become accustomed to using, even though the ideas behind how we are organizing the information is different. We are moving towards a replacement for MARC, but it has not yet been created. More information is available about the proposed replacement for MARC at bibframe.org.

The FRBR model consists of entities, relationships, and attributes that are used to describe resources. There are three groups of entities :

Group 1 – Resources: products of intellectual and artistic creation (Works, Expressions, Manifestations, and Items)

Group 2 – Those responsible for group 1: persons, corporate bodies, families

Group 3 – Subjects: concepts, objects, events and places

These entities are described as attributes and can be connected and linked by relationships. These elements are directly mapped to library user tasks and rationalize the way that data is organized and presented to users. It provides ways to collocate records at the levels of works and expressions, and to show relationships. One factor behind the FRBR model is the attempt to allow library systems to create better relational databases from bibliographic records.

Relationships are a big part of the FRBR entity-relationship model. This is the model for Group one:

- A work is realized by an expression
- An expression is embodied by a manifestation
- A manifestation is exemplified by an item.

RDA instructions provide a content norm. They do not provide for how the information recorded will be displayed, and it is designed to be used with different systems.

In 2011, RDA entered a test period in the United States, and in June the Library of Congress, the National Library of Medicine, and the National Library of Agriculture released their findings. The consensus indicated that although there would be discernible benefits to implementing RDA, those benefits will not be realized without further changes, especially developing a successor to MARC format. It has been suggested that the cataloging community might better wait until that format has been created, but it has been decided to take a leap of faith and create the need for a new format that will call for the creativity of programmers to meet.

You will notice some changes that seem purely cosmetic, but that is not the point of RDA. The point is in a new, more logical and structured way to organize bibliographical data, and transitioning from an old, much patched-up and added on-to data structure to a new, rationally thought out one. It is the first step in making library data comprehensible to the programmers who write the software we use to display it.