

RDA Q&A Questions

What is RDA? And what does RDA stand for?

It doesn't stand for Recommended Daily Allowance, or, for Macgyver fans, Richard Dean Anderson. It means Resource Description and Access. A good way to think of it is that library materials are resources, and catalogers describe them so that customers can access them.

RDA is often described as a new set of cataloging rules, but rules isn't quite the right word. The "rules" in RDA are actually more like standards, which is what cataloging "rules" always have been.

That said, it's important for libraries to follow most of the standards, especially the major ones. It allows librarians and customers to view any library's catalog at any time, and have a pretty good idea of what kind of material the catalog records represent.

Who developed RDA and why?

RDA is an attempt to help move cataloging into the digital age.

RDA was developed primarily by the Joint Steering Committee for the Development of RDA. The committee includes representatives from the Library of Congress, ALA, the British Library, Canada, Australia, and many countries in which English is not the primary language. The committee has been working for about 10 years. Originally, the goal was to create a new edition of AACR, AACR3, but that was scrapped early on.

When libraries everywhere used card catalogs, an entire catalog record had to fit on a 3 x 5 card. Catalog records didn't contain as much information as they often do now, but still, that's not a lot of space. The standards called for a lot of abbreviation and short phrasing, and a record didn't contain any information that was not considered absolutely essential.

When AACR2 was implemented, in the 1980s, online public access catalogs (OPACs) were still a dream. There were hardly any in existence. The OCLC WorldCat database existed, but libraries used it to print their catalog cards. MLS originally developed its own ILS in 1985 because there were no vendor ILSs. The standards in AACR2 were designed around the catalog card.

When libraries started using OPACs, computer storage space was still at a premium. In 1985, most mainframe computers had less storage space than a low-end laptop has now. Catalog records could be a little longer than they could be on cards, but not much. There were strict limits as to how many characters could be included in a catalog record.

Computers have evolved, and storage space has evolved, and catalogers are still using cataloging guidelines that are built around obsolete technology. They are also describing

materials in formats that didn't exist when AACR2 was developed. Catalog records contain information that most catalogers never even thought about including until the last 10 years or so. AACR2 doesn't provide guidance for including that information.

How is RDA different than AACR2, and will it be easier for customers to understand?

The most obvious differences are in the publisher and physical description areas of the record. RDA does away with most abbreviations that were used to save space in these areas.

In the physical description area, "pages" is spelled out instead of using abbreviation "p.", "illustrations" is spelled out instead of using "ill.", etc. In records for CDs, the discs are referred to as audio discs rather than sound discs. I'm not sure whether customers will even notice these changes, if they had trouble with the abbreviations, or even if they know there is a physical description in the record.

In the publication area, there are changes to the way missing information is indicated. In the past, if a cataloger did not know where a material was published, the record contained the abbreviation "S.l." (for the Latin *sine loco*, "without a place"). If no publisher could be identified, the abbreviation "s.n." (*sine nomine*, "without a name") was used. The RDA standards tell catalogers to use "place of publication not identified" and "publisher not identified". I could see this being a problem if customers try to use catalog records to create citations for papers. Even though customers may not have known what "s.l." and "s.n." meant, style manuals state that they were and are standard form for citations. For right now, librarians might end up having to explain to customers how to translate this information into citation form. The MLS catalog doesn't display place of publication in the OPAC.

Another change has to do with dates. MLS uses copyright dates rather than publication or printing dates in our catalog whenever they are available. That decision was made because the copyright date reflects the time when the content was created. An item may have been written and copyrighted in 2010, but published in 2013. The content may not be current any longer. AACR2 standards preferred that records include publication or printing dates over copyright dates, but allowed the option of using copyright. RDA does not even allow the option; it requires use of publication or printing dates.

Under RDA standards, if the material doesn't have a publication date, the catalog record should say "date of publication not determined", unless the cataloger wants to take a guess at the date. Even RDA trainers are telling people to take a guess rather than type out that whole phrase. This could mean that there will be multiple records for the same material because different catalogers guesses as to the date are different.

At MLS, catalogers will continue to use copyright dates in the catalog whenever we can find them. WorldCat, and other libraries' catalogs, may not. This could cause a problem with ILL requests. If a customer looks up a title in WorldCat and sees the 2013 date, s/he will think that the item is newer than the same title with a 2010 listed in the MLS catalog, even though it's the same thing.

Some changes won't show up in the MLS catalog, but are already showing up in WorldCat.

A major change is the removal of the general material designator, or GMD, after the title of AV materials. This refers to terms like [videorecording] or [sound recording] that appear after titles. There has been a lot of debate about this among catalogers. MLS customers might not care too much, because the MLS public catalog uses media icons. Many other public catalogs use similar icons, and icons appear in WorldCat. Librarians as a whole consider it important, or anyway don't want to give it up. For right now, MLS catalogers will continue to include the GMD in our catalog.

Other changes may help customers to gain information about materials, even though the changes are not so obvious. RDA does away with what catalogers call the "rule of three". Under AACR2 standards, if more than three people contributed significantly to a work, only the first name in the list appeared in the author listing in the catalog. If a material contained a collection of more than three works, the works did not appear in the title listing. The names or titles were included in contents notes, but not all catalogs access those notes. RDA allows a cataloger to include as many entries in a list as are considered appropriate. If a work is a collection of four short novels by four different authors, all the authors and all the titles can be listed in the catalog. If a work contains six novels or plays, all the titles can appear in the title listing. This might make it easier to locate materials for customers.

RDA leaves a lot of areas up to catalogers' judgment. The rule of three is one example. It's nice not to be limited to three authors or titles, but how many author or title listings in one record is too many? Here at MLS, the Catalogers are working to establish local guidelines so that all records can be consistent.

Will this be implemented at MLS? When? Why the change?

There is not going to be a real cutover implementation. In other words, the catalog will not contain all AACR2 records one day and all RDA records the next. For most libraries, implementation means that after a certain date, all catalog records created by that library will conform to RDA. The Library of Congress has set March 31 as their implementation date, and that is also the date that MLS has established.

However, MLS Catalogers don't create all that many original records. Most of our records are downloaded from OCLC's WorldCat database, then edited to fit our system's standards and needs. When no record is available, a Cataloger will create an original record and upload it into WorldCat to share with other libraries. Only about 1% of all the records that are added to the

MLS catalog are original cataloging. For MLS, the March 31 implementation date means that after that date, MLS Catalogers will only add records that are formatted according to RDA to WorldCat.

Why are we changing to RDA? A major reason is that RDA is going to be the industry standard for catalog records. If MLS is to stay current with accepted standards, new catalog records need to meet those standards. Another reason is that over time, more and more of the records that are brought into the MLS catalog from WorldCat will be formatted according to RDA. For those records to be converted to AACR2 formatting, a Cataloger would have to spend time changing each individual record back to an outdated standard.



At MLS, the average turnaround time for new materials in the Cataloging department is less than two working days. If records were being converted back to AACR2 standards, that turnaround would be much longer. That would mean fewer materials made available each day, and longer wait times for customers.





What impact will it have on librarians doing front-line customer service?

I really think that it will be minimal, or so gradual that librarians won't notice any problems. None of the changes that are being implemented will have any impact on searching. Librarians or customers might notice that records look a little "different", and customers might ask about it. Over time, the expansion of the number of author/title entries in a record could make searching easier.

RDA formatted records are already in the MLS catalog. Two examples are the book Lee Roy Selmon: the gentle giant (bib # 0815/9543) and the DVD "Clive & Ian's Wonder-blimp of Knowledge" (bib # 0840/3354). Take a look at these records to see what the changes actually look like.

Librarians or customers who do much work in WorldCat might see a few more changes. Many names in WorldCat are now followed by designators like "author", "director", or "performer". RDA provides for the designators, but does not require them. The Library of Congress has stated that since the designators are optional, their records will not include them. The problem with the designators is that in many library catalogs, each designator comes up in a search listing as a separate entry. (See the example below.)

	Eastwood, Clint, ⚭d 1930-	14
	Eastwood, Clint, ⚭d 1930- ⚭e author, ⚭e director, ⚭e actor, ⚭e composer	3

	Eastwood, Clint, ‡d 1930- ‡e director	2
	Eastwood, Clint, ‡d 1930- ‡e producer, ‡e director	4
	Eastwood, Clint, ‡d 1930- ‡e producer, ‡e director, ‡e actor	3
	Eastwood, Clint, ‡d 1930- ‡e actor	9

In this example, to access records for all titles to which Clint Eastwood has contributed, a customer would have to click on each entry separately. Most customers would not appreciate this nor bother to do it.

Until library catalogs are coded so that all name headings with designators are merged into one entry in a list, the designators are not really useful.

Does RDA mean that there will be one record for a title, and customers will be able to access the title in any format from that record?

No. That concept of one record leading to many forms of the same work is actually part of FRBR, the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (pronounced *fur-ber*). FRBR was developed by IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations. The FRBR concept is that there could be one record for a title, like The hobbit, which would in turn would link to records for the title in different forms. A customer could click the main record; then choose book, video, audio, etc.; then choose illustrated book, annotated book; then choose a particular illustrator. RDA is designed around FRBR.

Realistically, most catalogers have known for some time that our catalogs didn't and don't have the functional capability to make the FRBR concepts practical. The records in nearly all OPACs are coded using a type of markup language called MaRC, for Machine Readable Cataloging. MaRC originated in the 1960s as as a way to code catalog card information so that computers could read and display it. It has been updated periodically, but in its current form MaRC doesn't provide the framework necessary for FRBR concepts to work.

When a customer places a reserve on a material, there has to be something for that reserve to hang on to, something that says this customer wants THIS, not THAT. In just about every library's catalog, that something is a bib record. The customer selects the bib record that represents the material and expects that the material s/he receives will match the record. The

catalog system uses that information to locate an item and route it to the customer. In turn, that means that each item attached to that bib record has to match the description in the record.

It is possible to create catalog records using FRBR concepts and RDA standards, but right now it is not worthwhile. As long as library catalogs can only handle one format per record, FRBR type records have to be replaced with one record for each format. Libraries don't want catalogers to spend time creating records that can't be used.

Adoption of RDA by major libraries, including Library of Congress, was delayed for a long time because of the lack of FRBR functionality in MaRC. There was a school of thought that said that RDA should not be adopted until a replacement for MaRC was created. The process of designing that replacement is ongoing, but there is no timeline for its completion or implementation.

Does RDA mean that there will be fewer records in the catalog for the same thing?

Every set of cataloging standards tries to avoid having multiple records for the same thing. Catalogers really don't go out of their way to create a new record for every item.

RDA expands the definition of what the same thing is. For example, under AACR2, the same text issued by a different publisher was not the same thing. A mass market printing was not considered the same thing as a trade printing. Under RDA, a different publisher or printing format is not enough to require a different record. A different publication or printing date does not necessarily require a new record. There will be probably be fewer records for the same title.

That said, every version of a title is not the same. An unillustrated edition of The wind in the willows is not the same thing as an illustrated edition, and the edition illustrated by Ernest Shepard is not the same thing as the one illustrated by Tasha Tudor. Maybe it doesn't make a difference to every customer, but it does to somebody. A movie on DVD with closed captioning is not the same as the same movie on DVD with no captioning. A revised edition with a new copyright date is not the same as the previous edition. Even if the copyright date doesn't change, a new printing of a title is not the same if it contains updated information.

At MLS, Cataloging is working toward including different versions of the same material on a single bib record, like a mass market and a trade edition. The Catalogers understand the importance of having as few bib records for the same title as possible. However, they always have to balance that with making sure that all items attached to a bib record really do contain the same content.

Will existing records be changed or will only new records be in RDA? (If only new records, how will that affect our ability to search and find records in both cataloging formats?)

Only new records added to the catalog will meet RDA standards. Trying to convert our existing records is impractical for the same reason that continuing to follow AACR2 standards is. The goal is to allow Catalogers to focus on classifications and subject headings, and have them spend as little time as possible on areas like physical descriptions.

It will actually be quite a while before the majority of new records received are RDA records. Library of Congress is still creating some records under AACR2, as are many libraries. If an AACR2 record for a material is in WorldCat, it will not be changed to RDA nor will another record be created under RDA standards. Since MLS does not add catalog records until material is in hand, most of the records for materials added to our collections have been in existence for months. The records are likely to be AACR2 right now, although that will change over time.

Again, RDA should not impact searching the catalog nor locating records.

Will this affect the selection and implementation of a new ILS?

Not significantly. Most ILS vendors are preparing to accept RDA records into their databases. They also know that RDA records and AACR2 records will have to coexist in databases for a long time. Since all the vendors under consideration use records coded in MaRC, and MLS records are coded in MaRC, a vendor's software will be able to read the MLS records. Some records may need to be "tweaked" slightly, but the inclusion of RDA and AACR2 records is not an issue.

Are other libraries in Oklahoma and around the country also making this change?

Yes. Most U.S. libraries are transitioning to RDA simply because Library of Congress, which functions as our national library and major source of catalog records, is transitioning. Some libraries, especially large academic libraries, have already transitioned. Others are waiting until after the Library of Congress implementation date, or until more RDA records are available.

Are we one of the first making this change or have most other libraries already done this?

MLS is probably somewhere in the middle of the pack. Our system did not implement RDA as soon as it became available, but we are not planning to wait until it becomes critical.

In Oklahoma, MLS is more toward the front of the pack, especially among public libraries. The large academic libraries, OU and OSU, are in the lead and are creating RDA records; most smaller academics are not doing so as yet. MLS is one of the first Oklahoma public libraries to begin creating original records that meet RDA standards. Most other public libraries are accepting RDA records from other sources, but have not created any from scratch.