

To: ALA/ALCTS/CaMMS Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access

From: John Attig, ALA Representative to the Joint Steering Committee

Subject: Descriptions of relationships (RDA section 8)

## Introduction

The report of the US RDA Test Coordinating Committee included the following recommendation at l.g.xi:

Add more instructions about the use of contents notes and the information included in such notes (e.g., use of performer's name)

During the drafting of RDA, there were questions about where RDA covered contents notes. The answer was that a contents note is a listing of the parts of the manifestation being described and is considered to be a structured description of a related manifestation. Structured descriptions in general are covered by RDA 24.4.3 and related manifestations are covered by RDA 27.1.1.3, which contains examples of contents notes. Appendix J contains appropriate relationship designators that may be included in structured description of the contents of a manifestation.

CC:DA has also discussed the question of where RDA covers accompanying material. Again the answer was that accompanying material is a type of related manifestation and is covered by RDA 27.1.1.3, although in this case there do not seem to be any examples. Appendix J contains appropriate relationship designators that may be included in a structured description of the accompanying manifestation.

Contents notes and accompanying material statements raise issues relating to the mapping of RDA to the ISBD, as well as to MARC 21. In the case of contents notes, there are at least examples to indicate the appropriate RDA element. In the case of accompanying material, only the inclusion of "accompanying manifestation" designators in Appendix J indicates the appropriate RDA element.

What RDA does **not** include, I would argue, are *instructions* about how to record a structured description of a relationship. I would contend that this is a significant lacuna in RDA, one which makes it difficult to find the instructions for certain types of structured descriptions (such as contents notes and accompanying material statements), raises questions about what to include in such unstructured descriptions (see the recommendation from the RDA Test Coordinating Committee quoted above), and makes mapping to other standards uncertain.

I would like to suggest that CC:DA pursue the implications of this contention. As a way of getting started, I offer the following background information and some assertions to serve as a starting point for discussion.

## Background

RDA 24.4.3 contains the basic instruction about recording the description of a relationship, using an identifier, an authorized access point, a structured description, or an unstructured description. In RDA 24.4.3, a **structured description** is defined as:

a full or partial description of the related resource using the same order of elements that is used for the resource being described

This implies, but does not state, that a structured description is made up of elements defined elsewhere in RDA, combined — “using the same order of elements that is used for the resource being described” — to form a composite element.

It also implies that the order in which elements are recorded within an RDA description has some significance — which I find puzzling (to say the least).

The instructions for recording specific relationships in Chapters 25–28 simply refer to 24.4 as a whole for “general guidelines on referencing” the related entity.

Regarding structured descriptions, there are no instructions that specify *which* elements to include when describing any type of relationship. This is often obvious and can be deduced from the examples. However, even these raise some questions. Why, for example, do the structured descriptions of some related works include edition statements and publication statements? This suggests that even the obvious might need to be stated.

Given this background, I offer the following debatable assertions as a starting point for debate.

## Assertions for discussion

1. There ought to be instructions on recording relationships as structured descriptions. [In this document, I am primarily concerned with structured descriptions, but CC:DA might want to discuss whether there ought also to be instructions on recording relationships as identifiers, as authorized access points, or as unstructured descriptions.]
2. Such instructions ought to make explicit the basic guideline that a structured description is made up of appropriate elements defined elsewhere in RDA, recorded in the same order that is used for the resource being described, and combined into a single composite element.
3. Such instructions ought to include provision for inclusion of an appropriate relationship designator (or language derived from such a designator), in order to specify the nature of the relationship.
4. Such instructions ought to provide some guidance about what elements might be appropriate for each relationship. For example, should the structured description of a Related Work consist only of work elements? This would be problematic as it would mean that the Related Work would be cited by its Preferred Title, not the Title Proper of the manifestation embodying that work (as is commonly done in

- the examples). It would mean that a Related Expression might need to be cited by the Preferred Title for the Expression, an element intentionally excluded from RDA. However, the instructions should at least be clear whether manifestation elements such as Publication Statement are appropriate in the description of a related work or expression.
5. The instructions ought to make it clear whether the distinction between transcribed and recorded elements applies in structured descriptions.
  6. There ought to be a place within the instructions for dealing with the description of specific types of related entities, such as contents notes and accompanying material. This would not only provide useful guidance to catalogers, but would provide granularity that would facilitate mapping to standards such as ISBD and MARC 21.
  7. With regard to contents notes, the instruction ought to be to record the title proper and statement of responsibility of each part of the manifestation being described and, in addition, other elements that relate to the parts (such as extent, playing time, or names of performers), if such information is to be recorded for each part.
  8. With regard to accompanying material, the instruction ought to be to record the extent of the accompanying manifestation, together with other identifying information (such as dimensions), as appropriate. This would allow such a structured description to qualify as an ISBD accompanying material statement.
  9. The instructions ought to include references to the RDA guidelines and instructions for any element referenced.
  10. Specific categories of related entities (such as contents notes) ought to be named in the captions for the instructions and ought to be included in the RDA index. This is the ultimate solution to the problem of finding where RDA has hidden these instructions.
  11. Finally, both the identifier and the authorized access point support linked-data applications; the unstructured description does not. The structured description *could* support linked-data applications — *if* the individual elements making up the description were identified in the encoding. This may not be an issue relating to the structure or text of RDA, but it is worth keeping in mind as we consider the development of additional instructions on recording structured descriptions of relationships.

## Next steps

If CC:DA accepts the basic contention that there is a gap in RDA that needs to be filled, then a decision will need to be made whether to form a Task Force, commission an expanded discussion paper from an individual or group, or simply continue the discussion informally.