

To: CC:DA

From: Bibliographic Control Committee, Music Library Association

Re: 4JSC/CCC/6: Preliminary response

The Subcommittee on Descriptive Cataloging and the Bibliographic Control Committee of the Music Library Association have given initial consideration to the CCC proposal to revise 6.5B1 to record the specific format of the physical carrier using conventional terminology as the base rule and the current instructions as the option. Our comments here should be taken as preliminary, with the understanding that a fuller response is forthcoming in the near future.

MLA adamantly opposes this proposal as it currently stands. While we agree there is a benefit in introducing the possibility of more flexible terminology in Area 5, we strongly disagree with the suggested revisions. Our main reasons, with short discussion, follow.

1. Lack of adequate justification for the rule change

The chief reason for this proposal, consistency of rules across formats, is inadequate justification for the magnitude of the proposed change and its consequences. Changing the rules of one chapter (or more) simply to parallel the rules of a different, unrelated chapter is flawed reasoning in and of itself, much less sufficient grounds for such a major revision. If we were to follow this logic, we would also need to introduce a rule revision for Chapter 2, so that the physical description could state "1 book" or "1 duodecimo."

The further justifying statement that the "revision will allow for greater flexibility, the provision of more meaningful information for end-users and the accommodation of information pertaining to new and emerging formats" is only partially correct. Certainly, the revision allows for great flexibility in Area 5. However, the provision of more conventional terms, suggested to be more meaningful for end-users, is already available in sound recording cataloging in Area 7. Rule 6.7B10 (Physical description) gives the suggested note "Compact disc"; certainly any other conventional term may also be included. As for accommodation of information pertaining to new and emerging formats, this revision has little impact. Such formats as DVD-Audio and minidisks can already be described according to the rules of Chapter 6. Sound files do pose a problem, but require revisions beyond Area 5 in order to be accommodated.

All this being said, MLA reluctantly agrees that because of the impact of the introduction of conventional terminology in Chapter 9, that we should consider revising Chapter 6 to **optionally** allow conventional terms currently relegated to note fields to appear in Area 5. However, we believe it is a mistake to make conventional terminology the rule, a mistake to abandon a controlled vocabulary that is currently, and will remain,

intelligible to the broadest base of end-users, and a mistake to blindly adopt the wording of Chapter 9 without looking at other possibilities that may better serve our users.

2. The elimination of the SMD and the resulting loss of consistency

The proposed rule revision makes our current SMD optional. This implies that either the SMD is either outdated or otherwise no longer useful or that conventional terminology serves the exact same role as the current SMD and can thus replace it. MLA cannot agree with either of these implications. The SMD provides a consistent and controlled vocabulary to describe sound recording formats. Conventional terminology cannot do this.

The SMD provides two important descriptive elements—the content (sound) and the carrier (disc, cassette, etc.). The only other descriptive element to state that the content is sound in the bibliographic record is the GMD [sound recording]. The GMD, however, is an optional addition, is misplaced in being in Area 1, and has a doubtful future. Thus the SMD is the only mandatory descriptive element that informs a patron that an item is a sound recording of some type. If the GMD is eliminated, the SMD and its partner subfields, will be the **only** descriptive element that states that an item contains recorded sound.

Conventional terminology may also provide a mixed content/carrier descriptor, but not necessarily. The term DVD-Audio is a conventional and current term that mixes content and carrier. The term “CD”, the most conventional term for a 4 ¾ inch sound disc, however, gives no indication of content. The term is used for sound recordings, but is also quite commonly, and not incorrectly, used conventionally for CD-ROMs. Examples of conventional terminology for sound recordings that ignore content are numerous: wax cylinder, 78, LP record, minidisc, etc. The crucial content descriptor found in the SMD is either downplayed or disappears completely with conventional terminology, and may result, as is the case with the term “CD”, in ambiguity about both the content and type of carrier.

The SMD also provides a mostly controlled and consistent vocabulary to describe the content and carrier of sound recordings. Because of this, catalogers can share records, knowing that the vocabulary in other records will agree with those of their own institution. Patrons too, with a small amount of training in the vocabulary, can benefit from this controlled description as they locally or remotely search a variety of library catalogs. They can be confident that each format is described in the same way in any catalog based on AACR. This consistency of description from one catalog to another is a cataloging goal dating back to the Paris Principles of 1961 and is a basic concept of AACR2.

Conventional terminology is uncontrolled. Terminology that is completely up to the cataloger or an institution and considered “conventional” may differ widely among age groups, regions, types of users, or even catalogers in the same unit. Sound recording catalogers have long experience with this issue—is it a 78 or a shellac disc?; an LP (l.p.), record, vinyl or a 33?—and are deeply concerned by the loss of consistency that the optionality of the SMD would cause.

Conventional terminology on first glance may seem to better serve end users, but it can easily backfire. Sound recording catalogers know from experience that conventional terminology is not stable. Terminology changes over time, especially when formats become obsolete or when they need to be differentiated from a newer related format. The terms DVD-Audio and SACD seem fairly stable and conventional at the moment, but this may change as these formats become the norm or fall into obsolescence. For instance, the sound recording format conventionally known as the compact disc or CD in the mid 1980s may now be designated a CD-R or CD-RW. What might be conventional terminology today may completely mystify users five to ten years from now.

Within the same time period different age groups, different user groups, and different regions or countries may use completely different terms for the same format. What an older generation calls an “LP record” (or “l.p.”—a significant difference for a computer database), another group knows as “vinyl” and the two groups do not necessarily understand the other’s terms. Nor, as is illustrated above, is every term exclusive. The conventional terms CD, DVD, record, and many others do not necessarily refer to a single format or type of content. Relying exclusively on inconsistent, changeable, and ambiguous terminology as the primary physical descriptor in bibliographic records is a mistake.

Shared cataloging requires shared terminology. With inconsistent and uncontrolled terminology, sharing of cataloging records becomes more difficult. However, it is highly probable that different institutions will pick different conventional terms, depending on their user base. When using another institution’s catalog records, cataloging units will have to decide whether to manually change all the terms they do not use or to permit inconsistent use of terms. The first option is unlikely to be adopted by institutions because of time constraints and production requirements. The second option will introduce confusion to the catalog and its users, as some formats may be described with multiple terms and multiple formats may be described with the same term. What is meant to be a service to users will likely end up as a disservice as terms proliferate and fail to distinguish among different formats. And since conventional terms tend to change over time, catalogs in ten years time may be full of descriptors that are completely unintelligible to the community they are intended to serve.

Because of the major loss of consistency in an area where consistency equates with intelligibility and because of the attendant problems that conventional terminology would bring about, MLA will not accept a rule change that makes conventional terminology the basic rule for Area 5 in Chapter 6. We feel the SMD provides consistent and controlled terminology for describing content and carriers in sound recordings across local and international boundaries as well as over time, and is therefore a valuable and necessary convention in a shared cataloging world. Conventional terminology is also of value, but its inconsistency and transitoriness should relegate it to a subordinate position.

3. Impact on other rules in AACR

The proposal does not discuss how this rule change will impact other rules in AACR. The current SMD does not stand alone as the sole physical descriptor—there are other rules

within Area 5 and Area 7 that are crucial to the description. How will these be affected? If we now say “1 compact disc” instead of “1 sound disc”, do we need the rest of the description “digital, stereo. ; 4 ¾ in.”? Do we leave in the redundancy or remove it?

Related to this is the nature of conventional terminology for sound recordings. Sound recording terminology usually refers to some specific physical aspect of the recording, whether it be its material of manufacture (e.g. acetate disc, vinyl), its playing speed (78, 45), size (minidisc, compact disc), or intellectual content (audio book, transcription disc). Again, the current rules state that many of these descriptors belong in another part of Area 5 (6.5C (Other physical details) and 6.5D (Dimensions)). More discussion is required about the impact of conventional terminology on these other rules.

4. Lack of support among the affected communities

There is virtually no support in the MLA community for making conventional terminology the base rule. There is reluctant agreement that the option of a more flexible approach to terminology in Area 5 should be made possible to accommodate the needs of some users, but MLA will not support making conventional terminology the base rule. According to the proposal itself, there is also reluctance in the Canadian music community in accepting this proposal. Lack of positive support from the constituencies most affected should suggest that this proposal is deeply flawed.

5. Lack of exploration of alternatives to the rule as stated in Chapter 9

The conventional terminology rules for Chapter 9 were created with only Chapter 9 in mind; they were developed to address a problem as perceived by catalogers of electronic resources. There was little or no consideration given to the impact, present or future, on other chapters. That impact now needs to be addressed directly and the Chapter 9 rules revisited in light of expanding the application of conventional terminology to other chapters. The broader community of catalogers must seek to fully understand the implications of the application of conventional terminology in their respective fields, and to explore more suitable methods of introducing conventional terminology into Area 5. There may be a better way, or at least a way that can bring about an acceptable compromise. Or it may also happen that different chapters will have different requirements and thus will need different rules as already happens in Area 5.

In the spirit of this exploration, we would like to offer a possible alternative method to introducing conventional terminology to Area 5 that is far more acceptable to the music cataloging community. This is part of a formal proposal (or perhaps now a counterproposal) that we will submit in full at a future date.

The gist of this proposal is that Area 5 consist of the current SMD and optionally, a more specific descriptive term for an item, which we call the “optional conventional term qualifier”. In this way, the stability of the SMD is retained, but the possibility of more specific terminology is there. Our proposal is as follows:

6.5B. Extent of item (including specific material designation)

6.5B1. Record the number and type of physical units of a ~~sound recording~~ the carrier by giving the number of ~~parts~~ them in arabic numerals and one of the following terms as appropriate:

sound cartridge
sound cassette
sound disc
sound tape reel
sound track film

1 sound cartridge

2 sound cassettes

Add reel, cassette, etc., as appropriate, to sound track film.

1 sound track film reel

Use [name of instrument] roll, as appropriate, for rolls.

2 piano rolls

~~If none of these terms is appropriate, give the specific name of the item as concisely as possible.~~

For types of physical carriers not listed above, give the specific name of the physical carrier as concisely as possible.

~~*Optionally, if general material designations are used (see 1.1C1), omit *sound* from the specific material designation unless it is needed to make the designation understandable (as with sound track film).*~~

Optionally, add conventional terminology to the specific format to delineate a special characteristic of the physical carrier:

1 sound disc (CD)

1 sound disc (DVD-Audio)

3 sound cartridges (DAT)

4 sound discs (manual sequence)

1 sound file (WAV)

90 sound files (MP3)

But, give a necessary trade name or other similar specification in a note.