

Book Review: RDA Essentials | Dull | Library Resources & Technical Services

RDA Essentials. By Thomas Brenndorfer.

With his excellent reference work, *RDA Essentials*, Thomas Brenndorfer presents a guide to the cataloging code Resource Description and Access (RDA) that is both comprehensive and comprehensible. Brenndorfer provides catalogers with a clear path through RDA, helping them to understand the cataloging code and its underlying principles in plain English. Through his thorough introduction, Brenndorfer clearly and intelligently illustrates for readers the connections between the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records model (FRBR), FRBR user tasks, and the creation of bibliographic description. Readers of this work will thus gain not only a fairly complete bibliographic description of their chosen item, but also a greater appreciation for RDA's structure and conceptual underpinnings.

Brenndorfer launched his cataloging career in 1990 at the National Library of Canada. He has presented on FRBR and RDA at conferences for the Ontario Library Association and Canadian Library Association (verso). *RDA Essentials* stems from Brenndorfer's belief in the "importance of FRBR for the future of catalogs" (verso), a conviction clearly illustrated in his approach to elucidating RDA. The overarching organizational structure of *RDA Essentials* is, like RDA, grounded in the FRBR model. His discussion on how the Group 1 entities Work—Expression—Manifestation—Item (WEMI) relate to the distinction between content versus carrier is lucid and one of the best this reviewer has read. Librarians who have struggled to understand these concepts will find this short summary very useful.

Though Brenndorfer ably handles the theoretical side of RDA, his book is still grounded in practice. The main structure of the book follows the mental path that a cataloger would normally take when creating a bibliographic description. In the introduction, Brenndorfer sets out a “sequence of steps” (xi) that any cataloger would take when creating a simple description, such as for a book. In doing so, Brenndorfer describes how the FRBR user tasks—find, identify, select, and obtain—are truly at the heart of RDA. This user task-based workflow will help more experienced catalogers incorporate these tasks more directly into their work.

RDA Essentials is ultimately designed to serve as a “quick reference source for the RDA element set” (ix). While readers can, and probably should, follow it chapter by chapter when first creating a bibliographic description, it will most likely serve more experienced catalogers as a tool for clarifying particular elements or rules. The book is organized into four sections. Section 1, which is the bulk of the text, is on the elements themselves. In thirteen chapters, Brenndorfer moves the reader through the WEMI model and FRBR user tasks. Each chapter begins with a short list of relevant terminology, often followed by a sidebar called “Supporting the User.” This sidebar reemphasizes the FRBR user tasks as they are related to the given elements, such as how the “data recorded also supports users finding works any expressions that correspond to the user’s stated search criteria” (127). Each chapter contains a chart of the elements covered in the chapter. Any related subelements are provided, as well as an indication if the element is considered core or is transcribed. “Sources of Information” for the elements are then provided. The bulk of each chapter in this section consists of each element fully described, with the related RDA rules indicated, and an example of the rule applied to a bibliographic description. Exceptions, alternatives, and related elements are also provided. Section 2 contains guidelines that are referenced in the first section and provide additional detail and support around such issues as transcription (chapter 14) and statements of responsibility (chapter 18). Section 3 guides the user on constructing access points. Section 4 provides a conclusion to the work by addressing other additional instructions, such as

cases involving multiples elements (chapter 31).

Of course, as this book is about the essentials, there are some areas of cataloging with RDA that are not covered. Brenndorfer leaves the question of subjects—the creation of headings and their applications—to other resources. His work does not delve into more complex or unique issues of RDA cataloging, such as early printed resources, legal or musical works, or

“instructions for changing descriptions because of the Mode of Issuance” (xv).

Despite this, *RDA Essentials* will provide a solid jumping off point for most catalogers, especially for libraries dealing with more conventional collections and materials.

What is vital to note about this work is that it specifically “does not provide encoding instructions, such as those for MARC” (ix). Rather, readers should use this work to gain a better understanding of the elements themselves, and later map those to whatever relevant encoding schemes (such as MARC fields). This is an incredibly powerful and important approach to teaching RDA. RDA was designed to be encoding neutral, and sometimes a reliance on the MARC fields or thinking about cataloging through the narrow scope of the MARC record can cause the loss of the notion and the power of relationships in RDA. The focus on records is secondary to the “important lesson is that RDA is about recording well-formed *data* and recording *relationships*” (xvi). This approach also fosters a deeper understanding of the RDA elements and will better prepare catalogers to use RDA in a variety of encoding contexts now and in the future. It also, quite rightly, refocuses the act of cataloging on users through recording “robust and reliable data in order to maximize support for users engaged in resource discovery” (xvi). Overall, this is a comprehensive work that would be brilliant as a textbook in a cataloging class. As a cataloger, this reviewer has already used this book in daily work and looks forward to keeping it close by.—Margaret E. Dull (mdull@ubalt.edu), University of Baltimore, Baltimore, Maryland