



## Book review: RDA and Serials Cataloging

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Jones, E. (2025) *RDA and Serials Cataloging*. Second edition. Chicago: ALA Editions. ISBN 978-0-8389-4871-2 (print), ISBN 979-8-89255-539-5 (PDF), ISBN 979-8-89255-538-8 (ePub)

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This book by Ed Jones is your key to demystifying that trifecta of complicated cataloguing scenarios – Official RDA, serials, and MARC21. An updated version of his original book, *RDA and Serials Cataloging*, first published in 2013, this second edition covers all the exciting developments in the cataloguing world over the past decade.

Serials are fascinating items to describe – they change and shift over the course of time, but still maintain their identity. They're seen as “difficult” to describe, and are treated with trepidation. I have been involved in serials cataloguing for over thirty years, and I found myself relaxing into this book, knowing that it was easy to read, full of practical advice, and not afraid to shy away from complicated scenarios and examples. As the author says:

“RDA and Serials Cataloging is designed to be used by serials catalogers who are new to RDA and by monograph catalogers who are new to serials cataloging”

The first part is split into three chapters, tackling an overview of serials, an introduction to RDA, and searching serials. There was a lot on the history of serials and their description, which I found absolutely riveting, starting off with that question asked of all those involved in serials – “What is a serial?” There is no definitive answer (as I have heard before, everything is a serial), but:

“... a serial is like a good work of art: you may not be able to say what a serial is, but you know one when you see one.”

Setting the ground work of how serials behave is a good introduction to their description, and this book covers print, electronic, continuing and integrating resources, both scholarly and popular, and everything in between. The history of serials cataloguing is something that is worth a read, and Ed Jones gives a succinct description, and then treats the development of RDA in the same way.

The second part of the book is entitled "*Cataloging Serials and Ongoing Integrating Resources Using RDA*". And it really is very thorough! Most of this part is about cataloguing in MARC21, the carrier standard still used by the vast majority of libraries. So, we have a combination of how to treat a serial in both RDA and MARC21, covering content and carrier. Examples are plentiful and comprehensive, and so many variables are covered. If you don't have access to the RDA Toolkit, this book is a good manual to use in its place (with the caveat that the RDA Toolkit will be constantly updated, and this defined book will not – well, not until the next edition, at any rate). I liked the approach of thinking about how to tackle a serial before you start filling in your serials bibliographic record – there is discussion around major and minor title changes, a breakdown of the 007 and 008 fields in MARC21 (Physical Description Fixed Field, and Fixed Length Data Elements, respectively), when to create a new record... all the points that can look rather intimidating to anyone new to serials cataloguing. There are some useful points throughout marking the difference between AACR2, ISBD and RDA, which are useful for those who are coming new to RDA, but have catalogued in AACR2. For example (about editions):

"Prescribed punctuation:

**AACR2:** Edition area ends with a single period /stop.

**ISBD (revised):** Edition area ends with two periods /stops whenever the last element in the area ends in a period /stop (e.g., an abbreviation).

**RDA:** Does not prescribe punctuation."

"*RDA and Serials Cataloging*" starts off gently with print serials, but then does move into the heavy hitting world of online serials, born digital, version control, integrating resources, different formats (print and electronic, and even microform), and shows with full record examples ways of dealing with these. Reading the theory is one thing, but backing it up with solid examples helps massively when it comes to cataloguing serials, or, as RDA calls them, diachronic works.

There is also discussion about carrier standards other than MARC21, such as BIBFRAME. RDA was always meant to be a standard used more widely than purely in the library world, and other forms of data description will affect how we describe items in other ways. Linked Data, mapping between different vocabularies and standards – all of these are referenced as something to explore and look forward to. As the author says:

[The future] "holds both great promise and novel challenges, and libraries can expect to be in the thick of it. A brave new world indeed."

To conclude, this volume should be a valued addition to any cataloguing bookshelf. It describes how to handle serials cataloguing in a way that is easy to read and makes sense. Serials should not be shrouded in mystery, and "*RDA and Serials Cataloging*" is a very useful tool to combat any anxiety associated with serials cataloguing.