

# RDA in German-speaking countries (DACH)

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## ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of the approach taken by the DACH Region (German, Austria and Switzerland) and the actions of its Committee for Library Standards (Standardisierungsausschuss). This includes using a Companion Subscription for Official RDA to enable the development of a range of resources in which RDA is not only a metadata standard for library resources but a useful standard for metadata from non-library communities. A list of useful resources is included.

**KEYWORDS** RDA; RDA Toolkit; Dokumentationsplattform des Standardisierungsausschusses

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## Cooperation in the DACH area: The Committee for Library Standards

In 2001, libraries in Germany, Austria and Switzerland founded the Committee for Library Standards (Standardisierungsausschuss). All types of libraries are represented in the Committee: national libraries, academic libraries, special libraries, public libraries and library networks. Since then, numerous other non-library, cultural, and academic organisations and institutions have joined the Committee. The German National Library manages this work.

The Committee for Library Standards ensures the creation and use of common standards for cataloguing. These are rules for cataloguing, data formats and interfaces. Wherever possible, the standards used should be international. The Committee for Library Standards also promotes the harmonisation of cataloguing and networking with non-library communities, such as archives, museums, digital humanities, online encyclopaedias and bibliographies. The Committee for Library Standards is also responsible for the GND (Gemeinsame Normdatei/Integrated Authority File). The GND represents and describes entities of all kinds, related to

cultural and scientific collections. The GND identifier plays a key role in linking all types of data. Current topics being addressed by the Committee for Library Standards are artificial intelligence and the reliability and trustworthiness of library metadata.

### **RDA: the Original Toolkit**

One result of this collaboration is the introduction of RDA in the DACH region. The *“Regeln für die Alphabetische Katalogisierung RAK”* (Rules for Descriptive Cataloguing), which had been in use in Germany and Austria since the 1970s, have been replaced. The introduction of RDA in the GND took place in 2014. This was followed in 2015 by the introduction of RDA in descriptive cataloguing. The Original Toolkit was translated. The DACH policy statements were also integrated into the toolkit. The creation of the DACH policy statements posed various challenges. The RDA data had to remain compatible with the existing legacy data. The Original RDA Toolkit was still strongly influenced by AACR2. The Toolkit offered good solutions for US publications, but less accurate ones for German, Austrian or Swiss issues. The dominance of English as the language of cataloguing was also problematic. The RDA Toolkit also failed to meet internationalisation requirements in other areas. Christian writings, for instance, were given greater prominence than those of non-Christian religious communities.

The Committee for Library Standards negotiated a consortium agreement with the RDA copyright holders for all three participating countries, Germany, Austria and Switzerland, to access the RDA Toolkit.

The national libraries of Germany, Austria and Switzerland also defined a common cataloguing level for national bibliographic records. This national bibliographic level makes data exchange easier and has also been adopted by other major libraries in German-speaking countries.

### **RDA DACH and the Official Toolkit**

The renewal of RDA (Official Toolkit) also implemented some of the requirements of DACH libraries. The RDA Toolkit became more international. The Official Toolkit provides flexibility to incorporate country-, language- or culture-specific requirements into the rules using application profiles. The interoperability of data is ensured by the framework of the RDA Toolkit. The DACH region wants to continue using RDA because interoperability with data from libraries worldwide and other institutions is important. Many cataloguers also expressed that they would like to have all the rules necessary for their daily work compiled in one place. However, it was not possible to integrate the documentation of the format and rules for the GND and subject analysis into the Official Toolkit.

The Committee for Library Standards responded to this need and decided in 2020 to bring together all the rules and standards for the DACH region on one platform. This platform (*“Dokumentationsplattform des Standardisierungsausschusses”*) is the central

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point of access for all standards. The following rules and guidelines are published on this platform:

- RDA DACH,
- guidelines for the GND, the data format, the rules for subject analysis and a sample collection.

RDA DACH are the cataloguing rules for German-speaking countries. The Official Toolkit is the basis for RDA DACH. The Application Profile has been directly integrated into the translated Official Toolkit text. The Application Profile has various functions. It clarifies unclear or ambiguous statements in the Official Toolkit. It fills gaps in the Official Toolkit. The Application Profile also ensures the compatibility of RDA data with data from previous rule sets (e.g. RAK). Last but not least, the Application Profile adapts the Official Toolkit, where necessary, to the specific requirements of German-speaking countries.

The Committee for Library Standards wants all types of resources to be catalogued using RDA DACH. The rules in the Official Toolkit are only rudimentary for some types of resources. They are not sufficient to describe and catalogue large collections of special materials. The Committee has set up working groups to develop application profiles for these types of resources: pictures, music (music recordings and sheet music), sounds and other audio recordings, AV media, films, manuscripts, autographs, rare books, artist's books, performing arts, maps and collections. Other working groups are responsible for specific aspects of cataloguing: GND, provenance of resources, provenance of metadata, religious texts, legal documents, documents in non-Latin scripts, documents in braille, historical corporate bodies, etc. Multilingualism is particularly important for Swiss libraries.

One successful example of cooperation with non-library institutions is the set of rules developed for literary archives. Literary archives collect all kinds of objects related to writers and literary works. These include books, handwritten letters, typewriters, personal documents, pictures, etc. The introduction of RDA in libraries encouraged literary archives in German-speaking countries to catalogue their collections in accordance with RDA. The literary archives recognised that RDA creates a framework that simplifies the exchange and linking of metadata. Within five years, an international group developed the set of rules for cataloguing literary archives, "*Ressourcenerschließung mit Normdaten in Archiven und Bibliotheken (RNAB)*". The members of the working group are literary scholars and librarians. The RNAB rules are published separately and serve as a set of rules for cataloguing literary archives. The language is kept simple so that even literary scholars without library training can work with it. In addition to the separate publication, the RNAB are also integrated into the DACH RDA platform as an application profile for literary archives. The RDA framework

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guarantees interoperability with other standards that are important for literary archives, such as ISAD(G)<sup>1</sup> and Records in Context (RiC)<sup>2</sup>.

For other types of resources, a similar procedure is used in German-speaking countries. For example, librarians work together with art historians and museologists in the working group for pictures. Simply extending the rules for monographs to other resources is not sufficient. Three aspects are important for the development of an application profile for non-books:

- a. Cataloguing is based on the specific characteristics of the resource. An example: pictures often have no title, but some have captions. Names of pictures are often constructed. This contrasts with the library cataloguing of books. Books always have a title.
- b. Existing cataloguing traditions of non-library institutions should be taken into account.
- c. The catalogue should answer users' questions.

The Committee for Library Standards wants to achieve two main goals by working with non-library institutions. The first goal is to link metadata. This should result in better service for users. The second goal is to concentrate the efforts. This saves financial resources and working time.

The Committee for Library Standards signed up for an RDA Companion Subscription for the DACH region. The Companion Subscription not only enables the publication of RDA DACH, but also gives access to the Official Toolkit. Access to the Official Toolkit remains important for the development of RDA DACH. The RDA DACH is intended to facilitate the daily work of cataloguers and should not be interpreted as decoupling German-speaking libraries from international standards.

## Outlook

The Committee for Library Standards continues to promote cross-disciplinary cooperation in the field of metadata and cataloguing. The ongoing development of RDA to improve its interoperability with archival, museum and digital humanities standards should continue at regional and global levels. Another important topic is the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to cataloguing. It is necessary to define the elements that constitute RDA. New automated cataloguing methods also necessitate new definitions of the quality and reliability of library metadata.

<sup>1</sup> ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description (2000) 2nd ed. International Council on Archive. Available at: <https://www.ica.org/resource/isadg-general-international-standard-archival-description-second-edition/> [Accessed: 18 June 2026]

<sup>2</sup> International Council on Archives Expert Group on Archival Description (no date) Records in Contexts (RiC). Available at: <https://www.ica.org/ica-network/expert-groups/egad/records-in-contexts-ric/> [Accessed: 18 June 2026]

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