

TO: Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR
FROM: Jennifer Bowen, ALA Representative
RE: Dimensions of binding and of item(s) contained therein

ALA generally agrees with the proposal to allow the option of recording the dimensions of a resource contained within a binding in addition to recording the dimensions of the binding itself, although we do not necessarily agree with all of the specifics of the proposal. Responses to specific points are given below, following the same organization used in the proposal.

Background

Scope. ALA agrees that there is no reason to limit the proposal to “early printed resources.”

Current situation in RDA

3.5.0.5. ALA agrees that the current AACR2 glossary definition of “container” rules out treating a binding as a container, and that revision of 3.5.0.5 would therefore be inappropriate.

3.5.1.3. ALA agrees that the instruction to record the height of a binding in 3.5.1.3 is equally applicable both when the focus of the description is an individual unit contained within that binding and when the focus of the description is the whole volume. We point out, however, that the proposed options in 3.5.1.1 and 3.5.1.2 do not adequately address both of these scenarios (see “Postscript” below for a more extended discussion of this point).

3.5.3. ALA expresses no opinion on whether the option should also be applied explicitly to maps.

“Common” vs. “local”

Chapter 6. ALA notes that because the original chapter 6 has been removed from RDA, additions to chapter 6 no longer represent an alternative model to the proposal. Any revision of 3.5.1 will need to be applicable both to resources that have been issued in a binding and to items that have been bound subsequent to publication. ALA notes that both the current text in 3.5.1 and the proposed revision gloss over this distinction. If the rules are intended to apply in both situations, this should be made explicit. If not, the instructions need to be expanded.

Record-sharing. Despite the fact that the proposed revisions in 3.5.1.1 and 3.5.1.2 represent optional additions, ALA has some concerns about the variations in description

that might result from the recording of copy-specific dimensions, and the implications of this practice for record-sharing. These concerns are mitigated by several factors: 1) the scope of the materials likely to receive this treatment is relatively small; 2) such materials are likely to receive extra time and care in cataloging anyway; and 3) in a master-record environment, there is usually a centralized set of criteria governing which differences warrant a discrete description. We also recognize that record-sharing concerns of this nature extend far beyond the scope of this proposal, given that the dimensions of early printed resources already tend to be item-specific by default (i.e., even when there is no significant difference between the height of an item and its binding). Resources from the hand-press era, in particular, will often exist only in “local” bindings and their leaves usually will have been trimmed during the binding process, sometimes significantly. Given that the original dimensions of the leaves “as issued” will frequently be unknown, local information must often stand for general information. However, in cases when the original dimensions are indeed known with some certainty (e.g., the resource is known to have been originally issued without a binding and the dimensions of the leaves as issued are known from other copies of the resource), perhaps the rules need to be more explicit on when an item’s dimensions (including the proposed optional additions) would appropriately be recorded as a “common” data element and when they would appropriately be recorded as a “local” data element.

Postscript

Proposed deletion of 3.5.1.3. ALA points out that the proposed deletion of 3.5.1.3, which instructs to record the dimensions of the binding in cases when several resources of varying heights are bound together, is somewhat problematic. Although it is true that applying the general rules in 3.5.1.1 and 3.5.1.2 in cases of “bound-with” resources would produce the same end result as applying 3.5.1.3 (i.e., in all cases, one is instructed to record the dimensions of the binding), problems arise when trying to apply the proposed optional additions in 3.5.1.1 and 3.5.1.2 because these options only address the description of single items (the option in each case refers to “**a** bound item”). They do not provide guidance in applying the option when the focus of the description is an entire volume containing resources of varying heights bound together. Should the height of the smallest resource in the volume be given? The height of the largest resource? The heights of the range of resources (e.g., “22-25 cm in binding 27 cm”)? Or are the options not meant to apply in such cases?

ALA suggests that this issue needs to be addressed. The options for doing so would be: 1) expanding the proposed options in 3.5.1.1 and 3.5.1.2 to account for situations when several resources of varying heights are bound together; 2) keeping the current instruction in 3.5.1.3, but adding an option to record the height of the resource(s) in addition to the binding; or 3) specifying (whether in 3.5.1.1 and 3.5.1.2 or in 3.5.1.3, if retained) that the optional addition does not apply when the focus of the description is an entire volume containing resources of varying heights bound together.

It seems likely that the 3.5.1.3 situation (many resources of different heights bound together) will almost always apply to items that have been bound subsequent to publication. However, in cases when the focus of the description will be the entire volume, the question of whether the dimensions would constitute “common” vs. “local” data elements would be mute, as the entire description of the collective resource would essentially consist of “local” elements.

Proposed revision of 3.5.1-3.5.5 (new 3.5.1-3.5.4)

Examples. The proposed revisions of 3.5.1.1-3.5.1.2 suggest that the height of the resource and the height of the binding be “connected by an appropriate phrase.” However, the examples provided in the proposal all follow the same pattern of using “in binding” as the connective phrase. In order to promote greater flexibility in the application of the option, ALA suggests that the Examples Group be directed to provide at least one additional example with alternative connective wording (e.g., “22 cm bound to 24 cm”). Such an example would have the added advantage of paralleling the “folded to” wording used in the 3.5.1.4 example.