

To: Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA
From: John Attig, ALA Representative to the JSC
Subject: Review of RDA Vocabularies: Extent terms

Observations and Questions regarding Extent Terms in RDA

Continuing my way through the RDA Vocabularies in the Registry, I reviewed the RDA vocabularies for the various sub-types of the Extent element: Extent of Cartographic Resource, Extent of Notated Music, Extent of Still Image, Extent of Text, and Extent of Three-Dimensional Form. These vocabularies raise a number of issues on which I would like to consult the JSC before completing the review.

Note: CC:DA has just set up a Task Force to look at “machine-actionable data elements” in RDA Chapter 3. It is quite likely that this group will be looking at some of these same issues and may make recommendations to change the structure of the Extent element. The JSC might prefer to wait until this Task Force has completed its work (I doubt that this will be in time for any revision proposals to be considered at our Glasgow meeting) before making any decisions on these issues. From my perspective in reviewing the Registry, I would prefer to have at least a preliminary discussion by the JSC at this time.

Singular and plural terms. The instructions for each of the Extent sub-types includes the instruction “Record the term in the singular or plural, as applicable.” The current state of the Registry is inconsistent, but for at least some of the vocabularies (e.g., Extent of Cartographic Resource) both singular and plural terms have been included. This seems to me to be a good idea: not only are both terms authorized by RDA, but a well-designed application could even assure that the singular form is only used following the number “1”.

Question no. 1: Should plural versions of the RDA terms be included in the Registry?

The list in RDA itself, however, includes only the singular versions and the Glossary (when it includes a definition) defines only the singular term.

Question no. 2: Should the plural terms be added explicitly to RDA or is the instruction to use plural forms sufficient to maintain consistency with the Registry?

Definitions. When the Registry includes both singular and plural forms and the term is defined in the RDA Glossary, the definition given for the plural term is based on the definition of the singular term, but with the principal noun given in the plural. For example:

Atlas. A volume of maps or other cartographic content, with or without descriptive text.

Atlases. Volumes of maps or other cartographic content, with or without descriptive text.

My own preference would be to use the *same* definition for the singular and plural terms, thus ignoring the difference — and *not* adding a plural definition to the RDA Glossary.

Question no. 3: Do you agree that we do not need separate definition of the singular and plural forms, either in the Registry or in the RDA Glossary?

Implied vocabularies. The five sub-types of Extent do not cover all RDA Extent statements, only those categories for which there are special instructions. The rest are covered by the basic instructions on recording extent (3.4.1), which begins: “Record the extent of the resource by giving the number of units and **an appropriate term for the type of carrier** as listed under [3.3.1.3 RDA](#). Record the term in the singular or plural, as applicable.” Thus, although there is no explicit vocabulary listed under 3.4.1.3, there is an implied vocabulary, consisting of the Carrier Type terms listed in 3.3.1.3 — minus those covered in the explicit lists under the five sub-types of Extent — plus the plural forms of the Carrier Type terms. It would be possible to construct a list of valid terms covered by this instruction, for creating a vocabulary in the Registry and possibly for addition to 3.4.1.3. As it currently stands, it seems to me that there is a gaping hole in the RDA Extent vocabularies; on the other hand, creating an explicit one does create some redundancy with the Carrier Type vocabulary. I’m inclined to think that adding this to the Registry, but not to RDA 3.4.1.3 is a reasonable compromise.

Question no. 4: Do you agree with my recommendation in the last sentence?

Overlapping vocabularies. My recommendation above does create an overlapping vocabulary: The general Extent vocabulary contains some of the terms in the Carrier Type vocabulary, plus the plural versions. There is another example of this. The instructions for recording Extent of Notated Music (3.4.3.2) instruct the cataloger to record “a term for the format of notated music as listed under 7.20.1.3.” In the Registry, there are two vocabularies, one for Extent of Notated Music and one for Format of Notated Music; the former includes singular and plural forms, the latter only the singular forms. I tend to think that this overlap is useful, and recommend that we agree to this, without adding an explicit list to RDA 3.4.3.2.

Question no. 5: Do you agree?

Fragments of extent statements. The instructing for recording the Extent of Text element sub-type specifies a number of things that are words that RDA says to record as part of an extent statement, but are only fragments of such statements. For example, *approximately*, *folded*, *in various pagings*, *incomplete*, and *unnumbered*. In some cases, one could create a combined term, e.g. *folded leaves* or *unnumbered leaves* — although there would need to be quite a few variants — but *approximately* and *incomplete* are not easily treated in this way. Note: This is an issue that I expect the CC:DA Task Force to address; one of the things that makes data machine-actionable is a congruence between the element and the terms — in other words, the term should stand along as the content of the element, not combined with other terms or other data such as numbers.

For now, I recommend that we create combined terms where appropriate and add them to the registry; we may need to modify the instructions in RDA 3.4.5, but we should try to avoid this if

the instructions are clear that the combined term is to be recorded. For the remaining fragments, I recommend that we leave these as “new-proposed” until we see whether ALA will propose a different structure for this element.

Question no. 6: Do you agree with these recommendations?

There are also some odds and ends, not connected with the Extent element:

Order of terms. Most of the lists of terms in RDA give the terms in alphabetical order. I noticed that the list at Format of Notated Music (7.20.1.3) is not in alphabetical order. The order isn't clear, although the general term “score” is at the top of the list.

Question no. 7: Does the order matter? Should we rearrange the list at 7.20.1.3 in alphabetical order?

Hierarchy of Format of Notated Music terms. In the RDA Glossary, the entry under “Score” includes cross-references to all the other Format of Notated Music terms.

Question no. 8: Does this imply a hierarchy? Should the Glossary make a distinction between broader, narrower, and related terms? Should we try to build a hierarchy for this vocabulary either in the Registry, the list at RDA 7.20.1.3 or both?