

**To:** Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA  
**From:** Kathy Glennan, ALA Representation  
**Subject:** Subject Relationship Element in RDA Chapter 23

## Abstract

This proposal adds a subject relationship element as a first step towards supporting the treatment of subjects in RDA. It proposes text for the placeholder Chapter 23 that defines the relationship element **Subject**, as well as including the usual sections on terminology and core requirements. The proposal further adds provisions for relationship designators in Chapter 23 and Appendix L. Other instructions (0.6.7, 0.7, Glossary) are modified as needed.

## Background

At its meeting in November 2013, the JSC considered two documents that recommended dramatically different approaches to modelling subject entities in RDA. [6JSC/Chair/8](#) proposed to model the eleven FRBR Group 1–3 entities as the objects of a subject relationship to a work. [6JSC/ALA/Discussion/2](#) suggested a single subject entity, similar to the **thema** entity in FR SAD.

The JSC agreed that it was premature to make decisions about the modelling of subject entities in RDA until we have the results of the FRBR Review Group's consolidation of the FR models. The FR family consolidation project has the goal of creating a single model for functional requirements for bibliographic data, incorporating the current FRBRer, FRAD, and FR SAD models as well as the FRBRoo model which has just been augmented by FRAD and FR SAD. The methodology involves reviewing the entities and their attributes and relationships to eliminate duplication, resolve differences, and identify and fill gaps. The process effectively commenced in 2009 with a necessary analysis and comparison of the semantics of the elements during the development of the FR namespaces. The current project has been funded by IFLA from 2012, and is ongoing. Any draft consolidated model is likely to undergo worldwide review and approval by IFLA. [Information from Gordon Dunsire]

This means that the JSC is not yet willing to define the entity or entities that are to be the subjects of a work. Although JSC members expressed a general preference for the “lightweight approach” recommended by ALA [BL response], it was deemed premature to act on that preference.

It was agreed, however, that a subject *relationship* element should be defined in RDA, and that a high-level relationship element (cf. **creator** in Chapter 19, **contributor** in Chapter 20, **related work** in Chapter 25) should be added to RDA, using very general language about “the entity that is the subject of the work”. It was felt that Chapter 23 would be the appropriate place in RDA to define this relationship element. ALA was asked to prepare a proposal for consideration at the 2014 JSC meeting.

## Justification

The subject relationship has always been a part of the Functional Requirements models, and RDA reserved a number of chapters to cover subject entities and relationships. Members of the JSC have indicated that including some provision for the treatment of subjects in RDA is a priority.

Described in terms of an RDF triple, the subject relationship can be defined as:

`<work> has as subject <???'>`

This triple can be used to generate specific cases, such as:

A natural history of amphibians *has as subject* amphibians

but this cannot be *generalized* as a relationship between the work entity and any specific entity or entities. This cannot be done until the modelling issues under consideration by the FRBR Review Group have been resolved. Until then, we are left with a relationship with an incomplete definition.

However, it is not anticipated that a comprehensive set of instructions for recording subject relationships will ever be included in RDA. Catalogers will always apply the specifications of authoritative subject systems (such as *Library of Congress Subject Headings* or *Dewey Decimal Classification*). Given that, it should be possible to use the high-level subject relationship with the specific terms or codes specified by such systems, for example

`naf:A natural history of amphibians has as subject lcsh:amphibians`

The authoritative subject system itself provides the missing entity categories.

The instructions in RDA, therefore, need to be highly general, easily applicable to a variety of such systems. Thus the definition of a high-level subject relationship element is not only a reasonable starting point, but may be the most substantive thing that RDA can say about the subject relationship.

## Recommendations

### 1. The Subject relationship entity

Define the high-level relationship element “Subject” in RDA Chapter 23. This element is defined as the relationship between a work and an undefined entity that is the subject of the work.

### 2. Name of the relationship entity

The new relationship entity is named “Subject.” ALA also considered “Subject of Work.” Gordon Dunsire pointed out to us that “subject” produced a cleaner verbal label (*has subject/is subject of*) than the alternative (*has subject of work/is subject of work of*). The text of the instructions uses “subject of work” when this is clearer (e.g., in 23.4.1.2).

### 3. Definition

Use the following definition for the subject relationship element:

**Subject** ▼ refers to the relationship between a work and an entity that is the subject of that work, i.e., that identifies what the work is about.

### 4. Core requirement

ALA devoted considerable attention to questions relating to the core requirements associated with the subject relationship

RDA currently contains the following requirement (0.6.7):

When recording relationships between a work and an entity that is the subject of that work, include as a minimum at least one subject relationship element.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> When using an access point to represent the subject entity, the access point can be constructed by using either the preferred name, title, or term for the entity, or a classification number representing the entity. Construct the access point representing the subject entity following the standards for subject access points and classification numbers used by the agency creating the data.

ALA considered the following issues and makes the following recommendations:

*a. Should Subject remain a core element in RDA?*

Retain Subject as a core element. The subject relationship is an essential part of a full description, and ALA wishes to endorse its importance. However, the description of a work should not be an invalid RDA description simply because it did not include any subject relationship element. This would make invalid many records that otherwise follow RDA.

*b. Should “at least one subject relationship element” be required?*

Modify the requirement to acknowledge that not all works have subjects, by including the phrase “that is applicable and readily ascertainable” in the core requirement.

*c. When a work has multiple subjects, what should be required?*

Give guidance without compromising the basic requirement of a single subject relationship element.

ALA considered several sorts of guidance:

- Only a subject that applies to the work as a whole; this was felt to be inadequate because a single subject element cannot always describe the subject of the work as a whole.
- Only a subject that applies to a predominant part of the work; the same objection applies to this option.
- Only a subject that applies to the work as a whole or to a predominant part of the work (i.e., both); this option has similar problems, but at least it does provide a number of possible criteria for choosing a single subject.

The proposal below includes wording based on the third option above.

- d. *When recording a subject relationship element, should the authorized access point be required?*

Do not require use of the authorized access point.

In the proposal below, a subject relationship element can be recorded only as an identifier or an authorized access point. Core requirements for other RDA relationships do not require the authorized access point. ALA believes that either an identifier or an authorized access point should satisfy the core requirement here.

A further complication here is that the concept of authorized access points may not be applicable in every authoritative subject system.

- e. *Must terms, codes, identifiers, etc., be recorded following the specifications of some authoritative subject system?*

Do not require that a subject relationship element *must* always follow the specifications of an authoritative subject system.

ALA believes the use of authoritative subject systems represents a best practice that should be encouraged. However, we do not believe that a description should be invalid under RDA simply because it does not follow an authoritative subject system.

ALA attempted to find a way of allowing the use of uncontrolled terms (keywords) to be recorded and to satisfy the core requirement. This was difficult because the subject relationship element can only be recorded as an identifier or an authorized access point. It did not seem appropriate to describe uncontrolled keywords as “authorized access points.” In the end, we were unable to propose an instruction that would allow the use of uncontrolled keywords.

ALA welcomes discussion on these issues. We devoted considerable attention to the issues surrounding core requirements, and we do not believe that we have satisfactorily resolved all the problems.

## **5. Techniques for recording the subject relationship element**

Include instructions for the relationship element to be recorded as an identifier and/or an authorized access point.

The proposal does not include instructions for recording the subject as a structured or unstructured description. In the future, consideration should be given to adding such instructions. Notes on scope and coverage are actually descriptions of the subject of the work; an abstract is the description of the subject, although a separate element has already been defined. To be consistent, RDA should provide appropriate instructions. Further, the recording of uncontrolled/non-authorized access points (keywords) will need to be supported; it might be best to treat these as descriptions of subject relationships.

## 6. Additional elements in Chapter 23

Do not define the general elements Source Consulted and Cataloguer's Note in Chapter 23. Although this would parallel the elements in comparable chapters in RDA, ALA was not convinced that these elements were needed for recording the subject relationship, as opposed to establishing authoritative subject terminology; as such these elements would be part of the specifications of the authoritative subject system being followed.

## 7. Relationship designators

Include provision for the use of relationship designators with the subject relationship element.

There will be a need to identify the general subject relationship. RDA does not provide relationship designators as such for relationship elements (although such elements have been included in the RDA Registry, and the labels could be treated as designators).

ALA has identified two specific types of subject relationships for which we propose defining relationship designators.

Specific recommendations:

- a. Include instructions for Relationship Designators in Chapter 23, using text parallel to comparable instructions in other relationship chapters.
- b. Re-purpose Appendix L to cover relationship designators for relationships between works and entities that are the subject of works.

Note that Appendix L is currently destined for a different set of relationship designators: those among instances of Group 3 entities. It is unclear whether RDA will ever include provisions for such relationships. Therefore, it seemed reasonable to re-purpose this placeholder appendix, rather than adding a new one.

Technically, if the order of appendices were to follow the order of the chapters dealing with the corresponding relationships, this appendix should fall between Appendix I (which corresponds to Chapters 18–22) and Appendix J (which corresponds to Chapters 24–28). ALA does not seriously propose such a major structural change to RDA. Appendix L will do just fine.

- c. Include general guidelines in Appendix L, using text parallel to comparable sections of Appendices I, J, and K.

The other appendices contain the following paragraph, which does not (yet) apply to the proposed Appendix L, because there is only one level of specificity in the proposed designators.

Use relationship designators at the level of specificity that is considered appropriate for the purposes of the agency creating the data. For example, the relationship between a screenplay and the screenwriter responsible for the work can be recorded using either the specific relationship designator screenwriter or the more general relationship designator author.

- d. Define two relationship designators: *depiction of* and *set in*. In general, ALA believes that the specific types of relationship will most often be specified by the authoritative subject system being used; however, we believe that these types of relationships are sufficiently general to merit inclusion.

ALA is not recommending the inclusion of the inverses of these relationships, because we do not feel that they are particularly useful. If the JSC disagrees, the following are possible definitions for the inverse relationships:

**depiction** A work, particularly a work of art, that depicts or portrays an entity

**setting of** A work whose activity or plot takes place in an entity, for example, in a place, in a time period, in a building, at an event

## 8. Genre/form

Defer the issue relating to genre/form relationships. While ALA strongly supports the need to provide for such relationships, we continue to feel that this must be addressed first in the FR model itself.

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## Proposals

### 1. RDA 0.6.7: Delete the footnote and revise the text

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#### 0.6.7 Section 7: Recording Subject Relationships

When recording relationships between a work and an entity that is the subject of that work, include as a minimum at least one subject relationship element.<sup>23</sup> that is applicable and readily ascertainable (if the work has multiple subjects, only a subject that applies to the work as a whole or to a predominant part of the work is required).

~~<sup>23</sup>—When using an access point to represent the subject entity, the access point can be constructed by using either the preferred name, title, or term for the entity, or a classification number representing the entity. Construct the access point representing the subject entity following the standards for subject access points and classification numbers used by the agency creating the data.~~

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#### 0.6.7 Section 7: Recording Subject Relationships

When recording relationships between a work and an entity that is the subject of that work, include as a minimum at least one subject relationship element that is applicable and readily ascertainable (if the work has multiple subjects, only a subject that applies to the work as a whole or to a predominant part of the work is required).

**2. RDA 0.7: Add the subject relationship to the uses of access points**

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**0.7 Access Points**

RDA provides instructions on the construction of authorized and variant access points representing works, expressions, persons, families, and corporate bodies.

RDA also provides instructions on the use of authorized access points to record the following types of relationships:

primary relationship between a manifestation and a work or expression embodied in the manifestation

relationships between a resource and persons, families, and corporate bodies associated with that resource

relationships between works and entities that are the subjects of works

relationships between works, expressions, manifestations, and items

relationships between persons, families, and corporate bodies

In addition, RDA provides guidance on the use of titles (title proper, parallel title, variant title, etc.) as access points.

RDA does not provide guidance on the use of other data elements as access points. Agencies using RDA data may determine which additional elements are to be indexed based on the needs of their users and the capabilities of their data management systems.

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**3. RDA Section 7: Change title of the section**

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# SECTION 7

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## RECORDING SUBJECT RELATIONSHIPS ~~TO CONCEPTS, OBJECTS, EVENTS, & PLACES~~

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#### 4. RDA Chapter 23: Replace current content

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# 23

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## GENERAL GUIDELINES ON RECORDING THE SUBJECT OF A WORK

[To be developed after the initial release of RDA]

### 23.0 Scope

This chapter provides general guidelines and instructions on recording subject relationships between a work and an entity that is the subject of that work. It includes:

- a) an explanation of key terms (see [23.1](#))
- b) the functional objectives and principles underlying the general guidelines and instructions in chapter [23](#) (see [23.2](#))
- c) the core elements for recording subject relationships to entities (see [23.3](#))
- d) the use of identifiers and authorized access points to record subject relationships (see [23.4](#))
- e) the use of relationship designators to indicate the specific relationship between works and entities that are the subjects of works (see [23.5](#))

### 23.1 Terminology

#### 23.1.1 Explanation of Key Terms

There are a number of terms used in this chapter that have meanings specific to their use in RDA. Some of these terms are explained at [23.1.2–23.1.5](#).

All terms with a specific technical meaning are defined in the glossary.

#### 23.1.2 Work

The term **work**▼ refers to a distinct intellectual or artistic creation (i.e., the intellectual or artistic content).

The term *work* can refer to an individual work, an aggregate work, or a component of a work.

### 23.1.3 Access Point

The terms *access point* and *authorized access point* are used as follows:

The term **access point** ▼ refers to a name, term, code, etc., representing a specific entity (work, expression, manifestation, item, person, family, corporate body, or other entity that serves as the subject of a work).

The term **authorized access point** ▼ refers to the standardized access point representing an entity. The authorized access point representing a work, expression, manifestation, item, person, family, or corporate body is constructed using the preferred name for the work, expression, manifestation, item, person, family, or corporate body. The authorized access point representing other entities that serve as the subject of a work may be constructed following the guidelines of the authoritative subject system used by the agency creating the data.

### 23.1.4 Authoritative Subject System

The term **authoritative subject system** ▼ refers to a standard for subject access points and/or classification numbers used by the agency creating the data. It may be used in determining the name, other identifying attributes, and relationships of an entity used as the subject of a work.

### 23.1.5 Relationship Designator

The term **relationship designator** ▼ refers to a designator that indicates the nature of the relationship between works and entities that are the subjects of works.

A relationship designator is recorded with the authorized access point or identifier representing the subject of the work.

## 23.2 Functional Objectives and Principles

The data recorded to reflect the relationship between a work and an entity that is the subject of that work should enable the user to find all works that have that entity as a subject.

To ensure that the data created using RDA meet that functional objective, the data should reflect all significant subject relationships between a work and the entities that are the subject of that work.

## 23.3 Core Elements

When recording relationships between a work and an entity that is the subject of that work, include as a minimum at least one subject relationship element that is applicable and readily ascertainable (if the work has multiple subjects, only a subject that applies to the work as a whole or to a predominant part of the work is required).

## 23.4 Subject

### CORE ELEMENT

*If the work has multiple subjects, only a subject that applies to the work as a whole or to a predominant part of the work is required.*

### 23.4.1 Basic Instructions on Recording the Subject

#### 23.4.1.1 Scope

**Subject** ▼ refers to the relationship between a work and an entity that is the subject of that work, i.e., that identifies what the work is about.

#### 23.4.1.2 Sources of Information

Take information on the subject of a work from any source.

#### 23.4.1.3 Recording the Subject

Record the subject of the work by using one or both of these techniques:

a) identifier (see [23.4.1.3.1](#))

**and/or**

b) authorized access point (see [23.4.1.3.2](#))

##### 23.4.1.3.1 Identifier for the Entity That Is the Subject of the Work

Provide an identifier for the entity that is the subject of the work.

#### EXAMPLE

Library and Archives Canada control number: 0200B4753

**Identifier for the Canadian Subject Heading** Icelandic Canadians, **an entity that is a subject of the work:** Selected resource material on Canadians of Icelandic descent

Library of Congress control number: sh 85040737

**Identifier for the Library of Congress Subject Heading** Economic policy, **an entity that is a subject of the work:** The changing role of central banks

Medical Subject Headings control number: D005817

**Identifier for the Medical Subject Heading** Genetic Counseling, **an entity that is a subject of the work:** Atlas of genetic diagnosis and counseling

Library of Congress/NACO Authority File control number: n 79032932

**Identifier for the Library of Congress/NACO authority record** Wright, Frank Lloyd, 1867–1959, **an entity that is a subject of the work:** Frank Lloyd Wright, his life and architecture

Library of Congress Classification control number: CF 00434699

**Identifier for the Library of Congress Classification number** QL737.M35, **an entity that is the subject of the work:** Kangaroos & their relatives

### 23.4.1.3.2

#### Authorized Access Point Representing the Entity That Is the Subject of the Work

Provide an authorized access point representing the entity that is the subject of the work.

The access point may be a controlled subject term for the entity, or a classification number representing the entity, as specified in an authoritative subject system.

##### EXAMPLE

Icelandic Canadians

**Authorized access point in Canadian Subject Headings for the entity that is a subject of the work:** Selected resource material on Canadians of Icelandic descent

Economic policy

**Authorized access point in the Library of Congress Subject Headings for the entity that is a subject of the work:** The changing role of central banks

Genetic Counseling

**Authorized access point in Medical Subject Headings for the entity that is a subject of the work:** Atlas of genetic diagnosis and counseling

Wright, Frank Lloyd, 1867–1959

**Authorized access point in the Library of Congress/NACO Authority File for the entity that is a subject of the work:** Frank Lloyd Wright, his life and architecture

332.1

**Authorized access point in the Dewey Decimal Classification for the entity that is a subject of the work:** The changing role of central banks

QL737.M35

**Authorized access point in the Library of Congress Classification for the entity that is the subject of the work:** Kangaroos & their relatives

## 23.5 Relationship Designator

### 23.5.1 Basic Instructions on Recording Relationship Designators

#### 23.5.1.1 Scope

A **relationship designator** ▼ is a designator that indicates the nature of the relationship between a work and an entity that is the subject of that work. A relationship designator is recorded with the authorized access point or identifier representing the subject of the work.

The defined scope of a relationship element provides a general indication of the relationship between a work and the entity that is the subject of that work. Relationship designators provide more specific information about the nature of the relationship (e.g., entity depicted in the work, setting of the work)

### 23.5.1.2 Sources of Information

Take information on the nature of the relationship between a work and the entity that is the subject of that work from any source.

### 23.5.1.3 Recording Relationship Designators

Record one or more appropriate terms from the list in appendix L to indicate the specific nature of the relationship between a work and an entity that is the subject of that work.

depiction of

**Relationship designator recorded in conjunction with the authorized access point for the Library of Congress/NACO authority record for Diaz, Maggie, 1925– , the entity that is depicted in David Roberts’s photograph Portrait of Maggie Diaz**

depiction of

**Relationship designator recorded in conjunction with the identifier for the Library of Congress Subject Heading Puppies, the entity that is depicted in Paul Gauguin’s painting Still life with three puppies**

set in

**Relationship designator recorded in conjunction with the authorized access point for the Library of Congress/NACO authority record for San Francisco (Calif.), the entity that is the setting of Armistead Maupin’s novel Tales of the city**

set in

**Relationship designator recorded in conjunction with the identifier and authorized access point for the FAST heading American Civil War (1861-1865), the entity that is the setting of the motion picture Gone with the wind**

If none of the terms listed in appendix L is appropriate or sufficiently specific, use another concise term to indicate the nature of the relationship.

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**5. RDA Appendix L: Rename and replace current content**

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# L

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## RELATIONSHIP DESIGNATORS: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ~~CONCEPTS,~~ ~~OBJECTS, EVENTS, AND PLACES~~ WORKS AND ENTITIES THAT ARE THE SUBJECT OF WORKS

[To be developed after the initial release of RDA]

### **L.0 Scope**

This appendix provides general guidelines on using relationship designators to specify relationships between works and entities that are the subject of works, and lists relationship designators used for that purpose.

### **L.1 General Guidelines on Using Relationship Designators**

The defined scope of a relationship element provides a general indication of the relationship between a work and an entity that is the subject of that work. If the relationship element is considered sufficient for the purposes of the agency creating the data, do not use a relationship designator to indicate the specific nature of the relationship.

Relationship designators provide more specific information about the nature of the relationship (e.g., entity depicted in the work, setting of the work).

If none of the terms listed in this appendix is appropriate or sufficiently specific, use another concise term to indicate the nature of the relationship.

## L.2 Relationship Designators for Entities That are the Subject of Works

Record an appropriate term from the following list with the authorized access point or identifier representing an entity that is the subject of a work (see 23.4). Apply the general guidelines on using relationship designators at L.1.

- depiction of** An entity depicted or portrayed in a work, particularly a work of art
- set in** An entity in which the activity or plot of a work takes place, for example, a place, a time period, a building, an event

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### 6. RDA Glossary: Add definitions [New content; mark-up not indicated.]

- Authoritative Subject System** A standard for subject access points and/or classification numbers used by the agency creating the data. It may be used in determining the name, other identifying attributes, and relationships of an entity used as the subject of a work.
- Subject** The relationship between a work and an entity that is the subject of that work, i.e., that identifies what the work is about.