

To: Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA  
From: John Attig, ALA Representative  
Subject: Initial articles

ALA thanks the Office of Library Standards of the German National Library for preparing this exhaustive proposal to address the lapse in RDA's support for the Principle of Representation.

ALA agrees that the omission of initial articles from preferred titles distorts the meaning of such titles, and that this distortion is particularly strong in the case of inflected languages. We do not agree with all of the arguments put forward in the proposal. In particular, we feel that it underestimates the value for resource discovery of an alphabetical listing of access points, and thus undervalues the importance of being able to present a standard sort sequence. However, ALA strongly agrees that RDA should take a principled approach to the recording of preferred titles, and that this requires that initial articles not be omitted.

That said, many of us continue to work in a MARC 21 system environment in which the only reliable way to sort titles correctly is to omit initial articles. We therefore strongly endorse the provision of alternative instructions that allow for initial articles to be omitted.

Furthermore, this alternative needs to be comprehensive. Although it is true that the distortion caused by the omission of initial articles is particularly serious in the case of inflected languages, we are not in a position to make an exception when applying the alternative instructions. Therefore, we do not support the inclusion of the clause "or which is originated from an inflected language) in RDA 6.2.1.7 and 11.2.2.8.

In general, ALA supports the wording changes to the proposal suggested by ACOC, BL, CCC, and LC.

However, we do not support the proposed revision of 6.2.1.7 suggested by the Library of Congress:

Record the title of a work as it appears on the source of information without modification.

We note that (a) this instruction only concerns initial articles, and such a sweeping instruction is not appropriate, and (b) all the instructions on transcribing and recording information consist of modifications to the information found on the sources. We prefer a simple instruction here to deal with the question of initial articles:

When recording the preferred title, do not omit an initial article.

– or, stated positively:

When recording the preferred title, include an initial article, if present.