

RDA Essentials bills itself as "a concise guide to cataloguing with RDA". As such, anyone feeling rather daunted by RDA and/or expecting a neat volume along the lines of the concise guide to AACR2 may not feel encouraged by this rather hefty tome. But fear not and stick with it. RDA Essentials delivers pretty much as promised, clearly and systematically, and without getting bogged down in any long-winded explanations.

The book begins with a potted history of the development of RDA which helps provide some context for its use and what RDA is trying to achieve which is, ultimately, greater discoverability of resources. The introduction is the most discursive section, and teeters on providing a summary, step-by-step guide to the whole process of RDA cataloguing...but not quite, as it loops around and repeats itself. Given the straightforward and plainly structured format of the following chapters, I felt this could have been done better. That said, various FRBR concepts at the core of RDA - content v. carrier, user task, relationships - are all described neatly and reiterated throughout the rest of the book.

The work concerns itself firstly with the elements of RDA (the bulk of the book), followed by guidelines (the 'how' rather than the 'what' to record), construction of access points and a short section on "additional instructions" which addresses the kind of "what if..." scenarios not yet covered by the main body of instruction. The elements themselves are worked through systematically, organised into chapters which address particular attributes or aspects of a resource. Each chapter opens with a table of the elements covered and then proceeds to drill through each in turn, with a concise description, example and anything else pertinent to that element, notably options, alternatives, common vocabulary (where appropriate) and a pointer to related elements. And that is more or less it. It is, essentially, exactly as it says; a concise guide, a distilled and more accessible version of the full RDA Toolkit. And while comprehensive, it is not exhaustive. There are caveats, for example, that it is not intended for more complex resources, especially musical, religious and legal works.

All considered, my only real criticism would be that some of the instructions and examples are a little too succinct. For a cataloguer completely new to RDA, this might better sit alongside an introductory text which provides more in the way of context for each element, by showing how they are applied to a few example resources as a whole, say, rather than in isolation. But as an easy-to-use reference for cataloguers already getting to grips with RDA, this is an excellent resource and a worthwhile investment.

Helen Burns, Edinburgh University