

Developing a Local Cataloging Policy

By Mary Russell, December 2022

A local cataloging policy should define what standards your library uses for its cataloging and detail any specific situations where a local decision has been made about how to implement (or ignore) national cataloging standards. It will also include information that has implications for your local system configurations. In some cases a library policy and a library procedure are clearly separate. This is not one of those cases. A useful cataloging policy gets deep into the weeds of library operations and includes numerous procedural elements.

1. What will you include in your online catalog?

Ideally every item in your library collection should be represented in your online catalog so that your patrons will know what is available in your collections. Sometimes this is not the case : there are libraries that don't include mass-market paperbacks in their catalogs or haven't cataloged any of their magazines or DVDs. It should be explicitly stated what you do and don't include in your catalog (and perhaps why that decision was made). Similarly, what materials will (or won't) have item-level records created for them? Will you create an item record for every issue of every magazine or will you put a note in the record indicating holdings policy ("We retain the most recent 6 issues," for example)?

2. What overall cataloging standards will your library use?

When copy cataloging what sources (LC, NHU-PAC, etc.) are acceptable to take records from? Will you take only RDA records, only AACR2 records, or is either acceptable? When (if) you create original records will they be RDA or AACR2?

When questions arise, what cataloging authority will be used to resolve them? *OCLC Bib Formats and Standards* is the NHSL authority (<https://www.loc.gov/marc/bibliographic/>). *LC Marc Format for Bibliographic Records* is also an option (<https://www.oclc.org/bibformats/en.html>)

Related to this are the criteria to be used for choosing records if there are multiple records that match your item-in-hand in the source that you are taking records from. Options include: choosing the most complete record according to the encoding level and fields within the bib record; use the record entered first; prefer records created by the Library of Congress over any others; choose a record that has already been merged (contains an 019 field); choose the record with the most holdings. Make an ordered list of the criteria to be used in selecting records and have everyone who puts records in your catalog use the list for selection. This makes it easier and faster to choose a record. You may also want to consider creating a check list of what constitutes a "match" to the item-in-hand for your system.

3. How will you create your call numbers?

You might use the full Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), Abridged Dewey, LC, SUDOC, or a Locally Defined classification scheme for your library. You might use a combination of these (for example, you might use DDC for non-fiction and FIC for all adult fiction titles and DVD for all DVDs regardless of their content).

Do you place limits on the length of all your numbers (DDC only to the first break point, for example) or leave it to the cataloger's discretion how specific the number should be? If you have multiple editions of the same work will you include the publication year in the classification of editions beyond the first one? If different kinds of material will use different classifications, detail in your policy which classification is to be used for each kind of material (kids books and YA books use X; adult fiction use Y; AV materials use Z; etc.)

What kind of cutter will you use? You might use 4-digit Sanborn Cutters verified against your catalog to make sure they are unique, or the first 3 letters of the author's name (even if this results in duplicate codes for different authors), or some other scheme. How will you handle duplicate call numbers (use a work mark of a certain number of characters added to the cutter, for example)?

Will your call numbers include pre-stamps or post-stamps (REF, NH, or similar to indicate a collection or a physical shelving location either before or after the classification)? Include a full list of acceptable pre-stamps and post-stamps with an explanation of when each is used. It may be helpful in some cases to specify when a particular one is not used (for example, "fiction shelved in the NH room does NOT get a FIC pre-stamp; it gets 'NH' instead"). If you have specific collections or shelving locations—which may dictate the pre-stamps used—you should either include a list of those and what belongs in each in your local cataloging policy or include a reference to where that is defined ("See LOCAL system configuration documentation for collection definitions," for example).

4. **How will you handle subject headings?**

What subject headings will you use? Some popular options include:

- Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) – designated by a 2nd indicator of 0 in 6XX fields
- LC subject headings for children's literature – designated by a 2nd indicator of 1 in 6XX fields
- Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) – designated by a 2nd indicator of 2 in 6XX fields
- BISAC (see <https://bisg.org/page/bisacedition>) –2nd indicator of 7 and **bisacsh** in subfield 2
- A locally defined list of subject terms –2nd indicator of 7 and **local** in subfield 2
- Homosaurus (see <https://homosaurus.org/>) –2nd indicator of 7 and **homoit** in subfield 2

You don't have to choose just one kind of heading but it is important to be clear if you want headings other than a specific type to be removed from copy cataloged records. If you will require subject headings to be added to locally created records what kind should they be? Consider whether you want to set a minimum number of subject headings to be included in your records as well. If you use a locally defined set of terms that list, and guidance on when the terms are used, should be included (at least by reference) in your policy.

Are there situations where you want additional subject access points included? For example, should materials about your town have a corporate heading for your town? Do you want to include index terms for genre or occupation (these are found in the 65X fields of MARC records). Should geographic or chronological subdivisions be used? There are a lot of options available for providing subject access to your materials and setting standards will allow staff to make consistent choices about how much (or how little) access to provide and of what type. OCLC's Bibliographic Formats and Standards includes information on subject access which may be helpful in exploring options for your local policy (<https://www.oclc.org/bibformats/en/accesspoints/subjects.html>).

5. **Are there specific fields in the records that you want used in a particular way?**

There are as many possibilities here as there are MARC fields (actually there are more) and detailing every field that will ever be used in your catalog is probably not necessary (especially if you copy catalog most of your material). However, if you want a particular field to be used consistently it needs to be in the policy. Here are a few ideas to get you started thinking about fields you want to include information about in your policy:

- Should the donor of a book given to your library be listed in a particular field in item records?
- Do you want to add summaries in the 520 field for all mystery novels in your collection?

- Are there restrictions on access to some materials which should be explained in a 506 field?
- Are there websites related to some materials that should be linked in an 856 field?
- Should materials bought with grant money have a 536 field indicating the grant project and funder?

6. Will you use Authority Control?

If you will not be using authority control in your catalog you should state that in the policy. If you will there are numerous details that will need to be defined and mapped out and a reference here to your library's full Authority Control Policy is appropriate.

7. What physical processing will you do?

How do you identify materials as library property? What kind of call number labels do you use and where should they be affixed to the items? Are materials barcoded? If so, where do those stickers go? Are there other stickers added to materials ("be kind, rewind" stickers, or genre stickers, for example)? Do all books get mylar jackets? When do you use label protectors? Do you put tattle-tapes in things? Do you need a card and a pocket in the back of books? All these details, which will probably vary by type of material and perhaps by collection, should be clearly explained in your cataloging policy.

8. What are your special cases?

Once you have defined the basic policies for cataloging in your library you will discover situations where different policies or additional steps apply. Outline these in your cataloging policy as special cases. This might include collections (NH State Government Documents, story-time puppets, etc.) or might be individual titles or series (your town budget, the Federal Register). Give each one a section in your policy as you come across it and explain how it varies from the policies that apply to your library generally.

9. What quality control measures will you follow?

This may not be a separate section of the policy, but should be considered throughout. What things need a second person to check them? Who is responsible for making sure specific steps are completed before materials are shelved? Are there checklists, statistics, or other records to be kept relating to the cataloging or processing of materials?

10. Does your Cataloging Policy intersect with any other library policies or procedures, and do they conflict?

When your draft policy is complete review any existing policies in your library and make sure there are no conflicts – like a circ procedure that says to stamp the date-due on the slip glued in the back of the book and a cataloging policy that never mentions adding date-due slips to new books. Any conflicts you find need to be resolved in one place or the other. If you have written documentation about your local system configuration (which you should!) review that data to make sure there are no conflicts between the policies or procedures.

11. How will your Cataloging Policy be maintained and who can revise it?

If you have a standard process in your library for reviewing policies how does this one fit into that? Where is the actual document kept (both physical copies and the electronic document)? Do policy updates need to be tracked? If they do, how? Where on the policy does the date of last update go? How often will the policy be reviewed and revisions considered? Who has the authority to change the policy? If someone has a concern about the policy who do they go to?