

MARC (MACHine Readable Cataloging) Crash Course

MARC is a specification for the exchange of library cataloging information that predates the World Wide Web. Though its death has long been predicted, MARC continues to be quite robust and widely used. Of course, catalogers will know MARC intimately, but to those who don't know it, MARC can seem inscrutable at first.

The good news is that you actually don't have to know too much about MARC to *consume* MARC records. Most of the information you would want to extract from a MARC record for purposes other than cataloging is to be found in the fields outlined below. This is not an exhaustive list—there's much more in the MARC specification, some of it very clever. Full documentation of the MARC21 Format for Bibliographical Data is available at: <https://www.loc.gov/marc/bibliographic/>

Information about people

Information about people (whether authors, publishing personnel, etc.) can be found in two different fields.

Main author: 100

Anybody else: 700

A MARC record can have no more than one 100 field, but multiple 700 fields. All 100 and 700 fields have the same subfields available, though not all will always contain data.

- a** Name
- b** Numeration (e.g., III)
- c** Titles, etc. ("Baron")
- d** Dates (birth, death, "fl.")
- q** Fuller form of name

Information about books

Title: 245

- a - Main title
- b - Continuation of title
- c - Statement of responsibility

Edition Statement: 250

- a - Edition Statement

Publication Information: 260

- a - Place of publication
- b - Name of publisher
- c - Date

Format: 300

- a - Extent (number of volumes, pagination, etc.)
- b - Other physical details (e.g., plates)
- c - Dimensions

Notes: 500

- a - Free text

Citations: 510

- a - Name of source
- c - Location in source

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Structured information

The **008** field contains a range of normalized information about the record that can be a helpful supplement to the record itself. The 008 field is 40 characters long, with individual characters and ranges of characters having specified meanings. The meanings of characters 00 through 17 and of characters 35 through 39 are the same for all kinds of materials, while characters 18 through 34 differ depending on the kind of material being cataloged. A full description of the 008 field is available at: <https://www.loc.gov/marc/bibliographic/bd008.html>

Some ranges that may be immediately useful are:

07-10 Date 1

11-14 Date 2

The meaning of these dates varies depending on the contents of character 06 (which you'll need to read up on). These ranges may contain digits [0-9]. If a digit is unknown, the letter u is used (e.g. 169u or 18uu). If the characters aren't in use, these positions will be filled with octothorpes (#).

15-17 Place of publication, production, or execution

A two- or three-character alphabetic code following the list at:

<https://www.loc.gov/marc/countries/>

(Examples include **enk** for England, **fr** for France, etc.)

35-37 Language

A three-character alphabetic code following the list at:

<https://www.loc.gov/marc/languages/>

(Examples include **eng** for English, **lat** for Latin, etc.)