Prescriptive comments from the editors for what they want to see in the introduction:

5. The Introduction needs to be fleshed out more. Instead of waiting until page 4 to define “authority control,” we recommend that you begin the paper with a definition. Also, please put authority control in the overall context of cataloging and bibliographic records, and be very clear and straightforward about why authority control is important (e.g., collocation and differentiation), and how it helps patrons. Also, please add the phrase “authorized access points” somewhere, and please mention some of the standards used to create access points, such as Resource Description and Access, the Library of Congress Subject Headings, etc.

7. At the end of your introduction, explain what you’re going to do in the paper. You do this in the abstract, but you also need to include this information in your introduction.

**Introduction**

As a continually growing and changing database, the library’s catalog requires ongoing maintenance, especially through disciplined authority control practice. Joudrey, Taylor, and Miller’s definition of authority control states, “Authority control is the result of the process of maintaining consistency in the verbal form used to represent an access point and the further process of showing the relationships among names, works, and subjects. It is accomplished through use of cataloging guidelines (in the case of names and titles), use of a controlled vocabulary, and reference to an authority file.”[[1]](#endnote-1) While the work can be time-consuming and intellectually demanding, the pay-off for the user experience is incalculable. Library patrons of today expect seamless information retrieval and sophisticated database navigation. Correct application of authority control best practices assists catalogers in meeting these needs, while connecting users to the most relevant resources for their information search. Barbara Tillett explained the essential nature of authority control within libraries over three decades ago, stating, “In order to accomplish the finding and gathering functions, the catalog must have authority control. Authority control is inherent to a catalog and without it, a file cannot be considered a catalog.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Technical services librarians today must be just as passionate about this essential function of their jobs.

In a foundational text on the topic, Clack states, “What is authority control? It is a technical process executed on a library catalog to provide structure. Uniqueness, standardization, and linkages are the foundation of authority control.”[[3]](#endnote-3) In the process of identifying and describing information resources, catalogers create descriptive (or bibliographic) records that are gathered into a library database, which serves as a tool for library users to find resources that meet their information needs. The information resource is described within a structured bibliographic record with various types of information keyed into data fields. Within this context, authority control is a key aspect of the cataloger’s work. The cataloger must select the names, subjects, and titles that are associated with the information resource and enter these in searchable fields within the record. These become the authorized access points by which the resource may be found through the searching functions of the library database.

Authority work is the process by which the cataloger ensures that the catalog links related resources through the foundational concepts outlined by Clack: uniqueness, standardization, and linkages. By ensuring an access point’s uniqueness, catalogers allow for differentiation between similar names or terms. Standardization helps catalogers to select an authorized access point which will allow related resources to be collocated. Standards such as *Resource Description and Access* (RDA) provide catalogers with guidelines for the creation of authority records for names and titles. The use of common thesauri such as Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) for selecting subject terms also supports the access points through standardization. Linkages are made possible through the encoding standards that underpin the data elements.

With the upcoming generation of technical services librarians in mind, this paper seeks to provide a foundational introduction on the topic including a history of the development of authority control practice, definitions of key terms, discussion of the content and encoding metadata standards that govern how authority records are created, and a description of current authority control practice within libraries. The use of local and cooperative authority files are discussed, along with an introduction to the automation of authority control through library vendor services. This paper also elucidates the importance of authority control in cataloging and library database management and how authority control benefits users of the library catalog in helping them find the information resources they need. An introduction to current issues and trends within the field includes discussion of authorized headings as facets, federated authority databases, linked data, and ethical authority control practice. Finally, the future of authority control is explored.

1. Daniel N. Joudrey, Arlene G. Taylor, and David P. Miller, *Introduction to Cataloging and Classification*, 11th ed. (Santa Barbara, California: Libraries Unlimited, 2015): 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Barbara B. Tillett, “Considerations for Authority Control in the Online Environment,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1989): 2, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J104v09n03_01>. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Doris Hargrett Clack, *Authority Control: Principles, Applications, and Instructions* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1990): 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)