Content Standard Analysis:
The Open Rules for Cataloguing Project

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Open Rules for Cataloguing (ORC) is a volunteer-based project to produce and maintain a set of open access cataloging rules to be made available as a free alternative to monetized proprietary content standards. The project's vision is to create "free and open cataloging guidelines for the library community with practical examples and easily understood models created by catalogers to empower catalogers." (ORC, 2025)

Started in 2019 by Amber Biley of Bard College, the project was conceived as an alternative to RDA (Leibowitz et al., 2022). Though dormant for the majority of the pandemic, the project resumed in 2021, and has since begun putting its theory into practice, making drafts of its cataloguing rules available as they are completed.

Currently, the ORC remains under construction and is largely incomplete. The process of generating rules is carried out by the Rules Committee, a collection of expert volunteers with training in information science. This is done on a datum by datum basis - most recently, the Commitee completed rules for formatting content Titles, and it is currently drafting the rules for Editions (ORC, 2025).

The Rules Committee first conducts research of rulesets from existing and historical cataloguing institutions, including the International Federation of Library Associations, Library of Congress, and the Society of American Archivists (Leibowitz et al., 2022). Based on this research, the Committee considers common trends and concepts, then collaboratively drafts rules for the ORC; each draft undergoes a thorough peer review process before being presented to the public for feedback. Committee members meet for two hours a month in between rounds of peer review and feedback collection for discussion and editing. As this is a slow and laborious process, each data type takes several months to go from initial to final drafting. (ORC, Dec 3, 2024)

In order to sustain the ORC over this long process, the project is overseen by an Executive Board, also staffed by volunteers and led by a rotating President. The Executive Board handles legal and bureaucratic tasks, such as maintaining the project's bylaws and nonprofit status. This Board conducts annual webinars updating the public on the project's current status and progress; these are available to view on YouTube (ORC, Dec 3, 2024).

While the ORC offers a compelling vision of an exhaustively-researched and decommodified modern content standard, it has yet to be realized, and due to limited resources and labor power, it is unclear when it will be able to deliver on its promise. Those interested in getting involved can reach out to the project at freeyourcatalogingrules@gmail.com.

References

Leibowitz, F., Soufi, D., Billey, A., & Theimer, S. (2022). Open Rules for Cataloging. *Serials Review*, *48*(3–4), 229–233. https://doi.org/10.1080/00987913.2022.2128629

ORC (Dec 3, 2024) ORC Fall/Winter 2024 Webinar. *Youtube.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cC-mN8PTZo

ORC (2025) *Open Rules for Cataloging.* https://openrulesforcatalogingproject.github.io/ORC/about/