Introducing RDA: A Guide to the Basics
By Chris Oliver, Facet Publishing, 2010, 128 pages, softcover, ISBN 978-1-85604-7326

Katrina Clifford reviews a work covering the long-heralded change in the cataloguing rule set: RDA (Resource Description and Access).

Introduction
The world of information description and retrieval is one of constant change and RDA (Resource Description and Access) is often touted as being one of the most radical changes on the horizon. Early discussions were often couched very much in terms of the principles behind the move from AACR2 (Anglo American Cataloguing Rules) and the principles of a FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records)-based system. We gradually move closer to the Library of Congress' decision on whether to adopt RDA or not, raising questions of what adoption will mean in terms not just of day-to-day cataloguing but the wider retrieval world. Therefore, it is not just cataloguers who may feel they need to gain an understanding of exactly what RDA is and what moving to it will involve. The title of Chris Oliver's book, Introducing RDA: A Guide to the Basics, will, as a result, catch the eye of people from many spheres of information work.

Content
Although this book is just over 100 pages long, I would say it is not necessary to start at the beginning and work your way through the book to get the most out of it. If you're looking for something that places RDA squarely within the historical context of information retrieval and the rationale behind its development then the first two chapters give a comprehensive overview in relatively few pages. Chapter 1, 'What is RDA?' introduces the idea of RDA being designed as a result of an increasingly varied range of resources in need of description, especially those that are digital in nature. Additionally there is the need to search multiple datasets at once, including those beyond libraries, in allied institutions such as museums and archives. Chapter 2, 'RDA and the international context', as implied by the title explores the relationship of RDA to international documentation standards such as ISBD (International Standard Bibliographic Description) and how it copes in terms of handling language issues of catalogue records. It is just a brief overview however, all the ideas are discussed in one or two paragraphs each. Together, these two initial chapters would easily fill in the background for an uninitiated professional, such as a library school student and indeed they show that RDA is built upon many of the key concepts touched upon in library school courses, such as Cutter's Rules for a dictionary catalog.

Chapter 3 furthers this introduction by describing FRBR and FRAD (Functional Requirements for Authority Data) and how they relate to RDA. In all the more recent discussions surrounding practical aspects of the uptake of RDA, the theoretical principles underlying it are often forgotten and revisiting them can be an interesting exercise. After an overview of how FRBR and FRAD are constructed, it moves on to why they are important. One figure lays out a MARC record and labels the fields with the appropriate FRBR entities which is helpful in understanding them in context. The remainder of the chapter shows how the RDA terms have been incorporated into the layout of the sections of RDA and the wording of the rules themselves. The chapter

shows why RDA is laid out in a very different way to AACR2, grouping rules by the attribute described rather than by item format. This chapter is perhaps the most difficult to work through, but I feel this is due to the nature of the content, rather than any failing on the part of the author.

Chapter 4 is entitled 'Continuity with AACR2' and while this may indicate it will describe how catalogues may appear different, the start of the chapter focuses more on continuity in terms of governance and principles rather than on the nuts and bolts of the records themselves. It does move to describing how AACR2 has been reworked into RDA, rather than RDA being written from scratch and illustrates this with a couple of rules and wordings from both products to compare the differences and similarities. It then moves back to what is essentially an historical account of the 'deconstruction' of AACR2, which is interesting in itself; but it would have been better placed near the start of the chapter to distinguish better between the historical description and the examples from RDA which follow.

For Those Who Already Know the Basics
Practitioners such as cataloguers, who already have a basic understanding of the need for RDA and who do not need to explore the theoretical principles underlying FRBR and FRAD, may wish to start at Chapter 5, as some of the historical background to RDA is repeated when required.

The chapter does cover some areas of mismatch between RDA and AACR2, such as the recording of carrier type and the recording of multiple authors. Changes from AACR2 are embedded in textual description, rather than clearly highlighted, which means this chapter cannot be skim-read for a summary of what's different to AACR2. There is a lot to take in, and the chapter is rather dense at times. Although there are section headings, this chapter in particular may have benefited from clearer signposts, such as heading numbering, to make it fully clear which points were related.

Chapter 6, entitled 'Implementing RDA,' starts by highlighting further areas where RDA will impose changes, but in terms of the MARC21 coding changes that will need to be adopted. It also shows how the national libraries are working to address areas where they have dealt differently with rule interpretations in the past. The chapter then moves to a description of the RDA Toolkit. For those who are unaware, the RDA Toolkit is the online resource that contains the full text of RDA alongside related resources. It goes beyond just an electronic version of the text however, incorporating features such as the ability to create online workflows for different item types. Oliver does accept that trying to convey the layout of the Toolkit textually is difficult. Many of the figures are closely cropped. Indeed an overall screenshot of the initial RDA Toolkit screen might have helped those who were not able to see the Toolkit during the free trial of 2010 to understand how the tabs relate to each other. Being able to view the RDA Toolkit while reading this chapter is not essential but it is more difficult, especially when the appendices are mentioned, to fully understand what is being described. The chapter does, however, highlight the useful features of the Toolkit such as the ability to include notes to mark local practice or the ability to search by AACR2 rule number to find the RDA equivalent. Although it appears a little repetitive in places, this does not detract significantly from the range of material covered. Moreover, it raises issues where there may be a degree of 'relearning' required from practitioners familiar with AACR2.

Chapter 7, 'Advantages, present and future' almost stands alone in terms of readability and while briefly acknowledging the historical factors that have led to the requirement of a new cataloguing standard, the focus in this chapter is on the benefits, both immediate and long-term, of moving to RDA. It is written in a very non-technical manner and would be perfect for a cataloguing or service manager faced with having to explain and justify RDA adoption to senior management who may not have ever catalogued an item or even been through a traditional library school.

Layout and Extra Features
The overall layout is fairly plain, but the wide margins on the outside of the page could be useful for note-taking. Cataloguing, like much of librarianship, is a world of acronyms - the book therefore comes with a handy list of abbreviations at the front. The list of references at the end of each chapter are brief, but they are supplemented by further resources at the end of the work, grouped not by chapter heading but by overall area such as 'RDA and other metadata communities' and 'Resources for training and implementation'. They go beyond just articles and the technical documentation from the major library agencies and include webcasts and video tutorials, alongside wikis and online sites, covering a wide range of information service fields.

Conclusion
Overall, to misquote the wording of a certain DIY product advert, Introducing RDA: A Guide to the Basics 'does exactly what it says on the cover'. It is not a 'how-to' manual and cannot be used as a day-to-day reference work. However it never pretends to be as such; rather, as noted on the back cover, it is a 'guide to the changes ahead'. It covers the history, theoretical principles and some of the benefits that services should expect if they choose to adopt RDA. With the exception of Chapter 7, you will need a certain degree of basic cataloguing knowledge but not extensively so. It's not what I would call an engaging read, but it does deal with the material in a comprehensive yet succinct manner. I can't say if I've learnt anything new as I've tried to keep up to date with developments in RDA, but it has served as a useful refresher. It would definitely be of use to service managers to supplement their employees' own knowledge of RDA; and to get everyone up to a similar point in the understanding a development that will, if widely adopted, undoubtedly have long-running implications in many areas of information description and retrieval work for decades to come.

Katrina Clifford
Senior Information Advisor (Bibliographic and Metadata)
Information Services
Kingston University
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey
UK