south dakota STATE LIBRARY
Leadership. Innovation. Excellence.

THE PUBLIC LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO COPY CATALOGING

Finding, Evaluating, and Using Existing Catalog Records to Build an Organized Collection

Cataloging is the process of creating and organizing records that describe the materials in a library's collection. These records help staff manage materials and help patrons discover and locate what they need.

Copy cataloging makes this process more efficient by using an existing bibliographic record rather than creating one from scratch. When a library purchases a new book, for example, there is a good chance another library has already cataloged that same edition. Staff can locate the existing record, verify that it matches the item, and add it to their own catalog with the appropriate local information.

Copy cataloging saves time, supports consistency, and makes it easier to maintain an organized, searchable collection.

Understanding Catalog Records

A bibliographic record contains information that describes a particular library resource. It provides the details needed to identify, organize, and locate an item.
Common elements of a catalog record include:

- **Title and Author:** The name of the work and the person or organization responsible for its creation.
- **Publication Information:** Publisher, place of publication, and publication date.
- **Edition:** Identifies a particular edition or version of a work.
- **ISBN:** The International Standard Book Number, a unique identifier assigned to many published books.

- **Physical Description:** Information such as page count, dimensions, and format.
- **Subject Headings:** Standardized terms that describe the topics covered in a resource.
- **Call Number:** The classification assigned to an item to help organize and locate it within the library.

Many library catalog records use a standard format called MARC (Machine-Readable Cataloging). MARC provides a structured way to organize and exchange bibliographic information between library systems. You may see MARC field numbers when viewing or editing a catalog record, but most library management systems display this information in a more user-friendly format.

What to Know Before Copying a Record

Finding a record with the same title and author is a good starting point, but it does not automatically mean you have found the correct record. The record should accurately describe the specific item you have in hand. Pay particular attention to:

- **ISBN:** Does the number match the book?
- **Title and Author:** Do the title, subtitle, and author information match?
- **Edition:** Is it the same edition?
- **Publisher and Publication Date:** Do these details correspond to your copy?
- **Format:** Is the record for the correct format, such as hardcover, paperback, large print, audiobook, or DVD?
- **Physical Description:** Does the description reasonably match the item?

An updated edition, different publisher, or different format may require a separate bibliographic record. Always have the physical item available when selecting a record. The information printed inside the book, particularly on the title and copyright pages, can help you verify a match.

Putting Copy Cataloging Into Practice

Although the exact process varies by library management system, the general workflow is similar.

Step 1: Search for an Existing Record

Begin with your library's catalog or the cataloging database available through your library system. Search using the ISBN when possible. Title and author searches are also useful.

Step 2: Review Your Search Results

Compare potential records with the item in hand. Look closely at the edition, publisher, publication date, and format. Select the record that most accurately describes your item.

Step 3: Import or Copy the Record

Once you have identified a matching record, follow your library system's process for importing or copying it into your local catalog.

Step 4: Review Local Information

A shared bibliographic record describes the resource, but your library still needs to add information specific to its collection. Review details such as:

- Call number and collection designation
- Library location or branch
- Item barcode
- Circulation settings
- Local notes or labels

Your library's procedures will determine which fields need to be completed or adjusted.

Step 5: Save and Process the Item

Save the record, verify that the item appears correctly in your catalog, and complete the physical processing needed to prepare it for circulation.

When You Can't Find a Matching Record

Occasionally, a search will not produce an appropriate record. This may happen with self-published books, locally produced materials, new publications, or items with limited distribution. When this happens:

- Try searching by title, author, and ISBN separately.
- Check another cataloging database available through your library system.
- Ask a neighboring library or regional cataloging partner for assistance.
- Consult your library system's support resources or a more experienced cataloger.

If no matching record exists, original cataloging may be necessary. This involves creating a new bibliographic record rather than using an existing one. Follow your library's established procedures or seek assistance before creating a new record.

Copy Cataloging Checklist

Before adding an existing record to your catalog, check that:

- ☐ The ISBN or other identifying information matches.
- ☐ The title and author are correct.
- ☐ The edition matches.
- ☐ The publisher and publication date are consistent.
- ☐ The format matches the item in hand.
- ☐ The physical description is accurate.
- ☐ Local information, including call number and location, has been reviewed.
- ☐ The item is correctly connected to the record in the library catalog.

Learn More

WebJunction: Library Catalog Training Series

WebJunction offers free, self-paced LiFT (Library Foundational Training) courses designed to build foundational cataloging skills. The Library Catalog series includes four courses:

- Introduction to the Library Catalog
- Classification and Call Numbers
- Subject Headings
- Copy Cataloging

The courses are especially helpful for library staff and volunteers who are developing their cataloging knowledge.

OCLC: Copy Cataloging Learning Path

Explore step-by-step instructions for searching, evaluating, and using bibliographic records in WorldShare Record Manager.

A Final Thought

Accurate catalog records make library collections easier to manage and easier to discover. Developing a consistent copy cataloging process helps keep your catalog organized, supports efficient collection management, and connects patrons with the materials they are looking for.