

Plenary Session: Etiquette for Replacing Bibliographic Records, Panel

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The great Jewish teacher and sage Hillel, who lived right around the time of the birth of Jesus, is supposed to have been asked by a non-Jew to sum up the Torah while standing on one foot.

"What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: This is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary; go and learn." This idea, often popularly known as the "Golden Rule" was hardly original to Hillel or even to Judaism or even to the West. It seems that nearly every civilization, religion, and ethical tradition has some variation on that theme. And of course, human history is not much more than one long tale of how selflessly devoted we've been to what has more formally been called "the principle of reciprocity."

Although it was never stated quite that explicitly, that's been the notion underlying the whole OCLC cooperative from the beginning and certainly all WorldCat Bibliographic record improvement programs introduced over the past three decades: Enhance created in 1983, Minimal-Level Upgrade implemented in 1985, Database Enrichment in 1991, CIP Enhance in 1993, National Level Enhance in 1994, and the Expert Community in 2009.

According to my trusty Cassell's French-English dictionary, the French "étiquette" literally means exactly what it sounds like, "ticket," followed by "label" and believe it or not, "tag." When we're talking about the "Etiquette for Replacing Bibliographic Records," how appropriate is that?

Those of us of a certain age fondly recall a time when every record in WorldCat (perhaps then called the OCLC Online Union Catalog) contained complete and perfectly accurate bibliographic information and there were no duplicates. Well, not exactly. This isn't to say that things have not gotten worse in spite of our best efforts, but there never was a Golden Age of Bibliographic Perfection. And until and unless Hermine and Mary and Neil and I can thoroughly examine every bibliographic record being added to WorldCat every hour of every day, it's safe to say that there won't be.

In both the "Enhance Training Outline" and the "Expert Community: Guidelines for Experts," we tried to suggest gentle ways of regarding existing records that would both respect the work of other catalogers and result in the improvement of data. Throughout all of these thirty-some-odd years, there have been numerous sources of bibliographic data, not all of them involving direct human intervention, and numerous means by which a bibliographic record can make its way into WorldCat, again, not all of them involving direct human intervention.

We need to keep both of those points in mind – the record's source and how the record got into WorldCat – when we think about doing something to it. If we were redesigning the MARC Bibliographic Record Format from scratch – wait a second, in a way we are, but that's a different story – we would do many things a lot differently. At OCLC at least, one major thing we would not have done is to use the Encoding Level (Leader/17) to mix up "record completeness/fullness" (the ostensible meanings of the numeric codes in MARC proper) with whether the record originated as manual online input or through a batch process (which we did with our locally-

defined alphabetic codes). We tend to treat records that are in some sense “untouched by human hands” a little more freely than those created and input by actual catalogers.

We also try to be true to two simple sub-principles of the Golden Rule, which were mentioned in the Expert Community documentation:

- First, do no harm.
- When in doubt, don't.

Many of you who have encountered records incorrectly merged by our Duplicate Detection and Resolution software will doubt me, but I assure you that all of our decisions regarding the design of DDR are weighted on the side of those two propositions. The vagaries of bibliographic information, the inherent shortcomings of MARC, and “The Heart-ache, and the thousand Natural shocks/That Flesh is heir to” notwithstanding, we always try to err on the side of not merging when we're not sure. In an automated process designed by fallible human beings, things don't always work out that way, but that is our inclination and intention.

Enhance Training Outline

Revised 2004 March 19, By Jay Weitz, Consulting Database Specialist, WorldCat® Content Management Division

[\[http://www.oclc.org/support/services/worldcat/training/enhanceoutline.en.html\]](http://www.oclc.org/support/services/worldcat/training/enhanceoutline.en.html)

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Hints For Responsible Enhance Activity

1. OCLC's experience has led us to be very conservative when correcting bibliographic records. Do **not** make assumptions about bibliographic records; it is better to ask a question than to jump to an incorrect conclusion. You always have the option of sending a change request. If at all possible, verify with piece in hand. This is not always possible with retrospective work, but if there is a serious question involving description, the piece is the ultimate source.
2. Always look at the whole record, not just one isolated data element. If there is conflicting information in a record, such that you cannot be sure which of two possible versions is represented, please ask for verification instead of changing the record. For example, if the fixed field is coded for a microform, but there is not a reproduction note, or dates conflict between 260 and the fixed field, do **not** conclude which one is wrong without further evidence. OCLC's experience suggests that there is no easy way to tell without asking the inputting institution before changing.
3. Please complete your "replace" transactions as expeditiously as possible. Try not to leave records locked in your Save File for a prolonged period. Only one institution at a time can lock a record, so OCLC staff regularly receive calls from users who can't lock a

record because another user already has it locked. If you keep a record locked for more than two weeks, you may be contacted and asked to complete your work on the record. In extreme cases, OCLC staff may "release" the record. If OCLC staff releases a record that you have locked and saved, your changes remain intact. OCLC staff will resave your record, which remains unlocked in your save file, although it will have a new save file number. You may produce or update the record or copy and paste your changes into another locked version of the record before completing the replace transaction. Quick replacement of records allow:

- a. Other users to have access to your improved record right away, thus avoiding unnecessary duplication of effort;
 - b. Other users who wish to lock and replace the same record to do so without repetitive attempts and inconvenience;
 - c. OCLC automated database quality software to work more effectively, since locked records cannot be processed by Duplicate Detection and Resolution software, automated authority control software, or database scans.
4. When in doubt, **don't**. Never remove data from a record unless it is clearly incorrect. Leave subject headings and call numbers in the record unless they are clearly wrong. Use judgment on the determination of predominant subject emphasis.
- a. In UKM records, 653 fields should be retained, but other 65X fields with second indicator "4" may be edited to agree with the LC subject authority file (changing second indicator to "0"). Fields 886 may be deleted except when they contain unique information not found elsewhere in the record (e.g., a variant name).
 - b. LC Encoding Level 5 records are no longer being loaded into WorldCat, (except for some records processed from LC overseas offices), but for records already online, it is permissible to delete the "In process" 050 field and the priority number 500 field. In addition, libraries should do the necessary authority work and subject analysis to ensure that an upgraded record meets I-Level standards. If there is doubt that the item in hand truly matches the item described in the "in process" record, do not upgrade the record.
5. Common quality control problems to stay alert for:
- a. Filing indicators. For details of current practices, see LC's "[Change in Practice for Counting Non-Filing Characters in MARC 21.](#)"
 - b. Fixed field dates.
 - c. Failure to use the authorized forms of name, subject, and uniform title headings found in the authority file.
 - d. Tagging of name headings (personal vs. corporate).
6. If you detect a pattern of errors on recently cataloged work from a particular inputting library, please contact OCLC. We can do more research and forward data to the network for follow-up.

Expert Community: Guidelines for Experts

November 2009. Jay Weitz, Consulting Database Specialist

[<http://www.oclc.org/support/services/worldcat/documentation/cataloging/guidelines.en.html>]

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Basic Principles of the Expert Community

The overriding principle of the Expert Community is: "First, do no harm." Please use the same care in editing an existing master record as you would use in creating a new record.

- NEVER remove correct and accurate information from a master record (such as classification numbers or subject headings) simply because your institution does not find it useful.
- NEVER change the basic nature of a master bibliographic record into something different.
- AVOID including local data or local practices in master bibliographic record.
- Be cautious about changing bibliographic records with a different Language of Cataloging (identified in field 040 subfield ‡b). *Bibliographic Formats and Standards*, Section 3.10, "[Parallel Records for Language of Cataloging](#)", has details on working with these records.

A second overriding principle is: "If in doubt, DON'T."

- Do not replace a record solely to change an element that is a matter of cataloger's judgment.
- Consider data within the context of the whole record, rather than in isolation. If you can reasonably resolve contradictory information within a record, please do so, but try not to jump to conclusions.
- Please behave responsibly concerning each other's records. Remember that each library that replaces a record input by another library appears, by virtue of the 040 field, to have some responsibility for the content of that record.