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Cataloging Loose-Leaf Publications

Byron Cooper

Current practices in the cataloging of loose-leaf publications have created numerous problems for both librarians and users. Many of these problems result from the effort to fit loose-leaf publications into a monographic cataloging format. It is argued that library needs demand, and AACR2 perhaps permits, the treatment of several types of loose-leaf publications as serials.

MANY PUBLICATIONS appear in loose-leaf binders. Often this format is preferred for economic reasons over a stitched or glued binding for a simple monograph and offers no cataloging challenge. But the treatment of loose-leaf publications designed to be updated is one of the more intractable problems of descriptive cataloging. The conceptual approach to loose-leaf publications is a theoretical question with serious practical consequences.

Every year more loose-leaf works are published with accompanying updating services. Since this format is expensive, loose-leaf services have generally been available in the past only for subjects of interest both to academia and to large, affluent professions, notably law, business, and medicine. Rapid changes, especially those brought about by technological developments, have led to the growing use of the updated loose-leaf format in many areas, including library cataloging itself.

CATALOGING QUESTIONS

Many of the problems of cataloging a loose-leaf publication will be apparent even to those who have never seen such a work. When it is updated, it gets new pages. The old pages may be superseded and discarded, or the new pages may simply be added to the end of the work. If the present binders become too crowded, new binders are added and old binders replaced. A new title page may be among the new pages provided every year or more frequently. A change in the title, the statement of responsibility, the edition, the place of publication, and the name of the publisher may create a "new manifestation" of the item.¹ Certainly the text of the work and the date in the chief source of information will

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have changed. Furthermore, one "loose-leaf service" can consist of a variety of publications. A periodical, a monographic series, several non-periodical serial sets, and as many as fifteen loose-leaf volumes, each performing a different function, may all be sent to those subscribing to the service.

THE DEFINITION OF LOOSE-LEAF PUBLICATION

The second edition of the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* (AACR2) refers to "all loose-leaf publications that are designed to receive additions," but offers no further definition of *loose-leaf publication*.² This term, like many others in descriptive cataloging, is difficult to define. The binder itself distinguishes the loose-leaf publication from most monographs. Many loose-leaf publications, however, are published in pamphlets usually filed at the end of the previously published pamphlets. They become almost indistinguishable from a periodical for which the publisher supplies a storage binder.

At least three characteristics, however, seem to be found among those works commonly called loose-leaf publications. First, such works are published in pages or pamphlets that are filed in a binder, usually supplied before or at the same time as the pages or pamphlets. Second, the set is updated with pages or pamphlets that replace or add to the previous material. Third, the set as a whole is integrated, at least by a digest system or an index that is supplied or cumulated nearly as often as updating pages or pamphlets are provided. The essence of a loose-leaf publication is the integration of the updates with the previously published material.

TYPES OF LOOSE-LEAF PUBLICATIONS

Loose-leaf publications can be divided into three types: sequential, interpaginated, and mixed. Sequential loose-leaf publications are those in which new material, except for the index, is added by pages or pamphlets filed at the end of the existing material. These publications cause few problems and are routinely handled by the Library of Congress and most other libraries as serials.

Interpaginated loose-leaf publications are those in which the new pages or pamphlets are interfiled within the existing work, sometimes superseding the existing material, sometimes adding to it. Of these there are also two types: (1) those intended to be continued indefinitely (or at least until the need for revision is so substantial as to warrant reissuing the basic volumes) and (2) those that are superseded at regular intervals. In something of a paradox, as explained below, those intended to be continued indefinitely are treated by the Library of Congress as monographs, and those regularly superseded are treated as serials.

Mixed publications are those in which part of the loose-leaf service or treatise is filed sequentially and part is interpaginated. If the only part that is interpaginated is the index or digest, then there seems to be no problem with regarding the whole as a "serial" under current practice. If more than the index or digest is interpaginated, then the Library of Congress tends to regard the whole as an interpaginated monograph. If

each part has its own title or subtitle, then each part can be given a bibliographic record appropriate to its type.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF CURRENT PRACTICES

The fundamental problem in the descriptive cataloging of loose-leaf publications of the interpaginated and mixed types has been the attempt to force them into formats established for monographs. The consequences of forcing an infinitely changing work into a format designed for a fixed, finite entity have been felt by both patrons and librarians.

Cataloging records for loose-leaf publications frequently mislead patrons looking for a particular "edition" of a loose-leaf service or treatise. Interlibrary loan requests are sent for loose-leaf works that no longer exist in any library, because the works have been updated with new title pages. The treatment of loose-leaf publications has failed dramatically to meet one of Cutter's objectives for cataloging records, which is to assist in the choice of a book as to its edition.³

Cataloging loose-leaf publications as monographs consumes inordinate amounts of staff time in constant revision of volume numbers, dates, and other information on cataloging records. Complete sets often must be recataloged and relabeled because of changes in title pages. The key figure in this process becomes the serials check-in clerk, who must be sufficiently aware of cataloging rules and practices to recognize significant changes, but not so sensitive that the catalogers are flooded with every update to a loose-leaf service or treatise. The chief purpose of such a work is severely undermined if the updates are backlogged in the cataloging department.

Updates for a loose-leaf service cataloged as a monograph usually cannot be controlled through an automated serials control system that is dependent upon a cataloging system, unless a separate serials cataloging record is constructed for the updates. To construct such a record is the philosophy of *OCLC Technical Bulletin* 104.⁴ But the guidelines in this bulletin do not directly answer the problem of what to do with updates that do not have their own titles distinct from the works in which they are interfiled. Furthermore, it is troubling to find separate cataloging records for both the basic service and the updates, neither of which has any fixed reality. The updates cease to exist as an entity when they are filed, and the service as a whole is nothing more than the sum of the updates.

According to its stated policy, *New Serial Titles (NST)* does not include loose-leaf publications.⁵ In fact, a large number of interpaginated loose-leaf works are included.⁶ But because the Library of Congress and *NST* guidelines exclude loose-leaf publications from serials treatment, other union listings of serials routinely omit them as well. The continuing costs of most loose-leaf publications are very high, and it is unfortunate that current practices are inhibiting interlibrary control and sharing of loose-leaf resources.

The International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) has proved very useful in controlling and identifying serial publications. Through cooperation between the Library of Congress and the U.S. Postal Service (USPS), the latter has adopted the ISSN as the preferred method of serial identification. The National Serials Data Program (NSDP) rou-

tinely assigns an ISSN to a sequential loose-leaf work or to the updates of an interpaginated one if the updates have a title different from that of the publication as a whole. Otherwise, the NSDP is reluctant to create a registry entry and no ISSN is assigned. The publisher must then use the USPS number assigned by the post office, and the latter number is nearly useless for control and automated searching and check-in procedures.

SERIAL OR MONOGRAPH?

Librarians' conception of what constitutes a "serial" unfortunately became fixed before loose-leaf services were widely used. The first loose-leaf services in law were not developed until 1907.⁷ Business services were developed at the same time. Oxford University Press claims to have developed the first medical loose-leaf service in 1920.⁸

On the other hand, by 1904 Cutter had already defined a serial as a "publication issued in successive parts, usually at regular intervals, and continued indefinitely."⁹ Cutter need not have defined *serial* as he did. He clearly formulated a definition based not on ordinary usage or lexical considerations but on the usefulness of the definition to librarians. This definition has, however, been strictly construed. Functional utility has been disregarded. After all, the purpose of special rules to describe serials was not to suggest the need for considerable shelf space but to create a format capable of describing something incomplete that is undergoing frequent change.

Cutter's definition was essentially retained in the 1908 and 1941 cataloging rules. By 1941 the Library of Congress had in practice already begun to describe interpaginated loose-leaf publications as monographs. There was some inconsistency in the treatment of individual items in the description, but the monographic format was often employed. This practice was codified in the 1949 *Rules for Descriptive Cataloging in the Library of Congress*, which was adopted by the American Library Association. Specific rules for describing loose-leaf publications were included in the chapter on "separately published monographs."¹⁰ The inclusion of loose-leaf rules in the chapter for monographs was continued in AACR1, in the revision of chapter 6, and in AACR2.¹¹ The definition gradually evolved so that it now states that a serial is a "publication in any medium issued in successive parts bearing numerical or chronological designations and intended to be continued indefinitely."¹²

Actually it has never been clear why the traditional definition cannot apply to interpaginated loose-leaf publications. They are *issued* in successive parts, even if they are not filed or bound successively. At the time they are issued, they almost invariably bear both chronological designations and numerical designations (Release 219, Release 220, etc.), even though these designations may be lost at the time of filing. But many loose-leaf services do retain such designations, and in fact the standard legal citation format in some cases requires citation by the date on the cited page, if there is one.¹³

In addition, the application of the principle that a loose-leaf publication be intended to be continued indefinitely in order to be considered a serial has been somewhat paradoxical. In Library of Congress practice,

serial treatment has been denied to a loose-leaf publication that may perhaps be superseded by a new edition at some undetermined and uncertain future time. If the present binders become too full or if new developments warrant, the publisher may prefer to reissue the entire set rather than try to update each page of the existing set. Otherwise the publisher will continue merely to update the current set indefinitely. In fact, many loose-leaf works have never been reissued since they were first begun, some of them more than forty years ago. This kind of publication has been regarded as failing to meet the criterion of indefinite continuation. If, on the other hand, the publisher does decide to supersede the current sets at regular fixed times, then they are "intended to be continued indefinitely" and become serials, as in the cases of the *Congressional Index* and the *Standard Federal Tax Reporter*.

A case can be made, however, that AACR2 requires interpaginated loose-leaf publications to be treated as serials. The rules in themselves may indicate that the editors of AACR2 consider "all loose-leaf publications that are designed to receive additions" as monographs since a rule for their description is given in chapter 2. All such publications are to be described as "1 v. (loose-leaf), 2 v. (loose-leaf), etc."¹⁴ No exception is stated for open-volume descriptions of sequential loose-leaf publications. A literal application of this rule to all loose-leaf publications would require librarians to state and then constantly revise the number of volumes for both sequential and interpaginated loose-leaf works. But the reason for the absence of any exception is apparent. There is no need to make an exception for loose-leaf serials in the chapter on monographs. So it must first be determined from the definitions that a loose-leaf publication is a monograph before the cataloger turns to chapter 2.

From the definitions in AACR2, it appears that a significant change has occurred. In AACR1, a monograph was defined as a "work, collection, or other writing that is not a serial."¹⁵ AACR2, however, has defined a monograph as a "nonserial item, i.e., an item either complete in one part or complete, or intended to be completed, in a finite number of separate parts."¹⁶ This definition clearly excludes interpaginated loose-leaf publications. Nothing is finite or complete about the number of parts of a loose-leaf publication. The number of pages, the number of volumes, the binders, the title pages, text, and indexes change constantly. The parts of an interpaginated loose-leaf publication are not separate but interwoven. AACR2's elucidation of what constitutes a monograph strongly suggests that an interpaginated loose-leaf publication should be regarded as a serial. Chapter 2 is to be used only for monographs that are published in loose-leaf binders to facilitate storage of any additional, separate, finite monographs related to the original.

Functionally, loose-leaf publications have always been treated as serials for acquisitions, for check-in procedures, and for accounting and budgeting records.¹⁷ It is only for cataloging purposes that they have been regarded as monographs.

Handling interpaginated loose-leaf publications as serials would facilitate the establishment of automated check-in records. It would improve control through union listings and the routine assignment of ISSNs. In the cataloging record itself, the serials format would give greater promi-

nence to chronological designations and would enable catalogers to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the serials format to avoid some of the frequent changes now required.

CONCLUSION

Loose-leaf publication is a superb format for a serial. Viewed functionally, it is in fact nothing more than a highly developed form of serial that allows augmentation by subject rather than in simple chronological sequence. The utility of such a format is very great, but has been limited in important respects by the cataloging treatment accorded to it.

The best interests of patrons and librarians would be served by treating the updated loose-leaf publication as a serial. Such treatment would foster standardization, interlibrary cooperation, and perhaps substantial economies in library operations. Merely recognizing the serial nature of an interpaginated loose-leaf publication does not solve all of the problems, but it is a necessary first step.

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