



MassCat Musings - March 2014

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Monographs and Serials

In Library-speak, a monograph is any item that is complete. Most monographs are single items such as a book, a music CD, an audio book, or a DVD. Some monographs have multiple volumes like an encyclopedia or Robert Caro's biography of Lyndon Johnson. Even though a monograph may be published over a period of years, it is ultimately complete.

Serials, however, are never supposed to be complete; the intention is they continue forever (even though they usually don't). A newspaper is a serial as is a magazine like *Time*, *Sports Illustrated*, or *Real Simple*.

Something that is published just once a year is also a serial if the purpose is to publish it annually.

This brings me to travel guides such as Fodor's or Frommer's. Most libraries have some of these although the library does not buy a new one every year. The individual guides sometimes have an ISBN (International Standard Bibliographic Number) which makes the guide look like a monograph. But usually the guides also have an ISSN (International Standard Serial Number). The ISSN is an 8 digit number with a dash in the middle. For example, 1096-7788 is the ISSN for the *Mobile Travel Guide, Florida*. This ISSN will be the same for all issues of the title regardless of the year.

Because most libraries don't purchase the new version of a specific travel guide every year, libraries sometimes prefer to treat these items as monographs. But in a shared catalog like MassCat it is more efficient to use serial records. Then, when any one of the 70 MassCat members purchases a travel guide, the cataloger can add that issue to the library's collection immediately instead of looking for or requesting a new monographic record. He/she does need to add the year as if it were a volume number. And it is easier for a library patron to see all of the years available throughout MassCat and request the most appropriate one for his/her needs.

Of course with so many different libraries joining MassCat and importing their records into the shared catalog, there are a variety of different ways travel guides have been cataloged over the years by different people. As I find monographic records for items that are really serials, I am importing the serial record and transferring holdings onto the new record.

Beware! Just to make things interesting, not all travel guides are serials. Some have been issued by the author as a monograph with no intention of ever publishing an updated version.

Have questions? Let me know!