

**TO:** Peter J. Rolla, Chair  
ALA/ALCTS/CaMMS/Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access (CC:DA)

**FROM:** John Attig, JSC Representative

**SUBJECT:** Colour Content (RDA 7.17)

One of the issues raised by Deborah Fritz in her discussion paper [CC:DA/Fritz/2013/1] was inconsistency within the treatment of Colour Content (RDA 7.17). In particular, black and white are recorded for still images (7.17.2.3) and for moving images (7.17.3.3), but not for illustrative content (7.17.1.3); this suggests that black and white are treated as colours in the case of still and moving images, but not in the case of illustrations. Further, illustrative content frequently consists of still images, and it is disconcerting that you get different results depending on whether you apply 7.17.2.3 or 7.17.1.3 when describing black-and-white illustrations. Deborah also notes that the British Library has chosen to apply 7.17.2.3 in describing the colour content of illustrations.

Coincidentally, the Joint Steering Committee has been discussing the vocabularies associated with the Colour Content element. They have a preference for a single set of terms that would be used in describing colour content for any resource, and question whether there should be distinct element subtypes for Colour of Still Image, etc.

In order to move these discussions forward, Deborah Fritz, Kathy Glennan and I have been discussing a possible revision proposal. This document contains a strawman proposal that would accomplish two things: (a) give a consistent set of terms that would be used in describing colour content in any context; and (b) provide a single set of instructions that would be applied for describing the colour content of resources such as still or moving images, as well as the colour content of illustrations.

This is a strawman proposal designed to promote discussion of the issues involved; it is expected that the proposal will need considerable modification before it is ready to submit to the JSC for their consideration. Therefore, it does not contain any mark-up indicating the differences from the current text.

This strawman proposal is designed to replace the entire text of RDA 7.17. In other words, it is assumed that the final proposal will call for the deletion of the current 7.17.2–7.17.5, and the replacement of the current 7.17.1.

Following the strawman proposal, there is a set of discussion points, with some specific questions that we believe should be discussed by CC:DA. If these issues can be resolved quickly, it is possible that a proposal can be submitted to the JSC in July; if the issues prove difficult to resolve, the formation of a Task Force may be necessary.

## Strawman Proposal:

### A set of basic instructions on recording Colour Content

## 7.17 Colour Content

### 7.17.1 Basic Instructions on Recording Colour Content

#### 7.17.1.1 Scope

**Colour content** is the presence of colour, tone, etc., in the content of a resource.

Colour content is also the specific colours, tones, etc., (including black and white) present in the content of a resource.

Colour content does not include matter outside the actual content of the resource (e.g., the border of a map, the cover of a book).

For instructions on recording information on hand-coloured items, see [3.21](#).

For instructions on recording the broadcast standard used for colour in videos, see [3.18.3](#).

#### 7.17.1.2 Sources of Information

Use evidence presented by the resource itself as the basis for recording the presence of colour content in the resource. If desired, take additional evidence from any source.

#### 7.17.1.3 Recording Colour Content

Apply these instructions to describe the colour content of:

a) the resource itself

*or*

b) the content of the resource, including illustrative content (see [7.15](#)).

Disregard coloured matter outside the actual content of the resource (e.g., the border of a map, the cover of a book).

Record details of colour content as instructed under [7.17.1.4](#).

##### 7.17.1.3.1 Black and White

If the resource or its content is in black and white or shades of grey, record *black and white*.

#### EXAMPLE

black and white

**A motion picture film in black and white**

#### *Exception*

**Digital still images.** For digital still images in grey scale, record *grey scale*.

If the image or images in black and white are tinted and/or toned, specify *tinted*, *toned*, or *tinted and toned* as appropriate, in parentheses, following *black and white*.

**EXAMPLE**

black and white (tinted)

**A photograph in black and white, tinted**

black and white (tinted)

**A set of slides in colour****7.17.1.3.2 Sepia**

If the images contained in the resource are in sepia, record *sepia*.

**EXAMPLE**

sepia

**A photograph in sepia****7.17.1.3.3 Colour**

If the resource or its content is in colour, record *colour* [or *color*].

If the specific colours are considered to be important for identification or selection, name the colour or colours.

**EXAMPLE**

blue and red

**An oil painting**

blue and white

**A porcelain bowl in blue and white****7.17.1.3.4 Combination of Colour and Black and White**

If the resource or its content is in a combination of colour and black and white, record both *colour* [or *color*] and *black and white*. If considered to be important for identification or selection, record the details as instructed under **7.17.1.4**.

**EXAMPLE**

colour

black and white

**7.17.1.3.5 Text and Background**

If the text and background in a resource designed for persons with visual impairments are other than black on white, record the colours of the text and background. Otherwise, ignore the colour of textual content.

**EXAMPLE**

blue text on yellow background

#### 7.17.1.4 Details of Colour Content

Record details of the colour content if they are considered important for identification or selection.

##### EXAMPLE

Colour maps, black-and-white photographs

**Illustration which include colour maps and black-and-white photographs. Colour content recorded as:** colour, black and white

Some color

**10 maps, some of which are in colour**

Chiefly colour

**Illustrations, most of which are in colour**

2 maps in colour

**Resource containing 4 maps, 2 of which are in colour**

Color with black and white sequences

**A motion picture film**

Black and white with colour introductory sequence

**A motion picture film**

Title and headings printed in red

**An early printed resource**

Displays in red, yellow, and blue

Technicolor

Colourized

## Discussion Points

1. **Vocabulary.** The first objective of this paper was to propose a single consistent set of terms for describing colour.

This is not a true vocabulary, one that could be given following an instruction to “record one or more of the following terms.” What we have here are instructions on when to record particular terms, not definitions of what these terms mean. Furthermore, the vocabulary is necessarily incomplete, given the instruction to record the names of specific colours if considered important.

- ***Question #1a: Do you agree that there should not be a formal vocabulary, i.e., that it should be a set of specific instruction to record certain terms, rather than a list of terms to be recorded?***

However, the guidelines above do contain the following specific terms. These constitute a vocabulary of sorts, and as such should probably be defined in the Glossary.

black and white  
 black and white (tinted)  
 black and white (tinted and toned)  
 black and white (toned)  
 colour/color  
 grey scale  
 sepia

The JSC is currently considering the following definitions, supplied by Dan Lipcan of ARLIS based on AAT:

black and white	Colour content consisting of shades of black and white.
grey scale	Colour content consisting of monochromatic tones in stages from black to white.
sepia	Colour content consisting of a cool brownish colour with overtones of violet or olive colour, varying from light to moderate value.
tinted	Colour content consisting of a changed or altered colour, whether by penetrating or coating.
toned	Colour content consisting of the alteration of the pervading colour.

Note that this list does not include “colour/color” — which is arguably the most difficult to define, because we would need to decide whether black and/or white are colours.

- ***Question #1b: Should the terms contained in the instructions be added to the Glossary? If so, how should “colour/color” be defined?***

- 2. Scope of the instructions.** The second objective of the paper is to explore the creation of a single set of instructions for recording colour, and the elimination of the element subtypes currently defined in 7.17.2–7.17.5.

The current instructions combine two different applications of the concept of colour content. RDA 7.17.2–7.17.5 cover the colour of the resource itself and is limited to four categories of resources (still images, moving images, three-dimensional forms, and resources designed for persons with visual impairments). RDA 7.17.1, on the other hand, covers the colour of the content (particularly the colour of Illustrative Content [RDA 7.15]).

The strawman proposal combines these into a single set of instructions, stating in the first paragraph of 7.17.1.3 that the instructions apply either to the resource itself or to any illustrative content. All the subsequent instructions would be applied consistently in either case.

- *Question #2a: Should there be a single set of instructions that covers both the colour of the resource and the colour of illustrations?*

Deborah Fritz notes that this simplified structure may make it more difficult to describe complex situations. For instance, a manifestation may consist of more than one type of resource (or have more than one type of illustration) and the colour content may be different; for example, a website might have both still images in colour and moving images in black and white. RDA does not provide a way of indicating what each colour statement applies to. If we retain the element subtypes, it would at least be possible to distinguish the colour of the still images from the colour of the moving images — although it would not be possible to record the presence of both colour maps and black-and-white photographs. Admittedly, RDA does not do a very good job of indicating relationships between elements describing the same resource; in this case, the best solution is to apply 7.17.1.4 and describe the relationships in a note (see the first example there). However, it is difficult to imagine how this could be machine-actionable in a linked-data environment.

- *Question #2b: Is there any advantage in retaining the element subtypes for Colour of Still Image, etc.?*

- 3. Tinting and toning.** In the course of developing the strawman proposal, some troublesome questions came up involving the instructions for recording tinting and toning. In this case, we may not have a clear idea of what we are trying to describe.

The current instructions limit tinting and toning to black-and-white images. In this context, a tint would be a colouring applied to a black-and-white image, preserving the variations in saturation and intensity. The tint would be a colour *other than* black and white; for example, a black-and-white image might be tinted blue, thus becoming a blue-and-white image. If this is the case, then describing such an image as “black and white (tinted)” is seriously misleading, as the image is no longer black and white, and we don’t say what colour it is! Shouldn’t we say something like “A black-and-white photograph, tinted blue”? However, if this is what tinting means in RDA, then what we are describing is not what we have, but the process by which it was created; i.e., we *have* a blue and white image that was created by the *process* of tinting a black-and-white image. One suspects that it would be very difficult to determine whether a given image was (originally?) blue and white, or a black-and-white

image subsequently tinted blue. If the instructions in RDA are dealing with this concept of tinting, they would appear to be seriously flawed.

The concept of tinting, however, may be more broadly applied. The dictionary definition of *tint* is “a variation of a color produced by adding white to it and characterized by a low saturation with relatively high lightness.” The definition of *tone* is “a modification of a chromatic or achromatic color with respect to lightness or saturation.” These clearly can apply to variations/modifications of any (primary?) colour, not just black and white. One would presume that the description of such a situation would specify the primary colour(s) and the fact that these colours have been tinted or toned.

These are two very different concepts of tinting; they yield quite different results; and it is not clear which is the most useful for bibliographic description.

Note that, in the first case, the image is being tinted or toned; in the second case, the colour(s) are being modified — although the second set of definitions might possibly be written in terms of modifications of the image.

- *Question #3a: How are the concepts of tinting and toning currently being applied in describing still- and moving-image resources? Do these concepts mean different things for still vs. moving images?*
  - *Question #3b: Should tinting and toning be part of the instructions for black and white or of the instructions for colour?*
  - *Question #3c: Should the instructions result in the description of the process by which an image was tinted [“black and white (tinted)”] or of the resulting colours?*
4. **Grey scale.** Shades of grey are included in the scope of “black and white,” so the exception allowing the specification of “grey scale” for digital images must be getting at something else. This may be due to the fact that greyscale is often a software setting that can be applied to a digital image of any sort (e.g., an original colour image rendered in grey scale). This may be the basis for treating this as an exception.
- *Question #4: Should this exception be retained?*
5. **Exclusion of matter outside the actual content of the resource.** The current instructions contain the following exclusion: “Disregard coloured matter outside the actual content of the resource (e.g., the border of a map).” It is not clear whether this should be a unique exclusion for maps or whether it should be generalized to include (for example) the cover of a book.
- *Question #5a: Should the exclusion be extended beyond the border of a map? If so, to what?*
- The exclusion could either be given following the basic instruction at 7.17.1.3 or it could be given as part of the scope statement at 7.17.1.1. In the strawman proposal, it is given in both places, with wording variations.
- *Question #5b: Should the exclusion be given at 7.17.1.1 or 7.17.1.3?*