

Recommendations of the Character Table Committee

Revised June 2020

Overview

These recommendations are based on the following premises:

- Each uniquely identifiable character who meets the GCD's criteria for inclusion in the table shall have an entry in the character table.
- Characters who have multiple identities, such as super-heroes, super-villains, spies, etc, may have multiple records in the character table (e.g. Dick Grayson, Robin, and Nightwing could all be separate entries). Links can be created as outlined below in order to establish relationships between the identities.
- Characters who have different features based on different periods of their lives (Archie and L'il Archie, Superman and Superboy, Conan and King Conan, Sgt Fury and Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.) may also have multiple records in the table as above.
- Multiple character records should be used for each incarnation of an identity that is passed on from one character to another (e.g. Robin, Ant-Man, Goliath, the Phantom).
- A character shall have separate records per language. Links can be created as outlined below to tie re-published characters to their original variant.

Adding Characters

The character records shall have the following information:

- character name -- the name most commonly associated with this character
- year first published -- year from date of first publication in that language
- language - language of stories this character appeared in
- disambiguation note -- short phrase that helps users distinguish this character from similarly named characters, for example the name of their alternate world or timeline.
- description -- concise character description, including background and character premise.
- notes -- general notes, including background on their creation and publication history

Support tables

- keywords -- same as keywords for other objects
- images -- a policy needs to be established governing the use of images for characters

Characters shall have at least one name, but some characters may warrant several (for example a common name vs a formal full name, or a maiden and married name). Therefore a method of adding, editing, and removing additional names should be provided.

Links

Many character records will have a complex web of relationships to other character records. They may have alter-egos, they may have counterparts in other dimensions/alternate histories, they may have adventures at other stages of their lives (as youths or in their later years), they may be republished in other languages, etc.

As such, character to character links will be plentiful. A general structure would probably encompass:

- link type -- a value list that should encompass, at a minimum:
 - republished/originally published as (for reprints)
 - alias of/secret identity of
 - alternate universe version of
 - identity also held by (for code names that are passed from one character to another).
 - younger/older version of
- notes

Conceivably, the concept could also be used to track important interpersonal relationships between characters: father/mother/son/daughter/sibling of; love interest of; partner of; etc.

Character display pages should display all associated links, and the edit workflow for characters should allow adding, editing, and deleting links. For clarity, different types of links may be displayed on different display pages, with clear navigation allowing the user to find and view the appropriate list of links. For a given character, the user should be able to view the character basics (name, year debuted, notes, etc) and there should be a place to view:

- A chronological list of appearances, hyperlinked to the appropriate story object,
- A list of other identities held, hyperlinked to the appropriate character records
- If the character is a licensed reprint, an “originally published as” link back to the original character record
- A list of alternate universe/timeline versions of the character, hyperlinked to the appropriate character records.
- A list of age variant versions of the character, each hyperlinked to the appropriate character record.
- A list of groups to which the character belongs or belonged, with date ranges, and with the group name hyperlinked to the appropriate group record.

Example 1: Hank Pym is a character who may also be referred to as Henry Pym, Dr. Hank Pym, Dr. Henry Pym, or Dr. Pym. His character is a secret identity of the characters Ant-Man, Giant-Man, Goliath, and Yellowjacket. He has been a member of several Avengers related groups and of the Defenders. He is a love interest of Janet van Dyne from xxxx to yyyy. There is an Ultimate universe version of him. Each of his costumed identities is related to a previous/successive incarnation, and each of those is related to a civilian identity. Every single

one of the preceding has a British, French, German, and/or Italian counterpart in a licensed republication in a non-U.S. comic.

Example 2: Superman is a character who has a civilian identity, Clark Kent. He is also known as Kal-El. The original Superboy is a younger version of him. He has been a member of the Justice League of America. There is/was an Earth-2 version of him. I don't know if the post-crisis or New 52 versions are considered distinct. There is an Earth Prime version, and an Earth-3 version (Ultraman). He at one time went by Nightwing in Kandor. The Superboy introduced in the '90s is a clone of him. The original Supergirl was a cousin of his. Jor-El and Lara are his birth parents; Jonathan and Martha Kent are his foster parents; Lois Lane is his love interest. Jon Kent is his son. Baby Kal-El is a younger version of him. And there are foreign incarnations of all of the preceding in licensed reprints in other countries.

Appearances

The most common action indexers will perform with a character is to add them to a story. It is assumed that all characters appear in at least one story in order to warrant a character record. No one on the committee came up with a reason to have a record of a character who did not appear in any stories, therefore character records in the database that have no appearances should be viewed with suspicion. It must be possible to add appearances from the add/edit story workflow. Indexers should be able to add as many characters to a story as needed. If needed, indexers should be able to add new characters from the character selection workflow while adding a character appearance to a story.

An appearance is the record of a character's appearance in a story. It is a link between a story and a character, but the record could also include information about whether the character appeared as part of a group, if they also appeared as someone else, what role they played in the story, etc.

Optional information that can be documented in an appearance:

- Group -- link to a group object (if character is appearing as a member of a group)
- Role -- value list, with options Featured, Supporting, Guest, Antagonist, Cameo
- Flags:
 - Flashback
 - Origin
 - Death
- Notes -- general notes

An add character appearance workflow should be available from a story, which should allow an indexer to select a character using an auto-complete on the character table. An "add new character" workflow should be available from the "select character" workflow.

Once the character was selected, the indexer should have the ability to fill in the optional fields

described above.

Some indexers may wish to note that a given character may also appear as someone else. For example, a costumed character may also appear in their civilian identity (sometimes this may be an assumption, sometimes it is worth recording), or a character may be disguised as an unrelated character (e.g a shapechanger or a spy). So there should be a way for an indexer to click “also appears as” and then fill out an additional appearance record linked to the first. It may be worth noting if the additional appearance is a disguise or not (i.e. if the appearance is not actually an appearance of the character depicted, so that the appearance does not show up as a false positive in searches for the depicted character).

Note: most committee members felt that the appearance record should link to a single, specific character record, but several supported an alternate suggestion that would allow the indexer to link to both a costumed identity and a civilian identity (e.g. “Green Lantern” and “Hal Jordan”) in order to reduce the number of character records needed. We leave it to the board to decide if the majority or minority approach is preferable.

Groups

Characters sometimes appear as part of a group, such as a club, team, or larger organization. We should document such groups, and membership of characters in such groups.

On the character pages, there should be a way to add group memberships and edit or delete existing memberships.

Membership shall be represented by means of links between characters and groups. These membership links should include:

- Joined -- publication year of story in which they joined the group
- Left -- publication year of story in which they left the group
- Membership type -- formal, associated, uncertain
- Notes -- general notes

A character can leave and rejoin a group, which can be represented by means of multiple membership records.

It should be possible to add new groups from the “select group” workflow when adding a character’s group memberships. The group record shall have the following information:

- group name
- year first published -- year from date of first publication in that language
- language - language of stories this group appeared in
- disambiguation note -- short phrase that helps users distinguish this group from similarly named groups

- description -- concise group description
- notes -- general notes

Support tables

- keywords -- same as keywords for other objects
- images -- a policy needs to be established governing the use of images for groups

Links

Relations between groups won't be as complex as characters, but they may exist. They may have counterparts in other dimensions/alternate histories, they may be republished in other languages, and they may be parts of larger groups.

A general structure would probably encompass:

- link type -- a value list that should encompass, at a minimum:
 - republished/originally published as
 - alternate universe version of
 - previous/successive group
 - subgroup of
- notes

Group display pages should display all associated links, and the edit workflow for groups should allow adding, editing, and deleting links. For clarity, different types of links may be displayed on different display pages, with clear navigation allowing the user to find and view the appropriate list of links. For a given group, the user should be able to view the group basics (name, year debuted, notes, etc) and there should be a place to view:

- A chronological list of appearances, hyperlinked to the appropriate story object,
- If the group is a reprint, an "originally published as" link back to the originating group record
- A list of alternate universe/timeline versions of the group, hyperlinked to the appropriate group records.
- A list of group members, with date ranges, and with the member names hyperlinked to the appropriate character record.

General note: For both characters and groups the rationale for including first publication dates in the record rather than relying on the publication date of the earliest linked stories is two-fold:

- 1) The earliest appearance may not be indexed.
- 2) The first publication year provides a handy means of disambiguating similarly named characters similar to the way it helps disambiguate similarly named series, e.g. Robin (1940) vs Robin (1982).

Sanity checks should be performed when adding character or group appearances: if the new appearance predates the first appearance date in the character or group record, the indexer

should be warned, and given the opportunity to either update the recorded first appearance date or reselect the character or group.

Our general IMP structure (<http://docs.comics.org/wiki/IMPs>) should be appropriate for working with characters and groups, no specific changes are required.