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## Database Indexing

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A workshop entitled 'Database indexing' begs the question: Why index a database? Databases have search facilities built in, don't they? Isn't that the point of them?

It turns out that database indexing is not indexing of databases but indexing for the main public bibliographic databases, such as APAIS, Streamline, NCJRS\* and others. In this nicely-paced workshop, Lynn Farkas first introduced her audience of seven librarians, indexers and editors to the concept of database indexing and then showed us where it fits in the knowledge continuum. She outlined the sub-categories of database indexing and the skills or qualities a database indexer needs for effective work.

After a coffee break, we had a go at this business. It had sounded quite easy to do when Lynn explained it earlier. In practice, of course, it wasn't easy at all. Try to summarise the main points of an A4 page magazine article in 1.5 minutes, never having seen the article before! (The time limit reflects the amount of time a working indexer can afford to spend absorbing the article.) Then turn that into an abstract. It's clearly possible in the time, once one has experience at it, and we had some success in capturing the essence of the text at first attempt.

Then Lynn handed out appropriate thesauri and we searched them for keywords that would describe the article. For an editor who has not seen this kind of thesaurus before, this was less straightforward than preparing the abstract. Thesauri have been compiled and published particularly for database indexing, and they focus on special subject areas, such as public affairs, water, criminal justice. The intention is that all indexers will use only particular keywords to describe the information in their sources, and so simplify the subsequent retrieval of that information from the database. However, the keywords we first searched for were generally not in the thesauri, and a flexible brain was required to think of synonyms that might be findable.

I enjoyed this workshop very much and it stimulated me to try out Streamline and other databases, and to want to pick up this skill professionally.

\*APAIS is Australian Public Affairs Information Service (now part of APAFT – Australian Public Affairs Full Text), and NCJRS is National Criminal Justice Reference System.