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This publication is indexed and abstracted by The Australian Clearing House for Library and Information Science for *Australian education index* and *Library and information science abstracts*.

## CHAPTER OF POSSIBLE ERRORS

Our last issue included the chapter on indexing for the new edition of the Australian Government Publishing Services *Style Manual*. The chapter was prepped on behalf of the Society by George Levick. One of our members, Janet D. Hine, discusses the chapter in the article below.

---

It was tempting to take George Levick's 'Indexing Chapter for AGPS Style Manual' as a state-of-the-art report, something to fall upon with excitement as a likely update for personal use. Even though there is now a genuine indexing community, able to share ideas through *The Indexer* (and the *Newsletter*), many of us continue to work in isolation and sometimes, if we pause in our busy lives to think of what we're doing, subject to fears of falling behind or into eccentricity - and grateful for an opportunity to measure ourselves against current received practice.

Instead of the private delights suggested above, I found some questionable proposals that I believe should be discussed further in public. I stress that, in what follows, I'm not picking out everything I disagree with, but just a few approaches on which debate might prove fruitful. Some practices will remain contentious till the end of time and are best regarded as questions of taste, and may be too subtle even to be stated as problems in an introductory discourse. I must admit, though, that I was surprised to see that inverted headings (except in the conventional treatment of personal names) are still in serious use.

Mr Levick comes to terms with a state of affairs that, more and more, requires authors to be responsible for having their work indexed; I suspect English influence here, through the attitudes of English publishers, together with the way authors are too often reduced to virtually publishing their own works unaided or by means of mere printers. These are very significant developments for indexers, and it's not just that the wishes of authors can't be ignored: we must either produce indexes that are precisely what the authors have in mind or convince them that something else would be better. To this end we must be able to communicate with them and explain ourselves so thoroughly that there's no possibility of misunderstanding.

For example, some people with contorted minds dearly love to separate 'scientific' and common names in books on natural history topics, and the authors and publishers of such works do sometimes need to be reminded that enquirers don't necessarily know which is which, can't be blamed when scientific are occasionally also the common names, and anyway are in constant danger of missing an index if there's more than one. Mr Levick is right to say multiple indexes are undesirable; I'd go further, to the point of absolute veto, in fact any lengths to convince anyone with a hankering that they always create more problems than they solve.

One interesting discovery is that some authors have actually done some indexing and have very clear notions of the problems and possibilities. They can be truly grieved not to be indexing the work they're now hesitantly handing over to the indexer - perhaps because they know they haven't time as they're now



engaged in writing the next book but one, such being the delay in publishing (another sign of the times). Such an author will probably be an informed index-user too and therefore able to speak for others of the breed, and their educated criticisms of other indexes will be useful guidance for the present indexer. For instance, one might have assumed that use of the general subject of the book as an index heading would be out, in the conviction that many of the other headings used would be functioning, as it were, as subheadings to *the* subject (of the book understood). Not a bit of it: an indexer missing out such a heading has failed to discover what the book is about!

Again, some guardians of the dogma of our profession are firmly against long strings of undifferentiated page numbers after headings. But it emerges that authors are not: they're positively proud of massive gatherings-together of instances of an important theme that has surfaced in many different connexions in their work. Furthermore, they know very well, as scholars, that they're enthusiastically happy to cope with such listings in indexes to the work of others; if they're striking pay-dirt each time (and it's up to us to see they do) they gladly note the page numbers separately for ticking off and going through from beginning to end. It could be that some of us dutiful indexers have been suffering from busy-reference-librarian syndrome here and have lost touch with the needs of serious users seeking information for themselves rather than for other people. This discovery is surely a message of hope for an indexer whose heart sinks upon realising the page numbers are mounting up and who knows there's no meaningful way of splitting them up with subheadings or hiving them off with references away. (It's not unlike the plight of cataloguers in large libraries with frantic quantities of books on general subjects, reduced to dividing the subject entries by some artificial means like date of publication, which might be meaningful to some users, and for some subjects, but certainly not all; how nice to work in the sort of library allowed to throw out the older books!) Whatever the predilections of the author, I shouldn't advocate any relaxation in efforts to devise divisive arrays of subheadings, etc., and there are clearly limits to the number of page numbers - but maybe nearer to 50 than five or six in some cases. And good old *passim* keeps some people happy, when true.

Mr Levick's distinction between covering pagination (116-21) and incidental mentions on successive pages (19, 20, 21) is far too fussy and subjective for me: what seems incidental to the indexer or author may not seem so to the user, and vice versa, and one doesn't have time for such niceties when working at speed. Giving the covering pagination only, in either case, is not only more realistic but saves space.

Having been drawn into analogies with libraries, I'd like to pursue another comparison in connexion with something that's been stirring restively behind much of what I've been saying. The current interest of authors in indexes requires us to be able to talk to them at a fairly technical level and to introduce them to some of our terminology - which seems to be in rather horrible shape. I notice Mr. Levick uses that difficult word 'reference' to mean all kinds of thing. Wouldn't it be easier all round to be able to say of an index, as librarians can say of their catalogue, that it contains two kinds of thing: entries and references. We could then proceed to explain that entries consist of headings (compounded with subheadings as necessary) plus citations, that is the page numbers in most book indexes but potentially section numbers and additionally volume numbers and dates for serial indexes; and that references may be either direct or indirect - or *see* or *see also* if we have to baby-talk

our author. It does help to have clear and unequivocal names for things, and surely an ideal specially dear to every indexer.

People can use indexes successfully without needing names for their components, since there's no need to talk about what they're doing. They can plunge straight in and work their way unerringly from references to entries and to the part of the publication which will give them what they're seeking. One thing they aren't likely to do, and shouldn't have to, is fidget round first looking for explanations and advisory notes. Mr Levick says, towards the end of his account: 'An index should be preceded by an introductory note ...' I'd say, on the contrary, that it must not be, that a good index (like a good library catalogue) should be entirely self-explanatory and, in any case, may as well be because users will rarely discover a note introducing it. Our abbreviations must be obvious (or not employed) and we must have refrained from any disconcerting oddities. I've concluded long since that index users simply don't differentiate filing systems, but automatically adjust subliminally to what is before them, normally a good representative spread. If in doubt on a particular point, and doubts do waste time, the indexer should use as authority something likely to be known to all, like the telephone directory.

I have the impression that some indexers dislike alphabeting and filing so much that they let this be the determining element in deciding to go over to a computer-aided system. I rather like these operations myself, finding them relaxing, like doing the washing-up without machine intervention. But, alas, my indexing procedures leave little scope for anything like that. Mr Levick evidently would make out a separate card for each citation and let the card accumulate for a final sort. (I refer to cards, but I mean them or slips: I prefer paper slips for large indexes, which mine usually are, since they're easier to heft round and not weighty for long but light cardboard boxes, and one can keep twice the quantity within arms reach.) I, unlike Mr Levick, keep all the cards or whatever in strict alphabetical order from the beginning, extracting and returning entries for the addition of further page numbers. One can see straightaway if a heading is coming unstuck (and fix it) or the reference structure needs touching up, and one avoids an extravagant proliferation of cards to be tossed out in the consolidation process; and that sort of consolidation would be an additional occasion for mistakes, as in any transfer-of-information exercise. Furthermore, in some circumstances it's extremely useful (and efficient) to begin being able to consult the index immediately for the author and friends, and to keep it usable at every incomplete stage. I do check the filing before typing but there's rarely anything wrong in a file that's already become a reference tool; there's no need for any kind of separate authority list either, of course, since any advisory annotation is filed in with the heading it applies to.

If the index is properly typed out, with clear and careful indentation and continuation notes, it surely doesn't need to be proofread by the indexer. I've always believed that sort of thing should be done professionally, like indexing itself, and properly, that is by two people, one reading to the other. Any kind of checking is better done by those not over-familiar with the material the way the compiler is by then. Becoming sated too soon is quite a danger for indexers; I'd advise one exhaustive reading only for the text - no preview at galley-proof stage, for instance. Anyway, by the proof stage the indexer may well be several books ahead, like the author.

Mr Levick concludes by remarking that the indexer should be acknowledged. That is something I never press for myself; I accept it if offered (making sure they know what form of my name I prefer) because authors and publishers seem to think personal attribution is some kind of compliment, and one doesn't want to appear rude. I suppose it's all very well if one has some other (subject) expertise that enables one to be helpful over and above the indexer's normal responsibilities. But sometimes I've been so encumbered by the requirements of the publisher that I'd rather not be identified (and wrongly blamed); and, more generally, having been reared as an anonymous public servant I appreciate that being named is no compliment, but a distancing and disowning device (blame her!) when I'd prefer the solidarity of being regarded as part of the establishment, for whom the publisher or whoever chose me is willing to be fully responsible. Doesn't it seem rather odd for an indexer to strive for an identity apart from the book with which he's been wholeheartedly identifying throughout his labours?

I hope indexers will remain too conscientious (and contingent) ever to need a code of ethics. But from time to time we should remind ourselves not to try to claim personal credit that should go to those who had the sense to commission us. We shouldn't need reminding not to promise more than we can perform, not to take advantage of the ignorance of inexperienced publishers by producing cosmetic flourishes masquerading as indexes, though the travesties I have in mind probably just grew there spontaneously like coatings of mildew and were not indexer-produced at all. We must be loyal to our authors and not poke fun at them in our work, sometimes a great temptation but undoubtedly making unfair use of our witty way with words. (Maybe I should even suggest we don't do anything to bring our profession into contempt or derision: inverted headings indeed! and with trailing prepositions!) A trickier thing to keep in mind is that it's best not to point out mistakes in the text when it's too late to correct them. The other day I had a further complication in a CIP which came as part of the page proofs. It said the book had an index, which was a comfort during phases of worry about the tightness of time. On the other hand, I didn't care for the subject cataloguing, which seemed too exclusively based on the title of the book and, at the end of the weary day, I got to fretting about how one used to tell cataloguing examination candidates about the usefulness of subsidiary matter like bibliographies and indexes for deciding on subject entries. But things have changed and, although it was too late to do anything about the CIP, presumably the entry would be looked at again before it goes international in databases. Libraries now have too much else to be worried about to concern themselves with such homely matters as Truth in Cataloguing, and I don't recall this ever figuring in their codes of ethics either.

To conclude: I agree most emphatically with Mr Levick's treatment of Mac, Mc and M' in filing.



### NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes the following new members:

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### BOOK REVIEWS - INDEXES MENTIONED

*Australians: a historical library.* Vol. 2. *Australians 1838.* Fairfax, Syme & Weldon. Reviewed by Maurice Dunlevy, *Canberra Times* 20 June 1987.

'an indexer who has produced an excellent index.'

BOBINSKI, George S. (ed.). *Current and future trends in library and information sciences education.* *Library trends* 34(4). Reviewed by Moira MacKinnon, *Australasian college libraries* vol. 5, no. 2/3, June-Sept. 1987.

'This being the fourth issue of *Library trends* Vol. 34, it includes the index for the entire volume. From a brief assessment it seems to be a well constructed index, with plenty of 'see' references.'

COTTON, Joseph. *Vanity will get you somewhere.* Discussed by Stephanie Mansfield, *The Age* 12 September 1987.

'Why did he write the book?

"He wanted to be taken as an *author*," says Patricia, lashes fluttering. It was she who edited the book. In fact, she says, after her husband's stroke he was unable to work, so she cut 500 pages from the manuscript.

What's left is an index somewhat short on references to Ingrid Bergman.

Alfred Hitchcock and Marilyn Monroe, just a few of the luminaries with whom Cotten worked closely. Instead, we find information on Patricia herself: "Medina, Patricia: beauty described ... as card player ... courting of ... See also Cotten, Patricia Medina ... appreciation for ... care during illnesses ... as coach ... early medical aspirations ... honeymoon with ... meeting with Hepburn ... orthopaedic problems ... photographic memory ... remodelling recommendations ... after Selznick's death ... in Venice ... willingness to travel."

Is Cotten that coy about his colleagues, or did his wife of 26 years edit them out? "I don't like dirt really," he explains.'

*Directory of Australian Databases*. 2nd edn. Australian Database Development Association. Reviewed by Mari Davis. *Australasian college libraries* vol. 5, no. 2/3, July-Sept. 1987.

'There are five handy indexes to:

- . thesauri used by database producers with accompanying notes on availability and price.
- . producer organisations with contacts and telephone numbers.
- . vendor organisations with contacts and telephone numbers.
- . broad subject areas covered by databases.
- . acronyms and their translations.

Each of these indexes relates back to the main entries, but is also useful in its own right for a variety of tasks associated with marketing, planning and survey work, general reference work and for the all important task of keeping up to date and keeping in touch with fellow database producers and vendors.'

DORUM, Eileen. *Percy Grainger: The man behind the music*. I.C. & E.E. Dorum. Reviewed by John Carmody. *Australian book review* no. 92, July 1987.

'Her index is often incomplete and unreliable.'

HALDANE, Robert. *The people's force: a history of the Victorian police*. Melbourne University Press. Reviewed in *Australian book review* no. 90, May 1987.

'It's the sort of book that not everyone will want to read straight through ... but the index will help you to look up the juicy bits, like how the police were affected by the Kelly saga and how they handled John Wren. Under "demonstrations" you'll find an enormous listing of references. Under "Assaults" you'll find "by police" as well as "on police", and you can look up all the famous cases that have involved the police over the years.

KATZ, Bill and FRALEY, Ruth (eds.). *Personal issues in reference services*. Haworth. Reviewed by Tom Cochrane, *Australasian college libraries* vol. 5, no. 2/3, June-Sept. 1987.

'There is no index.'

*Made in Australia*. Heinemann. Reviewed by Vane Lindesay, *Australian book review* no. 92, July 1987.

'... appropriate to a book of this kind - a model index.'



*Serials directory*: an international reference book. Ebsco. Reviewed by Christine Crocker, *Australasian college libraries* vol. 5, no. 2/3, June-Sept. 1987.

'Titles are listed by subject, alphabetically within each subject category, and there is an alphabetical title index, an ISSN index and a "ceased title" index of over 2,000 titles. Volumes 1 and 2 provide the serials listing, with Volume 3 containing the indexes. There are generous (over 20,000) cross references from related subject areas to the primary subject heading under which the full entry appears. Explanatory pages clearly and concisely set out the filing rules followed, and the subject headings used, as well as supply a list of subject cross references. The title index is less easy on my eyes, but perfectly adequate. Titles are printed in bold capitals, and the country of publication code, ISSN and CONSER control number are shown also. There is also an indication of the pages on which related subjects are listed. An ISSN index is very useful for beleaguered serials librarians, and I am pleased to see it included here, although I can appreciate that it must be a proof reader's nightmare! However, it would be helped by the addition of even an abbreviated title; the user is referred to the serial title by page only and thus has to search three columns for the one corresponding to the ISSN number.'

STEVENS, Rolland E. & SMITH, Linda C. *Reference work in the university library*. Reviewed by Cathie Hutchinson, *Australasian college libraries* vol. 5, no. 2/3, June-Sept. 1987.

'There is a full table of contents, a thorough author/title index with detailed notes to the user and an adequate though not detailed subject index.

WALSH, Frances. (comp). *A bibliography of nursing literature*. Library Association. Reviewed by Jessica Tyndall, *Australasian college libraries* vol. 5, no. 2/3, June-Sept. 1987.

'An excellent subject index with plenty of cross referencing makes access quick and simple. An author index is also included.'

WYNAR, Bohdan S. *ARBA guide to biographical dictionaries*. Reviewed by Judith Possin, *Australasian college libraries* vol. 5, no. 2/3, July-Sept. 1987.

'An author/title index and subject index at the back of the volume provides easy access by entry number.'

WHITE, Herbert S. (ed.). *Education for professional librarians*. Knowledge Industry. *Australasian college libraries* vol. 5, no. 2/3, June-Sept. 1987.

'An index is provided.'

## VICTORIAN INDEXES FOR FAMILY AND LOCAL HISTORY

As part of the Bicentennial festivities, Wendy Baker and Sue McBeth hope to publish a listing of all known indexes which may be of interest to genealogists and family historians in Victoria. Surveys will be mailed to organisations known to hold such material, but we are aware that many individuals have indexed material of interest and these are more difficult to locate. If any reader holds or knows of such indexes, we would be delighted to hear from them through P.O. Box 136, Hampton, Vic. 3188.

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### NOTES AND NEWS

Vol. 3 of *Libraries and information science annual 1987* includes a review of *The Indexer: journal of the Society of Indexers and of the affiliated American and Australian and Canadian societies*.

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Word Cruncher, a microcomputer-based indexing and text retrieval software package, developed at Brigham Young University, is reviewed in *Online libraries and microcomputers* vol. 5, no. 6-7, June 1987.

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At the Society's meeting on 26 August 1987, Dorothy Schnabel spoke on cemetery and other indexes prepared to assist those involved in genealogical research.