Skills and characteristics of, and services provided by, professional indexers.  
Prepared by Penny Whitten and Laurelle Tunks. Based on an evening workshop held by the Canberra Branch.

On 31 March 1998 the Canberra Branch held a supper workshop to consider *inter alia* the critical services provided by indexers and to compile a working list of essential skills and characteristics of professional indexers. The exercise was conducted with a view to preparing a guide for publishers and for those with a possible interest in pursuing a career as a professional indexer.

Overall workshop participants recognised a significant difference in the specific tasks performed by, and the final output of, back-of-book and database indexers. However they did identify a number of skills and traits common to the two professional groups. The following is a synthesis of their findings. It is hoped that other branches will take up the cudgel and build on, or perhaps corroborate these summaries.

**Professional indexers: Who are they?**

**What do they do?**

Do you need an indexer? Professional indexers can provide a range of services, including, but not exclusively:

**Services provided**

**Back-of-book indexers**

- Preparation of indexes which meet publisher’s specifications such as timing, size, style.
- Assist in meeting publication schedules.
- Provide access: points for users/readers.
- Quality control of full text – proofreading/editing/presentation.

**Database indexers**

- Secondary publishing/document surrogates.
- Bibliographic control.
- Preparation of abstracts.
- Quality control: proofreading/editing.
- Selection of sources – identification of new sources and of obsolete or redundant sources.
- Thesaurus enhancement and development.
- Database development, planning and marketing.

Interested in pursuing a career as a professional indexer? While the specific tasks involved and the final products vary depending on whether the focus is back-of-book, database or metadata indexing, professional indexers find they have a number of essential skills and characteristics in common, including:

**Skills:**

**Essential**

- Strong analytical and conceptual skills and ability to synthesise complex ideas concisely.
- Excellent reading comprehension skills.
- Ability to meet deadlines (time management skills).
- Ability to identify with users’ perspectives.
- Ability to adhere to local rules (e.g. use of thesaurus, standards, publishers’ guidelines).
- Consistency and accuracy.
- Good communication skills.
- Knowledge of information retrieval processes.
- Proofreading and editorial skills.
- Sound linguistic skills (fine grasp of grammar, style and so on).

**Desirable**

- Negotiation and consultation skills.
- Broad IT skills.
- Specific subject knowledge and/or above average breadth and depth of general knowledge.

**Personal characteristics**

- Logical approach to issues and organisation of material.
- Flexibility/adaptability.
- Objectivity/impartiality.
- Fast working.
- Attentive to detail.
- Ability to work in isolation.
- Professional integrity.
- Intuitive sense of design and organisation.

**What’s Inside**

- News and announcements 42-43
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New members
A warm welcome to the following new members:
Ross Gilham, Vic
Jennifer Ireland, NSW
Tony Large, Tas
Sharon Szeto, NSW
Gary Weston, Vic
and congratulations to those who are newly registered:
Ross Gilham, Vic
Jennifer Ireland, NSW
Gary Weston, Vic

NSW Branch
The NSW Branch Committee is proposing to run a half day seminar or workshop in August this year. The topics have not been finalised but will include a session conducted by Lynn Farkas on ‘What is Indexing’ as part of the research topic on the core and peripheral skills of indexing which the ACT Branch is undertaking.

Neale Towart has agreed to become an official member of the NSW Branch Committee.

The NSW Branch Committee has agreed to a request from the National Executive to take over the management of Indexers Available, and has established a subcommittee to investigate rationalisation of the various databases currently used by the Society.

NSW Branch Committee meetings are open to any NSW AusSI members who wish to attend. The next meeting will be held on 12 June 1998 at 32A Ross Crescent, Blaxland. Please phone the Secretary, Madeleine Davis (02 4787 6277) if you wish to attend.

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Noticeboard

Victorian Branch public meeting

What is indexing

This is the title of a research project being undertaken by the ACT Branch (see page 1). They have asked each of the state branches to hold discussion groups on the core and peripheral skills of indexers, with the view towards producing a guide to indexing services for interested parties (potential indexers, potential clients etc.).

The basis for this work is wide consultation among AusSI members, to gain consensus from practitioners about what categories of indexing they undertake, and how these differ from each other, and what various indexing jobs entail. The ACT Branch has provided guidelines and focus questions to spur on the discussion.

The Victorian Branch felt it would be helpful to have a panel of indexers who could share their expertise and experiences both in the marketing of their services (e.g. How did your clients find you? How did you arrange contracts and quotes?), and in the delivery of the finished product (e.g. Do you use a computer program? Did receiving the Society's commendation of Medal or Certificate attract more work?).

So we have invited Dorothy Prescott (maps and cartographic works), Geraldine Suter (newspapers) and John Simkin (books and bibliographies) to tell us all how they go about their indexing work and then we hope to turn the floor over to the audience for more comment and questions. Do come along and join in—we would love to hear your views.

Date and time: Monday 6th July at 6 for 6.30 pm (light refreshments served).

Venue: ACER (Aust. Council of Educational Research) 19 Prospect Hill Rd., Camberwell (close to junction of Burke Rd., parking behind shops, easy access to tram or Camberwell Railway Station)

Contact person: Jenny Restarick
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From the Webmaster

New Mailing List: ALIAIndexers

alaINDEXERS is a new electronic mailing list for Australians involved in indexing. Details on our Web site at http://www.zeta.org.au/~aussi

ACT branch Christmas in Winter

Yulefest dinner and speaker on 28 July.
Noticeboard

Tech. Communicators: Web design

At the next meeting of the Australian Society of Technical Communicators on Wednesday 24 June, Jonathan Jerney (AusSI webmaster) will be talking about Writing for the Web—the hows and whys. Jonathan will give an overview of what's involved in putting technical documents on the Internet and getting people to read them. He will also talk about page enhancements, what works and what doesn't, metadata and searching, and building up a following.

The meeting starts at 6:00 pm for 6:30 pm at ABC building in Harris Street, Ultimo (about 200 metres from Broadway).

Cost is $15.00 for non-members (includes wine and finger food). Please book by Monday 22 June by contacting Jonica at the ASTC office on (02) 9211 6590, or email: paramor@ozemail.com.au.

Society of Indexers (UK) conference

The Society of Indexers' (UK) conference Bracing Up to Indexing: a Conference by the Sea will be held in Tynemouth, England from 9-11 October 1998. The conference focus is practical, including electronic indexing (CD-ROMs and the Web), 'transnational' indexing, and business and health issues. Nancy Mulvaney will be speaking.

Bookings to Audrey Judkins, Treasurer, on 01429 274731 (with UK prefix). More details from the Editor.

Society of Editors (NSW)

Children's books

The speaker for the NSW Society of Editors' monthly meeting on Tuesday 7 July is Robin Morrow. Robin's topic is Publishing and Editing for Young Readers. She will discuss the current state of children's book publishing and the special challenges children's literature poses for editors. Robin Morrow is a well-known children's book reviewer, awards judge, critic and editor.

The talk begins at 6.30 p.m. at the Rooftop Function Centre, 4th floor, Australian Museum, William St, Sydney CBD. Cost is $15 for non-members (includes drinks and light eats). Please book by Friday 3 July to (02) 9294 4999 (voicemail) or to (02) 9130 8331.

APA Seminars 1998

The Australian Publishers Association will be running the following courses in 1998.

Permissions for tertiary publishers, Sydney 18 June, morning seminar.

Rights as revenue—Straight to the bottom line, Sydney 17 July, Melbourne 31 July.

Editing skills for non-editorial staff (am) and Introduction to production (pm), July, Melbourne and Sydney.

Making a marketing plan work, Melbourne 3 August.

Management series. Three one day seminars over July, August and September. Melbourne and Sydney.

For further program information contact the APA (Australian Publishers Association) on (02) 9281 9788, email apa@magna.com.au.

UNSW Indexing courses

The School of Information, Library and Archive Studies at the University of NSW is developing two new one-day workshops on Indexing Web Pages, and Indexing Images.

The Indexing Web Pages course will run in August. It will examine the skills of subject analysis, evaluation and annotation and their application to Web pages. The concepts of metadata and subject gateways will be explored.

The Indexing Images course will cover description and subject analysis of photographs, film and video materials. No date has yet been set for the Indexing Images course.

Each course costs $225.

Further information and bookings to Maureen Henninger, SILAS, UNSW, Sydney NSW 2052; phone (02) 9385 3589, fax (02) 9385 3430, email m.henninger@unsw.edu.au, URL: http://www.silas.unsw.edu.au/silas/confer.htm

From the editor

The main content of the newsletter this month is the list of members with their contact details. There are also heaps of announcements—no space for the editor today! Have a good month.

Glenda Browne.
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Total membership 179; Vic 51; NSW 47; ACT 38; Qld 20; SA 9; WA 3; NT 2; Tas 2; NZ 6; USA 1; 12 unlisted by request (26 May 1998). Please send corrections to: Membership Secretary, AusSI, PO Box R598, Royal Exchange, Sydney NSW 1225, or gcousins@onaustralia.com.au

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