What’s special about biographical indexing?  


There are not many publications on indexing which are essential reading for indexers, but the occasional papers on specialist subjects published by the Society of Indexers are among them. When first published in 1992 this booklet was quickly recognised as making a significant contribution to the practical literature on indexing, dealing as it does with an important and sometimes tricky specialist area.

In fact the topic is much more general than the title might indicate; the subtitle “and other stories of human lives” gives a hint that the application of the advice contained in the pamphlet may extend, as it does, far beyond the comparatively narrow genre of biographical indexing.

Is it also misleading to dwell too much on the categorisation of this publication as a pamphlet. While that is technically true (the publication is in small format, soft covered, and runs to only 65 pages in the second edition) the amount of significant information in its 26,000 words (my estimate) gives it the feeling of a small book. Indeed, one could wish that it had been published in a more generous format, since the density of information on its rather cramped pages sometimes makes reading and comprehension difficult. This is not a booklet to be read quickly, but one to be worked through carefully, thought about, and referred to later, using the serviceable five-page index.

The second edition covers the same ground as the first edition, but expands on and updates it. Presumably errors have been corrected, though unfortunately quite a few new ones, mainly of a minor typographical nature, have slipped in, and are corrected by an errata slip.

Metatopics

A most significant difference between indexing biographies and indexing other texts is that, in biographies, the metatopic is a person. With every text there are difficulties to be overcome and important decisions to be made about how to index the main subject (or subjects) the book. So, in indexing a book on tourism, or on derivatives trading, or on the treatment of cancer, the indexer has to make a decision as to whether or not to have a heading for "tourism" or "derivatives" or "cancer".

Experienced indexers can usually decide quite quickly either not to use such terms as headings, or to use them with a minimum of subheadings: "definition", or "history", perhaps. Other aspects of these metatopics will be treated not as subheadings, but as headings in their own right, so that the tourism index, for instance, might end up with a substantial structure of headings and subheadings under "accommodation" and "marketing" and "transport", rather than under the metatopic "tourism".

With biographies, of course, the same sort of decision might be made. Hazel Bell deals with this in her

(Continued on page 94)
News from ACT Region Branch

Update on conference arrangements

We have been fortunate to secure Richard Walsh as the keynote speaker for the first day of the conference. Richard has a long career in publishing, from the controversial days of the Oz trials in the 1950s to a more conservative period at the Bulletin, with much varied experience in between.

He will speak on the future of the knowledge industry, and how and where he sees editors and indexers fitting into this.

We have had a good response to our call for papers, but are still open to offers from people who feel they have something to contribute.

Database indexing brainstorming session

Our next function is a brainstorming session on database indexing, to be held at the national library on Wednesday 22 November, 10am-12 noon, with morning tea from 9.30am. The focus is subject indexing, the emerging problems in indexer training and the implications for database quality control. Please contact Lynn Farkas, ph 62863529 or email lfarkas@pcug.org.au if you wish to attend. Numbers are limited and the RSVP date is 17 November.

New members

Congratulations to Robert Withycombe who recently gained registered member status.

Recommended rate $42 ph

The National Committee issued the following statement on 26 October 2000, to take effect immediately:

'The Australian Society of Indexers recommends that the minimum hourly rate of pay for freelance, self-supporting, registered book indexers, working on short-term contracts, be $42.00 per hour.

The Society recommends that professional indexers working as freelance database indexers, or in other areas where remuneration is on a piece-work basis, should be paid a rate equivalent to the hourly rate recommended for registered freelance book indexers.

In reaching this decision, the committee considers recent increases in the consumer price index, rates of pay for comparable professions in Australia (librarians and editors), and recommended rates for indexers overseas, as well as factors and costs involved in running freelance businesses.

This rate has increased from the previous rate of $39.50 per hour, and takes into account the 6.1% annual increase in the consumer price index as at 30 September 2000.'

NSW Society of Editors

Meets monthly (usually first Tuesday of the month) at Judicial Commission Conference Centre, 5th floor Wynyard House (just above Wynyard Station) at 6.30 for 7.00. Cost $15 including drinks and light eats.

E-book indexing

If you are interested in indexing electronic books, take a look at www.ebookindexing.com: where you can see a sample index. Comments and suggestions are welcome. JJeremy.
ALIA Indexers

ALIA Indexers is a mailing list for Australians involved in indexing. At a recent meeting the National Committee decided to use ALIA Indexers as an official channel for communicating with members.

If you want to know what is happening as soon as possible you should subscribe to this list. It will also retain its previous role in general communication between Australian indexers.

Information about the list (and other alianet lists) is at http://www.alia.org.au/e-lists/subscribe.html

To join, write to listproc@alia.org.au with the following message:

subscribe alialINDEXERS Susan Bloggs
(but use your own name).

AusSI Web Indexing Prize 2000

Entries are now open for the 2000 AusSI Web Indexing Prize. The winning entry will win a book voucher for $100 from the Co-op Bookshop. Applications are invited from Australian and New Zealand indexers and webmasters. Teams of indexers may enter. Entries close on 30th of November 2000. Winning entries will be announced in the Australian Society of Indexers Newsletter and on indexing mailing lists; winners will also be notified by email.

Guidelines
The Society is looking for ways in which indexing skills have been applied to online material. Indexes will be evaluated on completeness, relevance, and the appropriateness of analysis carried out on the material indexed, as well as on ways in which online technology has been used to aid user access.

Indexes should be prepared to a professional standard. Thoroughness and ease of use will be given more emphasis in judging than size.

Rules and Entry Form
More information and an entry form can be found online via http://www.aussi.org. Please address any queries to Jonathan Jerney at webmaster@aussi.org.

Newsletter editor wanted

I will be resigning as newsletter editor at the end of this year so we are looking for a new editor.

Details in the last newsletter or on our website under administration.

If you have any questions about the job contact the editor, Glenda Browne. If you are interested in taking on the position please contact the President, Garry Cousins (details on back page).

AusSI Christmas lunch

Save the date: lunchtime on Wednesday 13 December for the AusSI Christmas lunch.

APA Seminar

Online Bookselling: booksellers and publishers in partnership

Monday 20 November—Sydney (Evening)
Wednesday 22 November—Melbourne (Afternoon)

Christine Simmons from Dymocks Online and Tony Horgan from Shearer’s Books will discuss their company’s approach to selling books online.

$110 non-members. (including GST)
Ross Karavis
Tel: (02) 9281 9788 ext 3
Email:Training@publishers.asn.au

From the editor

Welcome to the November issue.

This newsletter has a strong British influence, with a report of the Cambridge conference, and reviews of two Society of Indexers publications. SI publishes a range of practical books on indexing which are well-worth reading. We also have timesaving advice about the use of macros in a dedicated indexing package.

Cheers, Glenda Browne
chapter 12, “Mighty main characters” (pages 42-46). She canvasses a range of approaches, including the strong tradition of important authorities who advocate the omission or restriction of an entry for the subject of the book (Carey, Knight, Anderson), but also giving examples of useful long and complex entries for major characters devised by indexers who take a different approach. In discussing this problem, and throughout the booklet, Hazel Bell gives illustrative examples, and refers to articles on the topic, many of them in The Indexer, which she edited for 17 years.

Make mine soft and dry
Bell’s introductory discussion of ‘soft’ and ‘dry’ texts is interesting, but I am not sure that I am convinced that the distinction makes much practical difference to the indexer. Bell is placing her subject in context, and distinguishing between indexes to narratives and indexes to “documentary texts”, between indexing in the humanities (especially history and literature) and indexing technical publications, between indexing emotions and indexing facts. It’s a bit like hard and soft science; while there is some truth in the distinction, there is also a continuum rather than a strict dividing line. Certainly there are structural differences between narratives and academic dissertations, but in either case the indexer’s job is to work through the structure and index the names, the themes and the relationships.

The booklet’s definition of “biographies” includes autobiographies, memoirs, diaries and letters, and also extends into a great deal of more general publication in the humanities and social sciences. It definitely includes fiction, which is usually a narrative of some sort, and Bell devotes a chapter to this. The common thread is that these genres, as well as having a narrative structure, all have a lot of characters, so that one of the recurring themes (not only in the chapter on names) is how to deal with all these people.

Bell considers the literature on the topics she discusses, examine (as models) narrative indexes which have been awarded the Wheatley and Wilson medals, and provides a full and useful set of readings and reference works.

Indexing techniques
Bell’s discussion of the most important techniques pertinent to narrative indexing is particularly thorough. The booklet has chapters on topics such as reading the text, dealing with names (including minor or passing references to people), the choice of terms to be used as headings and subheadings, and “the perils of partiality” (avoiding bias in indexing).

The chapter entitled “All in good order: a proper arrangement” goes much further than simple technical advice on alphabetization, and includes discussion of the all-important arrangement and thematic grouping of subheadings, the successful achievement of which is perhaps the mark of the really good index to “narrative” text.

Not surprisingly, there is also a chapter on the handling of strings of locators, about which the author has recently written a heartfelt and sensible letter to the editors of indexing newsletters worldwide. I am with her on this matter, but again I would not restrict the special pleading to biographical indexing, since the same arguments can be mounted for most, if not all, scholarly indexing. I would argue that when an index is likely to be used for research, as well as for quick reference, then there can be no objection to longish strings of locators; indeed, it is the indexer’s duty to provide a complete string, in the appropriate circumstances.

Other important techniques discussed include methods of dealing with references to the biographer’s published and unpublished works, and the choices for presentation and layout (prefatory notes, run-on and indented style, sub-subheadings, and typographical devices).

The author’s approach is always to canvass the issues, and to demonstrate respectable ways of handling difficulties, but not to be dogmatic when different approaches are possible.

This is a most useful compilation of the state of knowledge on indexing biographies, which, far from being limited by its apparently narrow focus, is useful for indexers of academic books in many disciplines, but particularly the humanities and social sciences. It is recommended for every indexer’s library.

Getting it
The review copy has been deposited in the Australian Society of Indexers (AusSI) collection, which is part of the Social Sciences and Humanities Library at the University of New South Wales, where it may be consulted or borrowed on inter-library loan.

AusSI members may buy the booklet at the member price of 12 pounds (including surface mail) or 13.50 pounds (including air mail) from the Society of Indexers, Sales Administrator, Globe Centre, Penistone Road, Sheffield, S6 3AE, UK; fax 0114 281 3061; email: admin@socind.demon.co.uk.
This is the fourth in the SI series of Occasional Papers on indexing, produced under the general editorship of Michèle Clarke. As she says in her introduction, the aim of the booklets is to make a valuable contribution to raising indexing standards, and to stimulate indexers to think about the principles and methods of their work. This particular booklet is also aimed at librarians and information professionals concerned with the retrieval of newspaper and journal/magazine article information.

Of the booklet’s 56 pages, there is almost a 50:50 split in its coverage of newspaper indexing, and magazine and other periodical indexing. An examination of the table of contents provides an insight into the areas of coverage. For newspaper indexing, topics covered include: types of newspapers; what should be indexed; methods – how to index; indexing of non-text material; items not usually indexed; introductory notes to the user; multi-indexes and clippings libraries. For magazine and periodical indexing there is some overlap in the types of headings used as for newspapers. Topics covered include: types of periodicals; what should be indexed; methods – how to index; multijournal indexing; sound and moving-image indexes and introductory notes to the user.

In discussing both retrospective indexing and indexing of current newspapers the author provides some sound advice: consider why you are compiling the index; the audience for whom you are indexing, the scope of the index, and the level of subject headings that will be allocated. Details of software, entry levels, and location reference style are given, as are issues relating to the time aspects of indexing – changes of place and proper names, particularly those dealing with companies and government departments; changes in subject terminology, e.g. wireless and radio; and in many instances, for early newspapers, changes in the names of the newspapers themselves.

How to deal with the indexing of illustrative material in newspapers such as photographs, illustrations, cartoons and advertisements is also discussed, and as the author strongly points out this material contains a wealth of useful information, but quite often is poorly indexed or not indexed at all. I think this would have been an ideal opportunity for the author to provide a more in-depth coverage of the methods used for indexing ‘still images’, but maybe this is to be the topic of a future SI Occasional Paper!

The section on magazine and periodical indexes considers the characteristics of journals, as well as issues dealing with current or retrospective indexing of periodicals. Methodology of periodical indexing is given prominence, and deservedly so, covering issues relating to titles of articles, selection of subject terms, author indexes, problems of changing terminology, political correctness, consistency of indexing, volume/date/page issues, as well as handling of illustrations and advertising. On the topic of subject knowledge of the indexer, the author says: ‘... when you are working on a specialist publication [periodical], knowledge of the subject is essential.’ I couldn’t agree more.

The topic of multijournal indexing is what in these more modern times we would call database indexing. In pre-computer usage days however, indexes were compiled using a variety of methods. Poole’s Index to Periodical Literature, covering the years 1802-1881 and published in 1882, was constructed by bringing keywords to the front of the entries by changing the order of the title. For those librarians old enough to remember, this sounds remarkably like a KWOC index!

The fascinating topic of sound and moving-image indexes is also discussed, but from this reviewers’ perspective all too briefly.

For anyone interested in getting into either newspaper or periodical indexing this little booklet will be an invaluable addition to their library. (See the bottom of p. 94 for purchase details).

By Max McMaster, freelance back-of-book, journal and database indexer.
(Macros, Cont. from p. 97)

by preceding the character in the macro with a ^, + or % symbol respectively, eg:

^S+{END} - press Ctrl-S (Select Record) then press Ctrl-Shift-Home (Select from here to end)
+harry - press Shift-H then type arry in lower case
+t+o+m - types TOM
^{UP 5} - hold down Ctrl while pressing Up five times in succession
%{F4} - Alt-F4; i.e. close the program

The keyboard shortcuts which are already built in to SKY Index can be included in macros; eg. Ctrl-S in the example above.

Practical example

Let's say that you've been given a table of names to include in your index. Unfortunately the names are all in natural order, thus:

Fred Smith
Gail Green
Harry Cooper
Ichabod Adams

You could select each name manually, delete it and retype it surname first, with a comma—Smith, Fred—but this would be very tedious. Can we create a macro to invert the names for us?

The first step is to analyse how we might do this. It's no good deleting the name, because we have to re-use both parts, but perhaps we can use cut and paste to remove one of the parts temporarily and replace it somewhere else. (Remember the Windows keyboard shortcuts for Cut and Paste are Ctrl-X and Ctrl-V.)

Let's start with Fred Smith. We click the mouse on Fred's cell and the whole cell is selected. We press Alt-F2 (Edit Mode) and the highlight disappears to be replaced by a cursor flashing at the end of the surname. So %{F2} is the first instruction in our macro.

What then? The standard command in Windows to select the previous word—in this case the surname—is Ctrl-Shift-Left. So our second macro keystroke is ^+ {LEFT} (Not ^ plus LEFT, but ^ and + and LEFT).

To temporarily remove the surname we use Ctrl-X for cut, so our third macro command is ^X.

To get to the beginning of the name we press the Home key, so {HOME} is our next macro command.

To paste the surname here we press Ctrl-V, so ^V comes next in our macro.

Finally we type a comma and a space, so the last two elements in our macro are ,{ } (you don't need to put the space character in braces, but it makes it easier to see).

The complete macro then will be: %{F2}^+{LEFT}^X{HOME}^V,{}

To set it up, right-click on the first blank macro button at the bottom of the screen (make sure View/Macros is on), and type it into the Macro field. Add a suitable description in the hint field, e.g. Put surname first. Click OK. Now we can click on any cell containing a name like Fred Smith and immediately reverse it to Smith, Fred by pressing our macro button, or by pressing F3.

Can we improve on the macro? Well, if we have a long list of names we can get the macro to select the next name on the list by adding {DOWN} at the end. (To edit a macro, right-click on the macro button again, make your changes and click OK.) Now we don't have to click on the names ourselves, we can just keep pressing the macro button.

What if we had a list of 10,000 names like this? Do we have to press the macro button 10,000 times? Not if we get the macro to call itself. This is a trick called recursion, where the macro runs through and then starts itself up again without human intervention. We can do this here by adding the key that runs the macro—{F3}—to the end of the macro.

So our completed macro is:

%{F2}^+{LEFT}^X{HOME}^V,{}{DOWN}{F3}

We can start that up at the top of our list of 10,000 names, go and have a cup of tea and come back twenty minutes later. When the macro reaches the end of the list we press Escape to halt the macro, and the job is done. How's that for productivity!

Traps and tips

Successful use of macros requires care and attention. For instance, in the example above, a triple-barrelled name like David Lloyd George becomes George, David Lloyd—probably not what was wanted. And if we don't get back in time from our tea-break to turn the macro off, then we end up with a lot of blank lines at the bottom of the list. (How could we fix this?

What about working from the bottom up rather than the top down?)

So where there are (or may be) exceptions to the rule that your macro works on, either filter them out of the (Continued on page 99)
list first or use a non-recursive macro to do one line at a time. Check your macros thoroughly and make sure they do what you expect. Back up before running a macro that may change your index. Don’t make your macros too complicated: you’re better off with five three-step macros that you thoroughly understand rather than one fifteen-step macro that you use on trust.

**Saving and copying macros**

Here is the procedure to copy macros between index files:

1. Open the index file into which you want to copy the macros.
2. Choose Options/Import Index Options.
3. Choose the index file with the macros you want to import.

Unfortunately this will import all the formatting and other options from the selected index as well, but currently this is unavoidable.

For help and advice on all aspects of SKY Index, including macros, join the SKY Index Users mailing list at http://www.onelist.com/community/skyindexusers.

Thanks to Michael Wyatt, SKY Index Users list moderator, for assistance in checking and revising this article.

**Archives e-permanence**

Using the image of a stone to symbolise the enduring nature of information captured as records, the National Archives of Australia is introducing a new recordkeeping system called e-permanence that will have long term benefits for government agencies.

The products to be launched are now available on the Archives website at http://www.naa.gov.au/ They include metadata standards to aid retrieval of information online, web-based tools for making information and records more accessible, comprehensive advice on designing and implementing systems and guidelines on records disposal, storage and preservation.

For further information please refer to our website http://www.naa.gov.au/ or contact: Steve Stuckey and Michael Byrne.

Summarised from a mailing list email.

**Life of Lord Berners, indexed.**

Reviewers are never more likely to mention an index in a review than when it is humorous, or shocking, or in some way evidence of the richness of life.

Tony Large from Ulverstone, Tasmania, has sent a review of the index to the forthcoming life of Lord Berners, in which index entries summarise his life.

Relations with mother...lacks friends in boyhood...juvenile ballet scores...homosexuality...depressions and melancholy...swims Hellespont...dilettantism...influenza...clavichord in car...Diaghilev commissions ballet from...supposed meeting with Hitler...spoof poem on noses and roses...teases Walton...takes snuff...offends Nancy Astor...sex urge dies...supposed cocaine-taking...declines occupational therapy...in Richmond nursing home.

**Sunday Times Books Diary. 28/9/00**
AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF INDEXERS NEWSLETTER

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