Melbourne Indexers Bulletin

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In this issue

October meeting
Indexing challenges and helpful strategies

This month's meeting had us sharing experiences of some of the more challenging aspects of indexing work, as well as the strategies that can help.

The area that generated the most discussion was *personal names*. A common challenge is needing to distinguish multiple people with the same name from each other, and it gets even trickier when royal blood, nick names and monikers are added to the mix. For well-known people, such as royals, a visit to a library to see how other indexers have tackled the issue, is often a worthwhile exercise.

Unfortunately, this strategy doesn't help when it comes to indexing school histories (and a lot of local histories, for that matter), which often brings up the vexing problem of multiple generations with the same name, as well as variant forms of names. Even if you're lucky, and Michael Smith was the only one in his family who attended the school, you might still have to ascertain that he and 'M. Smith' and 'Mick Smith' and 'Smithy' are all one and the same. Access to the school's records, and perhaps a school archivist, is a good approach in situations like this. Original photographs can be of assistance, not necessarily for their pictorial content (faces and bodies can change an awful lot over the years!) but for the notes that might have been written on them. If you do find yourself doing this sort of detective work, don't forget to take your magnifying glass. Seriously, you might just need it.

Other pitfalls to watch out for are changes in name, particularly in relation to marriage, as well as incorrectly spelt names – not always that easily picked up when it involves lesser known people.

Military titles can be the cause of much anxiety as the indexer progresses his or her way through the text, while an army of soldiers progress their way up through the ranks. The strategy here is to keep calm, know your ranks, and use the highest rank obtained. Occasionally military personnel might throw a spanner in the works by misbehaving and being demoted. No problem – use the highest rank obtained, but remember to add a qualifier that notes their demotion to whichever particular rank.

Inconsistent use of terms by authors is a source of many a headache. Hopefully cross references will do the trick, but if it's just too

messy, you might have to pin the author down.

Unfortunately, there are no magic cures for *boring text*. Just do it, and look forward to more exciting projects in the future.

Not all subject areas lend themselves to *concrete terms and concepts* for indexing. Think philosophy! One tactic is to begin by locating any nouns that you can find, and work from there. It's also best to tackle difficult sections when you are feeling fresh, so work on these in the morning, and leave the less challenging sections for the afternoon.

Crucial to our work is *relationships with clients*, and opportunities to work directly with authors can be especially rewarding. On the flip-side, these direct connections sometimes come about because an author is self publishing, and if editorial input and proofreading have been given low priority, you can be sure of a few challenges at the indexing stage. Some of us find it hard not slip into editing and proofreading modes in such situations, but it's important to remind yourself of the job you were hired to do. If the project does need these additional services, and you are happy to provide them, you can offer them to the client for an additional fee.

An unhappy client is something that we all dread, and it can be particularly difficult if they haven't been specific about what it is that they don't like. Encourage them to give constructive feedback, and be prepared to run through it with them. The most frustrating scenario is having to defend a perfectly good index because of a client's lack of understanding about indexing.

Returning to personal names, it seems that being asked to omit some is not that uncommon. Strategies for dealing with this can run along a spectrum from a) pulling rank as the indexer, and insisting that they be included, to b) seeking some middle ground with the client by including the out-of-favour

person but giving them only minor treatment, to c) accepting that the client clearly has an issue with the person and is paying for the job (and has the ability to delete them anyway!). Omitting out-of-favour people from an index goes against the grain of course for an indexer, and somewhat maddeningly, it seems that those who put indexers in this sort of situation also have a remarkable knack for remembering to credit them! However, before being too anxious about what your colleagues browsing in a bookshop might think, there is some empathy out there for the untold backstory that resulted in 'your' shortcomings.

It's a reminder that there can be many stakeholders, including benefactors, involved in a publication, and keeping them all happy may require some adjustments. When the school history publication committee asks you to add the title 'Rear Admiral' to that young lad Michael Smith's name, it might not feel right to you but it's important to them.

Jobs from *not-for-profit organisations* may come attached with some hope that you'll consider offering your services pro bono. Depending on the size and complexity of the job, you might want to give this some thought. If the cheque arrives along with a note to the effect of "we'd be delighted if you chose not to bank this cheque", and it's been a large and time-consuming job, don't feel guilty about heading straight down to the bank. On the other hand, if you'd like to go the pro bono or low bono route, another option is to bank the cheque and to send a donation.

Just like every other profession *self care* is very important. Indexing happens amidst a lot of other challenges in life. If your work is being impacted by something going on in your life, a good strategy is to tackle more difficult work in the mornings and go easier on yourself in the afternoons. You can also make meeting deadlines a lot less stressful by setting a target for the number of pages that
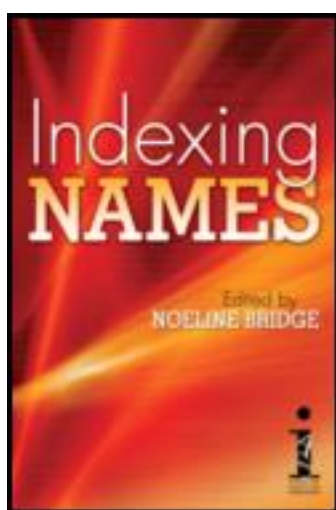
you plan to index each day. If you plan to index 50 pages but only do 45 pages, step up the pace the next day and do 55 pages.

We've all heard it before, but it can never be said enough. One of the best strategies for keeping yourself out of hot water is to be sure that you can do the job well. If the subject area is out of your comfort zone, or the deadline is ludicrously tight, it's best to let it go. And if you have a sense that the job is going to come with challenges that you would rather avoid, listen to your intuition.

Finally, it's remarkable how many problems can be solved by simply stepping away for a little while. And just because you're working by yourself at home, doesn't mean that you are alone. When the going gets tough you can always pick up the phone and talk the problem over with another indexer.

Nikki Davis

Melbourne Indexers Library

Don't forget that the Library has some great resources for dealing with tricky indexing problems, including *Indexing Names* edited by Noelene Bridge.

A complete list of the collection is available at: https://www.anzsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/MIB-Jun-2015.pdf

To borrow items email melbourneindexers@gmail.com

Professional development
Exploring bulletins produced by other professions

Back in July, I discussed the importance of professional development. Another suggestion for armchair PD is to explore the contents of bulletins produced by other professions. Some are restricted to their members only and many do not have content of interest.

One I keep an eye on is the *Bulletin of the Association for Information Science and Technology* at: https://www.asist.org/publications/bulletin/

While it can be a bit academic and of peripheral interest, here are a couple of articles from the past year relevant to the fields of indexing and taxonomy.

If you subscribe to *The Indexer* you may have read the review by Kristin Harley of *Indexing it all* by Ronald Day. ASIS&T gave the book the Best Information Science Book award in 2015. The *Bulletin* has published an afterword in which he explains how his book examines the concept of 'aboutness'. https://www.asist.org/publications/bulletin/decemberjanuary-2016/an-afterward-to-indexing-it-all/

The second article examines testing taxonomies. This article has some good tips on how to test taxonomies to try and make sure your taxonomy has a robust structure and users will be able to find the material they require.
https://www.asist.org/publications/bulletin/jun-15/testing-taxonomies/

ASI Online Learning
http://www.asindexing.org/category/online-learning/

ASI's upcoming three-part online course in November looks at 'How to Create Brilliantly Structured Indexes: A Metatopic-and-Pan-Granular-Based Process'. The instructor is Fred Leise. Full details of the course, as well as the code required to get the ASI members' rate can be found at:

https://www.anzsi.org/member-area/icris-links/

As with previous courses, webinar classes will be available for purchase after the event, so there is no need to fret about time differences. Previous classes include:

– Getting started in indexing with Madge Walls

– Embedded indexing in InDesign (Lucie Haskins)

– Practical taxonomy creation (Heather Hedden)

– Learning about KPS (Kerntiff Publishing Systems) indexing-related plugins for InDesign (Lucie Haskins)

Mary Russell

Upcoming December meeting
How are books constructed?

Have you ever made your own book? After a brief discussion on the process of how a book is bound there will be a chance to make your own simple booklets from sheets of A4 paper.

Date: Wednesday 7 December
Time: 6:00 for 6:30 pm
Venue: Holy Trinity Anglican Church Hall, Kew

Followed by dinner at Café La Q

Contributions to *Melbourne Indexers Bulletin* are welcome at melbourneindexers@gmail.com