

Melbourne Indexers Bulletin

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April meeting:

Things you like to have on hand while indexing

When you bring 11 Melbourne Indexers together and give them free reign to discuss the things they like to have on hand while indexing, you get an eclectic mix of ideas. To make sense of the discussion, I have broken their ideas into four categories: equipment, reference tools, food and drinks, and distractions. It was assumed that all indexers had a computer of some sort, a printer and appropriate indexing software.



Equipment

This category produced an amazing variety of tools. Large monitors, touchscreen monitors or multiple monitors were popular choices. One person was concerned about ergonomics and used their Swopper saddle chair to improve core muscles and posture. Others used a magnifying glass or Maggy lamp because they were indexing historical magazines only available in hard

copy, so deciphering text became an issue.

Problems with paper proved to be another talking point. For holding page proofs or magazines, one member said a Microdesk was essential. The desk holds A3 paper at an appropriate reading angle and can be placed between the keyboard and the monitor. For those with a tightly bound text that always closes itself at the most inopportune time, a book cushion was the way to go. And for those who used their iPad for work or sent lots of emails or text messages, a mobile phone/tablet stand was ideal, as it holds the screen at an appropriate angle for work (or play!). Finally, one person used their answering machine to screen annoying calls.

Reference tools

All participants had their preferred collection of reference tools, covering general dictionaries (e.g. Macquarie or Oxford), specialist dictionaries in medicine, drugs, crafts, etc., general thesauruses and atlases. Some people preferred their hard copy versions, while others preferred online versions or apps.

Almost everyone owned or had access to a variety of subject reference tools in their preferred discipline, e.g. philately. Style guides were also highly regarded. The indexing professional library was also deemed essential, whether you were just beginning your career or were an old hand. Finally, looking at past indexes you had created was also felt to be extremely useful when indexing a similar topic. Past indexes tend to be a forgotten resource, but one of the most useful.



Food and drinks

Office standbys of tea, coffee or bottled water were to the fore. One person even recommended beer. Chocolate was also popular, while one person suggested chewing gum. Eating biscuits over the keyboard was deemed inadvisable, however.

Distractions

Listening to music or the radio was the most common distraction, but getting up to do the laundry was also favoured. Having cats sitting on the desk, wandering across the keyboard or just sitting and staring at you over the top of a laptop also provided useful distractions, as well as some highly unusual index entries!

Coping with the downside

The second part of the meeting looked at strategies to overcome indexing frustration – or what can be termed ‘what do you do when things are not going well’. Some of the suggestions overlapped with the distractions outlined earlier.

Having a break was the most common response. This strategy appeared under a number of guises, from the sedentary to the very active. At the sedentary level, looking out of the window at the trees, park or even just the view was sufficient. For others, sedentary activities involved having another cup of tea or coffee, reading a newspaper or magazine, watching TV or stimulating the mind with a crossword puzzle.

Those with an artistic bent preferred to use their hands and be creative. Suggested activities ranged from knitting, quilting and jewellery making to drawing, painting, woodworking and playing a musical instrument. The answers resonated with Nikki Davis, who carried out an informal survey of indexers on Index-L in 2010, and found overwhelming evidence that hand activity helped relax the body and the mind, with obvious benefits for work productivity. Her article “Is knowledge work making us stupid?” (*ANZSI Newsletter* 6(4): 9-11, 2010), is very stimulating and can be found at <https://www.anzsi.org/publications/anzsi-news/2010/anzsi-news-2010-4.pdf#page=9>.

The more active strategies used to overcome frustration involved doing the housework (e.g. vacuum cleaning), going for a walk, taking the dog for a walk, going shopping or enjoying some retail therapy, or getting out in the garden. There is nothing like ripping out weeds for working off frustration, as one person said. For others, getting on the exercise bike or rowing machine was just what they needed.



Final word

With so many suggestions, one thing became clear: we all work differently. So if one of these ideas grabs you, go for it!

Max McMaster

Updated index to *Melbourne Indexers Bulletin*

The index to the *Bulletin* has been updated and now covers 30 issues. You can find it at <https://www.anzsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/MIB-index-30issues.pdf>

Book designer quirkiness and the indexer

Book designers like to include different stylistic features in texts. Fortunately, most do not affect the indexing. However, in a recently published 224-page text – *Barcelona Precincts* (Hardie Grant Travel) the page numbers were all printed with three digits, with the first printed as 001, the second as 002 and so on. The table of contents also used this three-digit pagination style.

The question is, should the indexer follow the designer's style for the index? This was the question posed at the recent Melbourne Indexers meeting. Most of the participants didn't even consider the possibility, and as the indexer, nor did I. However, one person suggested that there would be no harm in asking the editor if the situation arose again.

Assuming the editor did want to go down the leading zeros path, could indexing software handle it? A series of quick tests proved that Cindex, Macrex and Sky Index could all handle the unusual style.

I then decided to check how an entry would look under three different indexing scenarios, using the same entry from *Barcelona Precincts* for convenience.

Conventional indexing using Hart's rules/Oxford style

Jaume I (metro) 3, 6, 10–14, 16, 20–1, 50, 53–7, 60–8

Leading zeros using Hart's rules/Oxford style

Jaume I (metro) 003, 006, 010–14, 016, 020–1, 050, 053–7, 060–8

Leading zeros using all digits

Jaume I (metro) 003, 006, 010–014, 016, 020–021, 050, 053–057, 060–068

Space issues aside, including leading zeros seriously affects the readability of the index. So for this indexer, this is a no-contest. However, what do you think?

Max McMaster

Upcoming meetings

Day: First Thursday of the month

Venue: Hawthorn Library meeting room 1 (called Glenferrie), 584 Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn

Time: 6.00 – 8.00 pm

Carparking is available down the side of the building. If you are travelling by public transport there is a tram stop nearby, and Glenferrie Station is just a couple of tram stops away.

After the meeting we will go to a local restaurant for a meal (at own expense). For those travelling by public transport, there is always plenty of space in members' cars to enable us to all get to the

restaurant quickly. You will also be well located for getting home afterwards, with the train station and tram stops just a short walk away.

<p>May 3</p>	<p>Comparing indexes to biographies</p>	<p>The way indexers index the main character of the biography can vary from not having an entry under their name to placing everything under their name to something in between. Then the way the indexes are set out can vary. Suddenly subheadings are not filed alphabetically but in page number order or a forced chronological order. Is this used for all subheadings or only for the main character? How do you use your indexing software to file subheadings like this? Run-on style can be used for subheadings or even sub-sub-subheadings. With all these variations what features would be most useful to the biography readers? What indexing tips can we learn by examining various biography indexes? There will be examples to compare, however why not explore your bookshelves and bring along an example to share?</p>
<p>June 7</p>	<p>Five things from the indexing puzzle bag</p>	<p>The indexing puzzle bag contains a collection of topics we may puzzle over.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the common way to display page ranges? 2. How do you index book introductions or the long preface, particularly those with Roman page numbers? 3. How and why do you turn an indexing job down? 4. American spelling – traps for Australians. 5. How do you index concepts known in professions by acronyms or abbreviations? How do you file them?

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