

Melbourne Indexers Bulletin

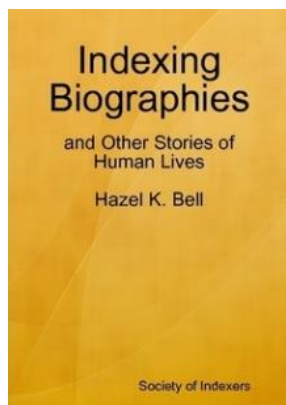
No. 33, May 2018

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May meeting:

Indexes to biographies



The table was groaning with biographies. Many were weighty tomes with long indexes. Other slimmer volumes had more succinct indexes. With such a variety there was plenty to discuss. In writing this up, I have kept the discussion general, rather than focus on any particular biography.

The question that heated up the discussion was: do you file subheadings under the key figure of the biography alphabetically or chronologically? The debate hinges on the ordering of the concepts such as birth, schooling, death, marriage, career, etc. One side argues that the concepts should just be filed in alphabetical order as it makes them easier to find and is consistent with the order of subheadings under other main headings. The other view is the order of the subheadings should reflect chronological order, rather than using dates. This is made easier if the book has been written that way. Hence the subheadings can be arranged in page number order with a few tweaks to ensure 'death' and 'wills' appear near the end of the list of subheadings.

Run-on-style is often used for subheadings in biographies. Again, the room was divided into those who felt that if run-on-style was used, subheadings must be in chronological order, and those who thought they should be alphabetical. The chronological/alphabetical debate is often out of indexers hands as the index needs to conform with the publisher's house style. By the way, if you were wondering, settings in indexing software packages make it possible to rearrange subheadings in page number order. Test it out, if you are unfamiliar with the setting.

Then there are indexes where there is nothing under the person's name. This sets extra challenges for the indexer. It means a main heading such as 'schools' can include the subheading 'Smith's experiences'. Some felt this was going a bit too far as there are some aspects that are best placed under the person's name. For example, 'birth' as a main heading can look odd.

One case was found where the key person's name was followed by 'passim'. This means the person is mentioned throughout the whole book – it is a biography!

Pulling out themes under the person's name can be done in several ways. Some biographies highlight these with headings all in uppercase or small capitals, such as APPEARANCE, HEALTH,

HOUSES, INTERESTS, TRAVELS or WORKS BY. These again may be arranged alphabetically or in some other logical order. For example, this is a made-up example using chronological order for subheadings under name and alphabetical order under group headings with run-on style:

Smith, Adam: grandparents, 6; parents, 7;
family background, 9–14; birth,
10, 14; adolescence 15–40 ...
APPEARANCE: beard, 25; clothes, 25, 37, 36;
hair thinning, 190;...
HEALTH: in childhood, 11, 12; eyesight, 19, 20
120...
HOUSES: in Canberra, 67; 28; childhood, 9, 10;
plans to build, 198–200

Alternatively, this could be arranged using main headings:

Smith, Adam
adolescence 15–40
birth, 10, 14
family background, 9–14
grandparents, 6
parents, 7...
Smith, Adam, appearance
beard, 25
clothes, 25, 37, 36
hair thinning, 190;...
Smith, Adam, health
in childhood, 11, 12
eyesight, 19, 20, 120...
Smith, Adam, houses
in Canberra, 67; 28
childhood, 9, 10;
plans to build, 198–200

Grouping topics like this was considered preferable, as the mere mention of sub-subheadings or even sub-sub-subheading brought a groan from the group.

Repeatedly prefacing subheadings with the same word is another way topics can be grouped. For example, 'travel to', 'letters to', 'views on' or even just 'on'.

Smith, Adam
letters, illustrated
letters to mother
letters to son
letters to wife
on bookshops
on politics
travel to London
travel to Spain
travel with family

Using dates can be a useful way to group material. Year subheadings in a biography of a sportsman made it clear which years he participated in that particular tournament.

For authors or musicians, it is often easier to have a separate index to their works. Again, these can be grouped or listed in appropriate ways, that may not be alphabetical. In one author's biography his works were preceded by year published, rather than in alphabetical order. With added publication details the separate index was like a bibliography with page numbers.

Indexes to some biographies were only name indexes. In one case the index was even headed 'name index'. In a couple of cases this was taken to the extreme and there were long lists of undifferentiated page numbers after all names except the key person where there were subheadings. This may have been driven by limitations on space available for the index. Sometimes long lists of undifferentiated page numbers can't be avoided, however finding some way to group them with a subheading is encouraged.

When a person is known by their initials, e.g. 'JC' Smith, should the indexer enter them as 'Smith, JC' or 'Smith, John Charles (JC)'? It was decided that the second option was preferred.

Distinguishing people with the same name is a common problem. Qualification with dates, profession or relationship to the key person helps. Qualifications are also useful if only the first name is known. In the case of 'Templeton (rat)' it can cause you to pause, until you realise it refers to a fictional animal character. Filing can also initially look odd when you find 'Mr Ed' under M, until you realise they are referring to the talking horse.

Inserted sections of photos are common in biographies. The photos are often unnumbered and there are no page numbers. The easiest solution suggested was to index the photo to the page number of the section, even if not actually numbered. This could be as 'plate page 4' or 'ps14', where 'ps' is explained in the index introduction as the photo section.

Instructions from authors can influence what goes in the index or what is left out. Family feuds can mean items in the text are not indexed, or names left out. Ideally both branches of the family are teased out in the index as this can assist book sales.

Each biography has unique challenges. With each remember to consider the reader and place index entries in a logical spot, so the reader can find the material they are interested in. Examining how other indexers have dealt with similar issues is a great way to help you move your index along. Clarify any preferred layout requirements and discuss any proposed variations, such as an additional index for works, with your contact (editor, publisher, or author), as early as possible.

For further tips on indexing biographies have a look at the references mentioned on the ANZSI website (<https://www.anzsi.org/resources/reading-lists/types-of-indexes/#biog>), or borrow *Indexing biographies* by Hazel Bell from Melbourne Indexers library.

Mary Russell

Melbourne Rare Book Week

Melbourne Rare Book Week is on from Friday 29 June to Sunday 8 July. Be sure to look at the program as there is a variety of free talks, as well as opportunities to visit behind the scenes in different places around Melbourne. You can see the program at www.rarebookweek.com

Professional development tips



Society of Indexers newsletter *Sidelights* is available to ANZSI members via <https://www.anzsi.org/member-area/international-newsletters/>. The gaps in our collection have now been filled. Why not spend time reading the various issues? They often contain software tips.

The Indexer: What's in the June issue?

Now available at Ingenta:

Strange indexes indeed: the wit of Francis Wheel as author-indexer *Paula Clarke Bain*

Term selection *Kate Mertes*

Ready, aim, fire: indexing military history *Kendra H. Millis*

Don't type it! Convert it! *Gale Rhoades*

PDFs in the indexing process *Walter Greulich*

CMoS and the indexer: *The Chicago manual of style on indexes*: how it has changed *Sylvia Coates*

Melbourne indexers rate the indexes to CMoS *Mary Russell with assistance from Max McMaster*

Do we really need indexers? A review *Vanessa Wells*

ANZSI Newsletter indexing project: indexing the first 20 years (1973–92) *Mary Russell*

Finding a new challenge in 'rare interests' groups *Arthur Maltby*

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.

June 7	Five things from the indexing puzzle bag	<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?
July 5	Improving indexing speed	<p>More haste, less speed, they say (and we have probably all experienced). We will discuss tips on how to improve your indexing speed.</p>
August 2	Selecting indexing terms	<p>In a group exercise we will select indexing terms for a short article and compare the results.</p>

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