

# Melbourne Indexers Bulletin

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## In this issue

- August meeting: Selecting indexing terms	1
- Indexing and editors	3
- Indexing the ANZSI Newsletter – the next 20 years	4
- Indexing conundrum: art books	5
- Upcoming meetings	6

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## August meeting:

### Selecting indexing terms

This month's Melbourne Indexers meeting was entirely practical and focused on selecting indexing terms. Ten indexers, from novices to very experienced indexers put their skills to the test.

Each participant was provided with a five-page article from the January 2014 issue of *The Strad* – a professional magazine for string musicians. The article was entitled 'The appliance of science' and looked at the most popular scientific techniques for examining stringed instruments (mainly violins), together with the limitations of the techniques.

Participants were told to treat the article as a "chapter" from a 250-page book on museum objects and materials. Their job, as a group, was to index the chapter. The constraint was that they were limited to a maximum of 20 entries. They did not need to worry about page numbers.

The second constraint was that they were only allowed 20 minutes to index the "chapter". This brought some protests about the short time frame, but as I pointed out, indexing a moderate-level text at 15 pages/hour (3 x 5 pages/20 minutes) was not unreasonable.

After the 20 minutes, we looked at the index terms selected. It became very apparent there was considerable diversity in the terms selected between participants. Comparing my selected terms (provided as a handout) with those of the group members reflected this same variation, which just reinforced the result that we had found a number of years earlier, that we all index differently (McMaster 2012).

Some terms showed commonality across the group, for example, varnishes, resins and pigments. In other instances, some members preferred specific scientific techniques, e.g. Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy and high-performance liquid chromatography, whereas I had chosen broader scientific headings for the same concepts, e.g. spectroscopic techniques and chromatographic techniques.

Group members felt that museum staff would be interested in the very specific analytical techniques, whereas I took a contrary view and assumed that staff would only need information about the broader analytical methods.

The same disparity occurred in relation to the musical instruments. Most group members preferred the term violins with appropriate subheadings, for example:

- violins
  - age of
  - authenticity
  - scientific examination

I, however, provided broader headings to cover a range of stringed instruments, not just violins, since the article mentioned a viola at one stage.

- stringed instruments
  - age of
  - authenticity
  - scientific examination

Which approach is best comes down to the perceived audience.

The second part of the session made use of the same “chapter”. This time, the participants were asked to treat the item as an article, in a series of articles from *The Strad*, as though they were creating a journal index. The constraint this time was that members could only choose a maximum of five subject entries.

It quickly became apparent that some members were unsure of the differences between book indexing and journal indexing, so I provided a brief explanation.

Interestingly, most participants used a selection of their book indexing terms for their journal index entries, with the exception of headings for stringed instruments or violins, which they excluded.

With the focus on subject entries, most people forgot they needed to create author/title entries as well, since this was a journal index.

Members thoroughly enjoyed the session and asked for it to be repeated, albeit with a twist. Their suggestion was to use the same article, but to index it with two different audiences in mind, and see what difference it made to the selection of entries. We have added it to our list of program topics for next year.

McMaster, MJ (2012). Same publication + many indexers = ??? *The Indexer* 30: 98-100.

*Max McMaster*

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## Indexing and editors

### **Indexing: adding to the editor's skillset**

On 18 August, a typical Melbourne winter's day of intermittent sunshine and rain, twenty-six editors, including one from Tasmania and one lone (brave!) man, gathered for an Editors Victoria workshop to learn from one of Australia's indexing experts. Max McMaster has been indexing for many years and brought us a wealth of knowledge delivered in an engaging manner.

It seems there are many job opportunities for indexers as the work is plentiful, but seasonal. Besides books, suggested texts to index include magazines and journals, databases, websites, primary to lower-middle school textbooks and annual reports. (The federal, state and local government bodies between them generate around 2,500 reports annually, many needing indexes.) Recipe books are notorious for containing bad indexes.

Max asked us, 'What is an index?' It is not a Table of Contents (the chapter structure) nor a concordance (a word list) but an alphabetical list of the text's contents whereby the reader can find what he or she is looking for, and which leads them further into the text.

When indexing, the first thing to know is – know your reader! You also need to know the subject, how much space has been allocated for the index, the timeframe, budget and your own limitations. Some texts will need more than one index; for instance, books on gardening often require a separate list of plants' botanical names and academic psychology texts insist on a cited author index as well as a subject index.

Max took us through headings, subheadings and cross references. If an author consistently wrote 'Second World War', would you file it under 'Second'? (Answer: no. Think how the reader would be looking for the term – World War Two or WWII – and put it under W and add a cross reference: i.e. Second World War *see* World War II.)

Alphabetical listings proved interesting. Is McDonald after or before MacDonald, and what about Mac Donald? Which comes first: 101 Dalmations or aardvark, black guard or blackleg? Is Macedonia after or before McCartney? Answer: depends on whether the house style is word-by-word or letter-by-letter.

Max next tackled the page numbering: 271–276, 271–76, 271–6. Again, house style and space considerations determine which form you insert. We learned how to index images, tables and figures and what to do if they interrupt the flow of text in the book.

There is downloadable indexing software that makes an indexer's life a lot easier, available for both Macs and PCs. All systems offer demo versions so you can choose which one suits you best. Training is available through a number of online courses that cost between \$675 and \$2180. However, for \$80 a year, one can join the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers (ANZSI: <https://www.anzsi.org>) with access to extensive online resources and regular meetings; the

Melbourne branch offers an hour's training session once a month. I have been a member for two years and can vouch for their quality of training and support.

For editors with an analytical mindset who are wanting to add a new skillset, indexing could be your new career path!

*Susan Pierotti*

### **The indexing development path for editors in Victoria**

As Susan Pierotti mentioned in her report, 26 editors (8 in-house and 18 freelancers) attended my training course – Indexing: adding to the editor's skillset, conducted on behalf of Editors Victoria on Saturday, 18 August. Most participants were from around Melbourne, but it was pleasing to welcome editors from further afield – Adelaide, Launceston, Ballarat and Geelong.

Attending the professional development course was the first step for editors in expanding their indexing knowledge. Hopefully, some of them will now be motivated to take the next step and add indexing to their skillset. However, as we all know, learning indexing basics in a course, even one that includes practical examples, does not remotely compare with the anguish when facing the pages of that first text you have to index. To assist these editors on their indexing journey, I encouraged them to attend the monthly Melbourne Indexers meetings, where they can avail themselves of the indexing clinic to discuss any particular indexing issues they have with one of the professional indexers in attendance. Being able to get that little bit of help should do wonders for their confidence!

*Max McMaster*



Editors Victoria (<https://www.editorsvictoria.org>) runs workshops monthly to assist members and non-members in their professional development needs. If any indexers would like to learn about the other courses please go to the Editors Victoria website or contact the Training Officer, Maryna Mews, [training@editorsvictoria.org](mailto:training@editorsvictoria.org)

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### **Indexing the ANZSI Newsletter – the next 20 years**

At the end of the article I wrote about indexing the first 20-years (*ANZSI Newsletter*, Feb 2018), I asked if there were any volunteers to assist with the index to the next 20-years. The article was republished in *The Indexer*. I am delighted to report there are now eight indexers working on the missing years. Four from Canada, three from the United States and one from Australia. We already have 10 scattered years indexed for the years 1993–2012, so the index to the next 20 years is well on the way.

*Mary Russell*



By Penwatchdog - Own work, CC BY 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=19270029>

## Indexing conundrum: art books

I recently indexed a 180-page book on street art of the world, but with substantial Australian content. The book contained around 250 images, with in excess of 100 of these by Unknown artists. The only information that was provided with each of these Unknown artist images was the location, e.g. Sydney, Australia and the year. Some of the images contained words, others included graphics, whilst others had a combination of both. The dilemma was how to index these works by the Unknown artists.

Potentially Unknown artists could be used as a heading, and subdivided by place, but would that be useful to the reader? I decided it would not. I ignored the Unknown artist tag altogether and indexed under place. Whether there was a better option, I am not sure, but if you have an alternative solution, I would love to hear about it.

One of the artist names in this text also caused me to pause about where it should be filed. The name was  $\pm$ MaisMenos $\pm$ . Yes, the  $\pm$  at either end of the name is correct. I considered three possible filing options.

- Treat as a symbol and file before the "A's".
- Ignore the symbol and file under "M".
- Treat the symbol as spelt out and file under "P" for plus/minus.

I ended up choosing the second and third options, but you may have different views.

*Max McMaster*



Share your thoughts on this conundrum, or one of your own by emailing  
[melbourneindexers@gmail.com](mailto:melbourneindexers@gmail.com)

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## 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.

September 6	Shortened forms	Shortened forms can be abbreviations, contractions, acronyms, initialisms or symbols. What's the difference? What punctuation is needed? How are they capitalised? How do you make them plural? How do you index them? And where are they filed?
October 4	Editing the index	Editing indexes is a good way of learning about indexes through detecting errors. Come and put your editing skills to the test, and edit a deliberately faulty (made up) index. You will be given a house style to edit against.
November 1	Show and tell	Have you seen a different index in a book, app or journal? Have you explored different indexing techniques or areas you would like to share? Perhaps a new software feature or app? Has a job encouraged you to arrange material in a different way? In other words, bring something to show and tell with others.
December 6	Indexing handwritten journals	Even in this computer age, handwritten journals are still popular. Indexing these has a long history. This session will explore some of the methods, tools and terminology being used by those keeping journals today. Are there tips for professional indexers?

Contributions to *Melbourne Indexers Bulletin* are welcome at [melbourneindexers@gmail.com](mailto:melbourneindexers@gmail.com)