

# Globalization and the indexer: reflections from the UC Berkeley Extension course

*Sylvia Coates, Heather Ebbs and Max McMaster*

---

*Sylvia Coates (USA), Heather Ebbs (Canada) and Max McMaster (Australia and New Zealand) reflect on how the UC Berkeley Extension course has adapted to the globalization of the indexing profession.*

---

*Sylvia Coates writes:*

Indexing has become an international enterprise, mirroring the communication and economic globalization of our modern society. As an indexer, though I work primarily with US publishers, I have taken projects from UK publishers and English-speaking publishers in both Japan and Switzerland. As an indexing instructor, my philosophy is that training reflecting this global reality provides the indexing student with a tremendous advantage. Being exposed to international indexing practices enhances an appreciation for the subtle nuances of indexing practices and an awareness which allows insightful responses to the needs of international clients. This teaching philosophy is not one that I originally held and has evolved in response to my experience with international students.

When the UC Berkeley Extension course, *Indexing: Theory and Application*, opened in 2004, the curriculum was designed to prepare students to index professionally. The material on indexing formats, guidelines, and the practical aspects of running an indexing business, focused on the practices of US indexers and publishers. Registration rates for the Berkeley online course were immediately brisk and have remained steady. Unexpectedly, though a delightful surprise, many of the students were from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

By early 2010 we had added several UC Berkeley instructors including Heather Ebbs, from Canada, and Max McMaster, from Australia. Because of the steady influx of Canadian and Australian students, I approached Heather and Max about adding curriculum specific to Canadian and Australian indexing practices. They both generously agreed to work with me by educating me, writing, and adding the new curriculum to the course. It was a project which took much longer than I expected, included frequent and detailed email consultations, and concluded with a far better outcome than I could have hoped for. The process was a fascinating one for me as I learned to appreciate the similarities and differences that indexers from Australia, Canada, and the United States must realize in order to conduct successful business in these respective countries.

*Heather Ebbs writes:*

When Sylvia Coates approached me about instructing in the UC Berkeley indexing course that she designed a number of years ago, I felt both honoured and intimidated. I was given access to the online materials so that I could review

the expectations for students (and instructors), and I quickly recognized the high quality of the program. But I also recognized some differences in indexing and the business of indexing between our two countries.

As close neighbours, Canada and the United States have many similarities, including many publication specifics. Indeed, the *Chicago manual of style* is almost as much of a publishing standard in Canada as in the United States. But the key word is 'almost'. We also have Canadian government style (*The Canadian style*, Dundurn Press, 1997) and Canadian press style (*The Canadian press stylebook*, regularly updated), as well as all the specific style guidelines of the various publishers and presses. Further, we do tend to spell things differently (Canadian spelling is a stew of US and British spellings, with a bit of French thrown in for flavour).

When Sylvia began updating and revising the Berkeley course, she asked Max and me to add bullet points about any differences with practices in our countries. For the most part, the Canadian contributions have been few in terms of indexing practices. We do, in Canada, have to deal with the sorting issues of French names and nouns (but US indexers often deal with Spanish names and nouns, so although the specifics differ, the need for heed remains the same). Business practices, of course, differ, particularly in relation to Canadian and US tax practices and regulations.

I think that the key thing to remember when indexing Canadian books is that the individual publishers will all have stylesheets. Some publishers may be doing books that they market in North America as a whole, in which case they may favour US spellings and punctuation. Some may be focused on Canadian markets, in which case they may favour 'Canadian' (a variable term) spellings.

*Max McMaster writes:*

Like Heather, I was initially shocked but also delighted to be approached by Sylvia Coates to be an instructor for the UC Berkeley course. At that stage my knowledge of the course was virtually non-existent. I had heard of the course, but as it was US-based I had assumed it was of little relevance to trainee indexers outside of the United States. Fortunately Sylvia put me right on my thinking and pointed out that a number of Australian and New Zealand students had already completed the course. She suggested it would be advantageous to supplement the current US curriculum material with information about local (i.e. Australian and New Zealand) indexing and business practices to make

the course more relevant to these students. This is what I have done, and what Heather has done for the Canadian students.

Before adding the Australian content I had to learn about US indexing practices. For some inexplicable reason we all seem to believe that how we index is universal, yet there are substantial regional differences. In Australia we predominantly follow British indexing practice, which tends to be set-out style with word-by-word filing (called sorting in the United States), whereas in the United States indexers use both the set-out style (called indented in the United States) and run-in style (in Australia we would call this run-on style) with, depending on the publisher, letter-by-letter filing or word-by-word filing.

Writing the Australian content involved interpreting terminology and phraseology. For example in the United States and Canada they talk about scholarly presses (an umbrella term that covers the university presses as well as the non-university, or academic, presses). I understand what is meant by this term, but in Australia we would use the term 'academic presses' or even 'university presses' as interchangeable terms. These may only be subtle differences but in the global marketplace it is important that these nuances be noted.

The major area of difference between our countries related to the business aspects of indexing, in particular rules establishing independent contractor status, and the use of employee numbers/business numbers on invoices to comply with the rules of the various taxation systems. Establishing independent contractor status, in other words whether you are an employee or self-employed, is an important issue in all three countries. In the United States it is handled by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS); in Canada it is handled by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and in Australia it comes under the heading of ABN (Australian Business Number) entitlement, managed by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).

You might have thought that sending an invoice for indexing services to a publisher was a fairly simple and universal process. However, as I discovered in adding the Australian content to the curriculum, this area is fraught with danger. In the United States you are advised to obtain an EIN (Employee Identification Number) from the IRS and use it in preference to a Social Security Number on your invoices. In Canada you need a Business Number obtainable from the CRA, and in Australia you need an Australian Business Number from the ATO. In the United Kingdom I understand you need none of these.

Incorporating these Canadian and Australian changes has meant that students from these countries submitting assignments can follow 'local rules' rather than slavishly having to follow rules that may be completely alien to them. However, as Sylvia says, we are training students for the global marketplace so taking them out of their comfort zone and making them familiar with alternative indexing practices is no bad thing.

So that UC Berkeley students do not feel completely isolated they are encouraged to participate in a weekly one-hour Office Hours chat session where they can ask

questions of one of the course instructors or interact with fellow students. From my Australian perspective, apart from having to remember the time differences – 6 pm Pacific Coast Time is 1 pm next day Eastern Australian Time – being able to provide the students with an alternative (non-US) viewpoint on particular issues has been valued by the students. I have also learned a lot from interacting with the students so there are mutual benefits. (Heather comments, 'I'd prefer Max's time difference to my own. For me, Office Hours is 9–10 p.m. I'm a lark – normally up and about before 6 a.m.; normally in bed by 9:30 or 10 p.m. – and I find the 9–10 timing a bit latish. I always feel a bit pumped up after chatting, so I can't relax for a while. But I do really enjoy the chat sessions, and I think the timing is the best that can be worked out.)

*Sylvia Coates concludes:*

The additional curriculum, specific to Australian and Canadian students, includes information on style guides, punctuation, indexing specifications, fee structures, tax issues, and other customary business practices. It was intriguing for me, as a US indexer, to note the many similarities and yet distinct differences in the indexing practices of Australia, Canada, and the United States. While the actual process of text comprehension, term selection, and creating a thematic index structure are similar regardless of the type of text, client, or country, the indexing specifications and business practices are often quite dissimilar.

It is not unusual for indexers to work with clients, both authors and editors, who have little or incomplete understanding of what we do. This is an unfortunate situation which can easily lead to poor indexing outcomes, upset clients, and even the termination of client relationships. Possible academic discipline or multicultural variations only complicate this state of affairs. The best defense is a good preparation and awareness of the possible diversity in types of publishers, academic disciplines, and yes, even countries. Adding this multicultural curriculum to the Berkeley course benefits all of the students by providing them with the awareness of these differences and instilling a cautionary approach to both domestic and international clients. As has been mentioned by both Heather and Max, the weekly Office Hours live chat is yet another opportunity for students to be exposed to the different indexing approaches by each of the five Berkeley instructors who come from different indexing niches, experiences, and countries.

On a personal note, navigating through these Australian- and Canadian-specific curriculum additions has been a fascinating education for me and a powerful reminder that indexing is a complex process requiring both finesse and precise attention to detail. Globalization is a growing reality for indexers. I was recently reminded of how global we have become when an editor emailed me to warn of a delayed .pdf file because of a 'rain day' during the Indian monsoon season. As someone living in California this was a remarkable reminder of our increasingly global world.

Sylvia Coates has been an indexer since 1989 and has taught indexing for over 11 years. In 2004 she developed the online UC Berkeley Indexing Theory and Application course, which was awarded the 2005 DLCoPC (Distance Learning Community of Practice) Award in recognition of innovation and quality of instruction by the UCEA (University Continuing Education Association). Email: sylvia@sylviacoates.com

Heather Ebbs has been indexing, editing and writing since 1980. A freelancer since 1985, Heather has been president of both the Editors' Association of Canada/Association canadienne des réviseurs (1990–1992) and the Indexing Society of Canada/Société canadienne d'indexation (2007–2009). Heather has taught publication production for Algonquin College and was a faculty member of the Banff Publishing Workshop for a number of years, in addition to

teaching many one-day workshops on various topics for various groups. She began instructing with the UC Berkeley Indexing: Theory and Application course in late 2009. Email: h1ebbs@gmail.com

Max McMaster commenced indexing in 1986 and became a freelance indexer in 1992. He has run many indexing training workshops for the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers (ANZSI), as well as for a number of editing and publishing bodies throughout Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. He lectures on indexing at a number of Australian universities. Max has held a variety of executive positions within ANZSI, including president, and has been fortunate enough to win three AusSI (now ANZSI) Medals for book indexing. Max commenced instructing with the UC Berkeley course in April 2010. Email: max.mcmaster@masterindexing.com

---

## Around the world

Edited by Terri Hudoba

---

This month's Around the World reports on an agreement between ASI and the Society for Technical Communication (STC) giving members reciprocal privileges, conference reports from CSI (Shanghai) and SI/NIN (Middelburg), and a discussion of indexer/client relations.

### Indexer/client relations

As Caroline Weaver (ASI) wrote in her article, 'The little extras: a customer service approach to indexing' (*The Indexer*, 27(1): 9–16) maintaining relationships with clients is one of the most important aspects of indexing. Without that there would be no work. For this column, I asked indexers to describe how they maintain ongoing relationships with their clients. For example, do you ever provide feedback to your clients (e.g. on particular projects or on procedures generally)? Do you ask for guidelines, make suggestions, meet in person? Have you been referred to colleagues in same organization or elsewhere? Do you meet your clients for social occasions?

I have to admit that the response was somewhat disappointing by previous standards with only a handful of individual contributions, most being subsumed in a round-up of comments gathered by society reps. (My own contributions are marked by 'TH'.) Was the question not interesting? (But if so, why does there continue to be so much discussion on indexer listservs about the issues?) Or did it open up so many possibilities as to be overwhelming? Those responses that did come my way tended to converge and to reflect changed ways of doing things. Gone are the days when it was the norm for the indexer to pick up proofs from the client and deliver the hard copy index by hand. What do these changes mean in practice for the indexer?

### Communication methods

Email is by far the dominant means of communication between indexers and clients around the world. Telephone conversations still take place, primarily to deal with immediate concerns or queries, or perhaps to talk through a project in its early stages, but this does not happen as frequently as in the past.

Alan Eddy (ANZSI) notes that:

beginning indexers can be nonplussed by a refusal of an editor to meet the indexer, even when their offices are only a suburb apart. The indexer learns that emails have taken over from face-to-face exchanges, and even replaced telephone conversations, which are often more effective in resolving queries.

Echoing comments from many respondents, he further comments:

Whenever I have offered to call on an editor or author they nearly always say that emailing is quite adequate, to arrange an agreement, to send the text, and to deliver the index and invoice. I don't even see a signature, because the client usually prefers to pay my fee into my bank electronically.

The fact is (a point made repeatedly at 'meet the publisher' sessions at SI conferences) that editorial and production staff work under considerable pressure and need the indexing process to be as smooth as possible. The ideal from their point of view is to commission an index and to get it back by the due date in the style that they asked for (should they have asked for one) without provoking adverse comment from the author along the way and in a state fit to go off to the printers. It should also be remembered that