

Becoming an Indexer

Do you have the skills, attitude and qualities to be an indexer?

If you think indexing may be for you, have a go at the questionnaire and simple indexing exercises on the next pages . . .

society of
indexers
information from A to Z

The Society of Indexers
Woodbourn Business Centre,
10 Jessell Street
Sheffield S9 3HY
UK

Tel: +44 (0)114 244 9561 or 0845 872 6807

Fax: +44 (0)114 244 9563

Email: admin@indexers.org.uk

Copyright © The Society of Indexers

CONTENTS

	<u>Suitability questionnaire</u>	4
Q1	<u>Arts and humanities based text</u>	6
Q2	<u>Science based text</u>	7
Q3	<u>Biography text</u>	9
Q4	<u>Politics index</u>	10
Q5	<u>Alphabetization</u>	12
	Answers	
Q1		13
Q2		14
Q3		15
Q4		16
Q5		18
	<u>Summary</u>	19

First, try this questionnaire to see if you might be suited to becoming an indexer.

I enjoy reading non-fiction texts	YES	NO
I can quickly read a text and say what each section is about	YES	NO
I use indexes regularly	YES	NO
I understand how a good index is superior to text searching	YES	NO
My general knowledge is good	YES	NO
I am interested in a wide variety of subjects	YES	NO
I have up-to-date specialist knowledge	YES	NO
I can copy meticulously	YES	NO
I can spell correctly without relying on a spellchecker	YES	NO
I can easily spot errors in texts	YES	NO
I am aware of the rules and conventions of grammar	YES	NO
I am diligent about checking my work in detail, even if I believe it to be correct	YES	NO
I can work impartially and objectively on material with which I may not agree	YES	NO
I am familiar with a good range of reference sources and can use them easily	YES	NO
I am happy with my own company, and don't mind working alone	YES	NO
I am sufficiently motivated to cope with working to tight deadlines, while still producing high-quality results	YES	NO
I have the necessary business skills (or could acquire them) to work as a freelance indexer	YES	NO

I can communicate effectively by phone, email and letter	YES	NO
I am prepared to spend time and money on training	YES	NO
I am prepared, financially, to allow time for building up an indexing business and a client base	YES	NO
I am familiar with Word and using pdfs	YES	NO
I am excited about trying new technologies	YES	NO
I am comfortable learning how to use new software	YES	NO

If you have answered 'YES' to all (or most) questions so far, read on . . .

. . . On the following pages are a few exercises in which you can test some of the abilities mentioned here and get an idea of what indexing involves.

QUESTION 1 (Arts and humanities based)

Read this extract from a booklet on old English crafts, and then answer the questions.

In the 18th century, following the influence of France and Italy, straw hats became fashionable in England and many were imported from Livorno in Tuscany. The Napoleonic wars put an end to these imports and the straw hat industry here began to grow. For two hundred years, up to the start of the 20th century, it prospered in parts of Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Essex, with production centring on Luton. (The football team there is still nicknamed 'The Hatters'.)

To make the hats required straw, workers to plait it and sew it, and workshops to form and finish the hats. The types of long-stemmed wheat that grew in the area were particularly suited for making hats and other items such as baskets, boxes and toys. Special tools were developed to split the wheat stems into fine strands, and dyes were produced to colour the straw.

The plaiting and sewing was done by home-workers, mainly women and children, who preferred it to stone-picking in the fields. The money earned was important to families, but the children's health and education were largely ignored.

The industry began to decline towards the end of the 19th century, because of imports from other Western European countries and, later, from the Far East.

- (a) What is the principal topic of this piece, and what terms could be used to describe the topic in an index to this booklet?
- (b) Which other index terms do you think might be included?

Remember that the purpose of an index to a book is to enable readers to find information relevant to particular topics, by referring from the index headings to the specific pages or paragraphs where the information can be found.

[Answer](#)

QUESTION 2 (Science based)

Read this extract from a handbook on Invasive Alien Species, and then answer the questions.

Many plant species can cause severe problems when accidentally or deliberately introduced to areas far from their native habitat. Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) is a notorious example, now classed as one of the worst invasive weeds in Europe and North America. Introduced as an ornamental from the Far East in the 19th century (along with other species which have since proved troublesome, such as Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed), it soon escaped from cultivation and spread rampantly in the wild. The tall, dense knotweed colonies rapidly overwhelm native species, threatening local biodiversity. Vigorous spring growth from underground parts of the plant causes structural damage in urban settings, affecting property value and requiring expensive eradication efforts.

Chemical control by the systemic weedkillers such as glyphosate can be attempted, spraying the top growth every four to six weeks through the growing season. Even then, the plant is resilient and treatment may need to be repeated for several years before it is completely eliminated.

Cutting and digging out are seldom successful, as the root systems are strong and persistent, and the plant quickly sprouts again from any fragments left behind. In the UK, it is classed as “controlled waste” under the Environmental Protection Act, 1990, and so requires a license for disposal.

The general perception of biological control has been tainted by well-meaning efforts that have gone disastrously wrong, such as the introduction of cane toads into Australia; but with proper risk assessment and the use of highly host-specific biological control agents, this can be an effective management method. Promising candidate agents for knotweed control currently being tested include a fungus causing leaf spot disease and a sap-sucking insect, the psyllid *Aphalara itadori*. The psyllid has been experimentally released at a few British sites, where its progress is being carefully monitored.

QUESTION 2 continued

- (a) What is the principal topic of this extract, and what terms could be used to describe the topic in an index to this handbook?
- (b) Which other index terms do you think might be included?

Remember that the purpose of an index is to enable readers to find information relevant to particular topics, by referring from the index headings to the specific pages or paragraphs where the information can be found.

[Answer](#)

QUESTION 3

This is an extract from a supposed biography of a TV celebrity...

After returning to Britain from Venezuela, Nat worked for a short time as a security guard at Bleachford Bowman's flour mill (close to the old family home at Holden), but did not find the company perk of free Sweetibisks a sufficient attraction, so left to become a driver for one of the new millionaires created by the National Lottery. 'The whole direction of my life changed as a result of working for Chris Laddson at The Manor. Chris just didn't know how to handle money, and was eager for advice from someone who lived "in the real world and could talk basic, not jargon like those so-called financial advisers". Chris called me "the Chief of the Treasury"! I could have exploited it to my own advantage, but I didn't. I earned a salary as a driver, but Chris introduced me to the entertainment industry, so when I decided to try to get the D-Group together again, and later, when Kit Wanstone and I needed backing for our new label, I knew who to approach for financial support. The entertainment industry has been very good to me. It's given me a good living, and many friends; you could say it's my home.' Nat left Chris's employ after five years, but they remain good friends, and Nat visited Chris regularly while he was serving his sentence (for fraud) in Oddsville Prison during the 1990s.

... and here are some index terms that an over enthusiastic novice might have chosen for this extract. Select **six** that you think would be important for this kind of book:

Bleachford Bowman	imprisonment
Britain	label, new
'Chief of the Treasury'	Laddson, Chris
D-Group	Manor, The
driver	millionaires, new
employment	National Lottery
entertainment industry	Oddsville Prison
financial advisers	security guard
flour mill	Sweetibisks
fraud	Venezuela
friends	Wanstone, Kit
Holden	

[Answer](#)

QUESTION 4 (Politics index)

There is something wrong with many of these index entries. See how many errors and inconsistencies you can find

Acts of Parliament (statutes) 7, 9, 40
Blair, Tony 34, 33
CABINET
 PM's relationship with 30, 31, 33–35
 social background 31–32
 collective responsibility 33, 75–76
 see also ministers
cabinet government 33, 74–75, 76–8
collective responsibility 33, 75–76
courts *see* legal system
David Cameron 34
electoral reform 14, 15, 16, 17, 28
elected mayor 14, 16, 20
European convention on human rights
 13, 39, 46–47
hereditary peers, 21, 29
House of Lords 20–21, 26, 65–67
House of Commons 19–20, 24 26
Human Rights Act (200X) 13, 15, 16,
 46–47
individual ministerial responsibility
 35–63
judiciary 40049
legal sovereignty 10, 11
legal system *see* courts
life peers 21
mayors, elected 14, 16
ministers (*see also* Cabinet)
 collective responsibility 33, 75–76
 individual ministerial responsibility
 35–36
parliamentary sovereignty 8, 10
peers 14, 20, 29

[Continued on next page](#)

QUESTION 4 continued

parliamentary sovereignty 8, 10
peers 14, 20, 29
prime minister
 relationship with Cabinet 30, 31,
 33–35
 presidentialism 36–38, 79–82
salisbury Convention 9, 24
sovereignty
 legal 10, 11
 parliamentary 8, 12
statutes *see* Acts of Parliament 7, 9, 40
Westminster model 20

[Answer](#)

QUESTION 5

Sort the following terms into alphabetical order, without using your word processor's 'sort' function.

sovereignty	scientology
salariat	schnapps
Saltpetre	symmetry
Sabres	sienna
syllogisation	scissors
scholasticism	sabotage
Spectra	sceptres
somnambulism	sanatoria
samovars	sybiosis
seismology	shamaniana

Indexers need a good understanding of alphabetization because computer software does not always sort complex terms in the most suitable way.

[Answer](#)

If you have worked through all the questions, now is the time to see how you have done. Once you turn the page or scroll down you will see the answers.

ANSWER QUESTION 1

- (a) The **major topic** of the piece is 'straw hats', so the most obviously suitable index term is:

straw hats

or

straw hat industry

But readers may look up either 'straw' or 'hats' in the index, so it is also useful to include the inverted form as an index term:

hats, straw

- (b) Readers may also want to look up:

place names: Luton, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, and possibly Livorno, Tuscany

topics: Napoleonic Wars, child labour, female labour.

Other terms that you may have chosen (e.g. baskets, fashion, Far East, football, stone-picking) refer only to **minor mentions** (i.e. they give very little information), and so would not normally be indexed for such a piece.

[Back to Question 1](#)

[Continue to Question 2](#)

ANSWER QUESTION 2

The major topic of the extract is 'Japanese knotweed', so the most obviously suitable index term is

Japanese knotweed

Some readers may look for this subject under its scientific name

Fallopia japonica

Also, readers may look up either 'Japanese' or 'knotweed' in the index, so it is also useful to include the inverted form as an index term:

knotweed, Japanese

Readers may also want to look up other topics such as

weeds (or weed control)

chemical control

glyphosate

structural damage, buildings

Environmental Protection Act (1990), UK

biological control (or biological control agents)

insects

Aphalara itadori

jumping plant lice (psyllids)

psyllids

herbicides

Some of the other terms that you may have chosen (e.g. Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed, cane toads, Australia) are only passing mentions, giving very little information, and so would not normally be indexed for such a piece.

[Back to Question 2](#)

[Continue to Question 3](#)

ANSWER QUESTION 3

Among your six items you should have included the following:

Bleachford Bowman

D-group

Laddson, Chris

Wanstone, Kit

Other **names**, e.g. 'Oddsville Prison' and 'Manor, The', could also be relevant.

Useful **subject entries** would be 'entertainment industry' (though as the book is a biography of a TV celebrity this might prove to be too broad to be useful), and 'employment', which may eventually need **subheadings** ('security guard', 'driver', etc.) to refer to a number of different jobs undertaken by the person who is the subject of the book.

*Indexing is not just a matter of spotting names or 'significant' words, and (as indicated in the previous answers) index entries are made **only if they lead to worthwhile information**. The text is an extract; the final index entries can only be decided in the light of the content and context of the book as a whole.*

[Back to Question 3](#)

[Continue to Question 4](#)

ANSWER QUESTION 4

Acts of Parliament (statutes) 7, 9, 40
Blair, Tony 34, 33
CABINET
PM's relationship with 30, 31, 33–35
social background 31–32
collective responsibility 33, 75–76
see also ministers
cabinet government 33, 74–75, 76–8

collective responsibility 33, 75–76
courts *see* legal system
David Cameron 34

electoral reform 14, 15, 16, 17, 28

elected mayor 14, 16, 20
European convention on human rights
13, 39, 46–47
hereditary peers, 21, 29

House of Lords 20–21, 26, 65–67

House of Commons 19–20, 24 26

Human Rights Act (200X) 13, 15, 16,
46–47
individual ministerial responsibility
35–63
judiciary 40049
legal sovereignty 10, 11
legal system *see* courts
life peers 21
mayors, elected 14, 16

ministers (*see also* Cabinet)
collective responsibility 33, 75–76
individual ministerial responsibility
35–36

Page numbers in wrong order

Wrong font – should not be all capitals

Subheadings not in alphabetical order

*Spelling mistake; inconsistent page
range style*

Circular cross-reference

*Name should be inverted – Cameron,
David*

*Alphabetical order – should come after
'elected mayor'*

Should be plural

*All main words should begin with
capital letter*

*Comma between entry and page
numbers – inconsistent with style for
rest of index*

*Alphabetical order – should come after
'House of Commons'*

*Comma missing between last two page
numbers*

Incomplete date

*Numbers transposed; compare with
subheading under 'ministers'*

Page number error – should be 40–49

Circular cross-reference

*Page numbers don't match with elected
mayor*

*Cross-reference style – compare with
Cabinet, where cross-reference comes
after last subheading*

ANSWER QUESTION 4 continued

parliamentary sovereignty 8, 10

peers 14, 20, 29

prime minister

relationship with Cabinet 30, 31,
33–35

presidentialism 36–38, 79–82

salisbury Convention 9, 24

sovereignty

legal 10, 11

parliamentary 8, 12

statutes *see* Acts of Parliament 7, 9, 40

Westminster model 20

Page number error? Compare with subheading under 'sovereignty'

Page 21 missing (see entries for 'hereditary peers' and 'life peers')

Subheadings not in alphabetical order

Capitalization error – 'Salisbury'

Page number error? Compare with 'parliamentary sovereignty' entry

No need for page numbers as well as 'see' cross-reference

Don't worry if you didn't spot all the mistakes in this index—there were a lot! Any indexer who produced work to this standard though would not have a long career ahead of them!

[Back to Question 4](#)

[Continue to Question 5](#)

ANSWER QUESTION 5

sabotage

sabres

salariat

saltpetre

samovars

sanatoria

sceptres

schnapps

scholasticism

scientology

scissors

seismology

shamaniana

sienna

somnambulism

sovereignty

spectra

syllogisation

symbiosis

symmetry

[Back to Question 5](#)

Getting a full set of correct answers does not guarantee that you will be a successful indexer; nor does getting a few answers 'wrong' mean that you could not become a good indexer. Many vital indexing activities cannot be adequately tested in a short exercise; this has just given you a taste of what is involved. But you should have gained some idea of your suitability and so be able to decide whether it is likely to be worth while embarking on a course of training.

GOOD LUCK!

For more information on training and a career in indexing go to the Society of Indexers' website:

www.indexers.org.uk