

# Embedded indexes: using Word

In his previous article, [Bill Johncocks](#) discussed the use of embedded indexes. Now he looks at implementing them in Microsoft Word.

## Inserting index markers

As Microsoft Word is the most widely available tool with an embedded indexing facility, we'll use it to take a closer look at the technique of embedding. You can create an entry or a cross-reference in a Word document by moving the cursor to an insertion point, selecting **Insert > [Reference >] Index and Tables**, typing your entry and clicking **Mark [Entry]** (the exact terminology varies between Word versions). Viewed with hidden text displayed, an example with two embedded entries might look like this:

```
Focus {XE "focus lock:alternative
methods" }{XE "AF-L button" \t
"See focus lock" }may be retained
either by pressing the AF-L button
on the camera top plate or by
opting to lock focus on half-
pressing the shutter release
(Setup Menu option 3).
```

The braces are really hidden text delimiters (XE stands for 'index Entry') but anything between the quotation marks can be amended like ordinary text. The backslash either introduces an operator (in this example, 't' suppresses the display of any page locator because all cross-references apply universally) or acts as an escape character to change the interpretation of some symbols. The colon introduces progressively lower levels of entry, while a semicolon enables you to override alphabetisation:

```
{XE "ω0 values;omega-zero" }
```

This causes the entry 'ω<sub>0</sub> values' to sort as though it were 'omega-zero' and so appear between Ohm's Law and overflows, rather than after Z. Word's default sort order is: keyboard punctuation symbols < numerics (digit by digit) < Roman characters (lowercase first) < most foreign-language characters (lowercase first). Most, but not all: δ and Ж sort after Z but Å and Ü appear immediately after A and U in my version.

## Generating the index

Move the cursor to the end of your document, select **Insert > [Reference >] Index and Tables** and click **OK**. This generates an index based on the markers you've entered so far and

displays it at the new insertion point. Our first example might result in:

```
AF-L button. See focus lock
...
focus lock
    alternative methods, 28
```

Your first index may not look very pretty: embedded indexes usually need a good deal of editing.

## Working around the limitations

Although some other tools used by readers may have good built-in indexing modules, Word's hasn't been developed in successive software releases and remains cumbersome.

There are at least five horrible features:

1. The growing index isn't displayed; to view it, you must regenerate it.
2. Only *See* cross-references (not *See also*) are provided.
3. Alphabetisation is always word-by-word (New York before Newark); never letter-by-letter.
4. The dialogs are clumsy and slow.
5. The mechanism for inserting page ranges can sap one's will to live.

You can, of course, copy the generated index into a separate Word file for handy reference but it will progressively become out-of-date as you work. *See also* cross-references, though, present special problems in documents that also include subentries. Neither of the obvious options, modifying the *See* entry in the dialog box or inserting a *See also* reference as a subentry, produces what's normally wanted: concatenated cross-references positioned as either the first or last subentry:

```
black holes
    See also neutron stars; quasars
    in active galaxies, 85, 203-04
    supermassive, 42, 287...
```

Instead, the first option results in:

```
black holes. See also neutron stars;
    quasars
    in active galaxies...
```

The second is even worse:

```
black holes
    in active galaxies, 85, 203-04
    See also neutron stars; quasars, 27
    supermassive, 42, 287...
```

An inelegant workaround uses the humble semicolon, the sort-order overriding switch we met in our first example:

```
{XE "black holes;See also neutron
stars\; quasars;!" \t }
```

Notice that the first semicolon (the recommended separator for multiple cross-reference targets) is escaped with a backslash. To make the cross-reference sort last, just replace the exclamation mark—which sorts first of all the symbols—with 'zzz'. Indexers have evolved a whole armoury of such hacks.

If you need letter-by-letter order, there's no alternative to ploughing through to find violations and using our trusty semicolon to hide spaces:

```
{XE "New York;NewYork" }
```

If it's the Indexing dialog that irritates, you can switch to the slightly faster Fields dialog or use the Indexing dialog once, select and copy the whole of the resulting hidden text tag, then paste it and edit its contents to create each new entry, subentry and cross-reference. A skilled programmer can avoid dialogs altogether and insert markers automatically with a Visual Basic macro but I know no easy way to automate the assignment of page ranges. Indeed, they're so cumbersome that you can often spot an embedded index by their total absence.

For more information on Word's indexing features, see Mike Unwalla's article in the Autumn 2003 *Communicator* (available from the Members' area of the website). Several commercial add-ons, costing from a few pounds to over a hundred, have been written to enhance Word's basic capabilities so, if you often index Word documents and don't want to do your own programming, look at sites like [www.jambiant.com/indexassistant](http://www.jambiant.com/indexassistant), [www.jalamb.f9.co.uk/wordembed.html](http://www.jalamb.f9.co.uk/wordembed.html) and [www.editorium.com/dexter.htm](http://www.editorium.com/dexter.htm).

Perhaps, before Word's module is perfected, we'll all have moved to XML document creation, embedding index entries using an XML editor and formatting the index with XSLT stylesheets? **C**

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