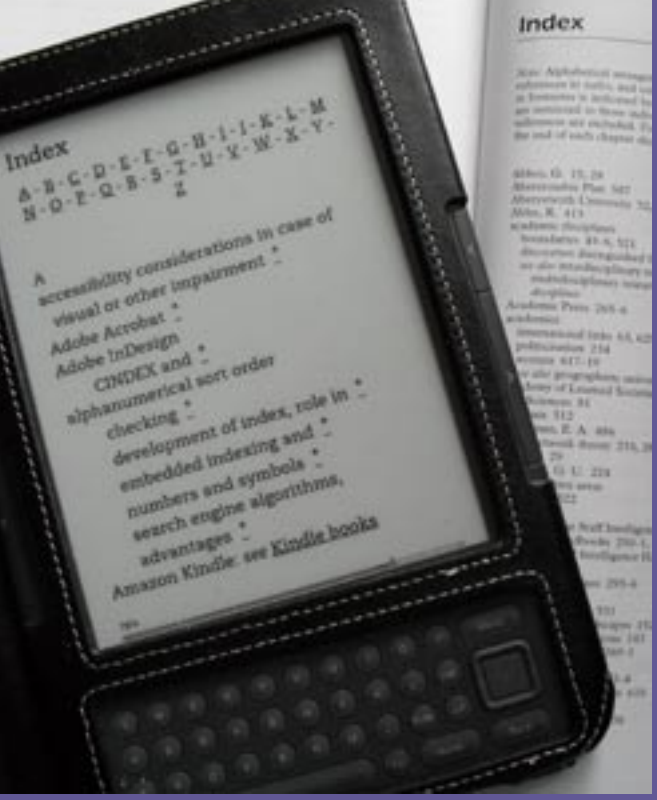
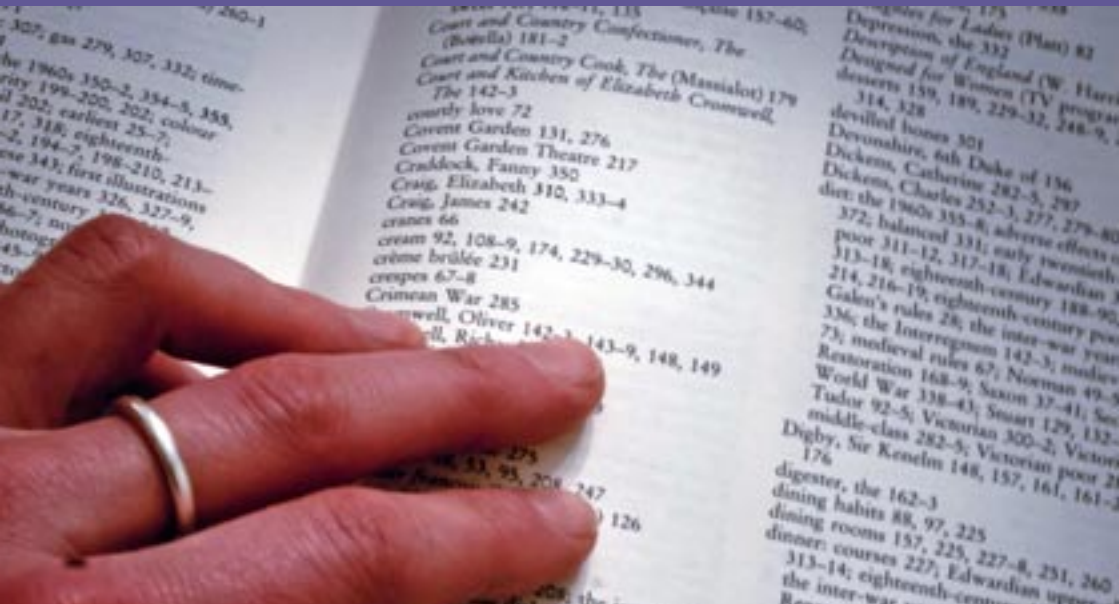


Last *but not* least

a guide for editors commissioning indexes



How do I find a professional indexer?

A well-crafted index produced by a skilled professional with the appropriate level of subject expertise is an essential feature of almost every non-fiction book. A comprehensive and regularly updated directory – *Indexers Available* – on the Society of Indexers' website (http://www.indexers.org.uk/) gives details of the qualifications, experience and skills of indexers whose specialist subjects range from accountancy to zoology.

When should I commission the indexer?

Good indexers get booked up months ahead, so don't leave it until the last minute; commission an indexer well before the page proofs are back from the typesetter. For embedded indexes (see p. 5) you will need to contact an indexer early in the production process. Remember to let him/her know if there are subsequently any delays in the schedule.

Scheduling and deadlines

Discuss how long the job will take and expect to receive the index by the agreed date. Many indexers are prepared to work unsocial hours to meet urgent deadlines, but the work is intellectually demanding and they cannot work without a break.

Don't send out a densely written 500-page text on Friday afternoon and expect the index to be in your email in-box on Monday morning.

For particularly complex texts it may be difficult to index more than 2–3 pages an hour; more straightforward material can be indexed more quickly, but the indexer will need to set aside time to edit the draft index into an efficient finding tool. Don't forget that a freelancer is likely to be fitting your job around other commissions, so it is advisable to allow two or three weeks for a book of, say, 200–300 pages. Factors that may increase the time (and

therefore the cost) include:

- **reference and research texts** requiring indexes equal in importance to the textual content
- **detailed indexing of figures**, tables and footnotes
- **poorly written or edited texts** where the indexer has to raise queries about apparent inaccuracies and inconsistencies, or where it is difficult to follow the author's argument
- proofs received **out of sequential order**
- **late amendments** to proofs (see pp. 8–9)
- **non-standard index style or presentation**

If you need an index to be done particularly quickly, involving evening or weekend hours, you must be prepared to pay a higher fee (see below).

Indexing fees: What will it cost?

The suggested rates which are found on the Society of Indexers' website (http://www.indexers.org.uk/) should form the starting point for negotiation. Higher rates should apply for:

- **more experienced** indexers
- **complex texts** requiring a high level of specialist knowledge and the ability to disentangle convoluted arguments
- **tight deadlines** that mean the indexer has to work unsocial hours
- **embedding** of index entries into the Word or XML file (which will save you time later in the production schedule)

Negotiating the fee

Most indexers prefer to negotiate a fee after seeing the proofs, or at least a sample chapter. At the very least, the indexer needs to know:

- book length and format
- readership level
- space constraints
- production schedule and deadlines
- format in which the index is required

The fee may have to be renegotiated if unexpected complications arise once the job is in progress.

Don't expect a cheaper index because you only have a few pages available for it. It is not necessarily quicker to prepare a shorter-than-ideal index.

How do I brief the indexer?

Style

A skilled indexer will use their professional judgement or follow the guidelines in the British Standards (BS ISO 999 and BS 1749) to deliver an index with the most appropriate stylistic features for both the document in question and its intended users. However, if a house or series style must be followed, this might cover:

- **capitalization** of first letter of entry (lower-case initial letters except for proper names is normally preferred)
- **alphabetization** (word by word, or letter by letter – see examples on p. 10)
- **typeface** style differences for references to illustrations, tables, appendices, etc. (e.g. bold or italic)
- **punctuation** (if required) after headings, before page numbers, etc.
- form of **location references** (e.g. page numbers, volume/page numbers, or paragraph/clause/section numbers)
- **page range** style – full (e.g. 123–124), maximum elided (e.g. 123–4), or something in between
- position of *see also* **cross-references** (after the last subheading in a sequence or after the main heading)
- **subheading style** (set-out or run-on – see examples on p. 11) and number of subheading levels

If last-minute stylistic changes are required once the index has been completed, it is usually a simple matter for a professional indexer to make these and they should *not* be attempted in-house (see p. 9).

Format

The indexer will also need to know:

- what your preferred file **format** is (e.g. RTF, Word doc)
- how **indents** (for subheadings) should be formatted (e.g. tabs or Word styles)
- how the index should be **delivered** (e.g. as an email attachment or uploaded to an FTP site)

To avoid problems, it is well worth checking file formats with the typesetter.

If you require index entries to be embedded into the Word document or the XML file, make sure that you supply full and clear instructions on the method to be used. For more on embedded indexing, visit the Society of Indexers' website: http://www.indexers.org.uk/

Length

There is no ideal length for an index; it depends on the type of book and the intended readership, but in general you should allow around 3–5 per cent of the book's length (i.e. 7–12 pages for a 250-page book). Some reference or scholarly texts may need much longer and more detailed indexes. If there are space constraints, discuss these with the indexer so that the index can be prepared to fit the space available. It may also be necessary to liaise with the designer over type sizes and column widths. See also 'Shortening the index' (p. 8).

What sort of proofs does the indexer need?

Send the indexer a complete set of **final page proofs** if possible, via email attachment or an FTP site. If the pagination changes after the index has been completed, don't forget that the indexer will also have to update the index (see pp. 8–9). If you have agreed to supply printed proofs, A4 sheets are much easier to work with than A3 or larger. Similarly, if you are supplying PDFs, each 'page' should ideally include only one page of text.

It's only a new edition – can't the indexer modify the existing index?

This is much more time-consuming (and costly) than you might imagine. The original indexer will be in the best position to update the index but if this is not possible, it is often quicker and cheaper to commission a new index rather than ask for the previous one to be modified. Don't forget about the moral rights of an indexer not to have their work subjected to derogatory treatment and check whether there are any copyright issues (some indexers retain the copyright on their indexes).

What if the author wants to be involved?

Although some authors and editors have produced award-winning indexes, by and large it is better to commission a professional indexer rather than expect the author to do the job. Authors should tactfully be dissuaded from interfering and reminded that the indexer *is* a professional. It is not necessary for authors to provide lists of terms they think should be included in the index; indexers should have relevant subject knowledge. Depending on the personalities involved, it may be useful for the indexer to contact the author or editor directly to resolve queries more speedily.

Remember that the final structure of the index should be a matter for the indexer's professional judgement.

Contracts

You may wish to use/adapt the draft contract included in the *Indexers Available* section of the Society of Indexers' website (http://www.indexers.org.uk/). A contract should cover the fee and any expenses. Ensure that your accounts department settles the invoice promptly (see https://payontime.co.uk/); freelance indexers are sole traders and late payment can have serious repercussions on their cash flow.

I've got the index – what now?

Do I need to check anything?

A professional indexer should deliver an index tailored to the needs of the reader, conforming to any agreed stylistic conventions, of the appropriate

length and in the agreed format. Using specialized software (Macrex, Cindex or Sky), the indexer will have automatically checked that the index is accurate and consistent in terms of alphabetization, capitalization, page range elision, subheading style, cross-referencing (no *see* references leading the reader round in circles) and matching double entries (see p. 11).

You might want to satisfy yourself about the accuracy of locators (page numbers) by spot-checking both from index to text and text to index, but remember that *passing mentions of a subject in the text should not be indexed.*

If the index has been produced by the author or an editor lacking both indexing skills and specialized software, you will need to check the index more carefully for accuracy and consistency. In addition, putting yourself in the place of the potential reader, try to check the points listed below.

- Are all the **major topics** covered adequately? (Check the main headings against the contents list or author's summary.)
- Is there an **introductory note** to the index? Is it helpful?
- Are the **subheadings** logical and not so brief as to be confusing? Are they grammatically consistent? Are they redundant?
- Have any **foreign names** been correctly indexed? Make a list of any special sorts for the typesetter, if the indexer has not already done so.
- Has the indexer avoided long '**strings**' of page references? These are annoying to readers and should generally be avoided; more subheadings may be needed.

Design and typesetting

Make sure both designer and typesetter understand the purpose and accepted standard layouts of indexes.

- **Indents** (for set-out subheadings) are usually in multiples of 1 or 2 ems.
- **Turnovers** should be indented further than the deepest subheading (see the example on p. 11).
- **'Continued' statements** (repetition of main heading) are useful when a series of subheadings is split between two pages, especially over recto/verso breaks.

What about the author?

The author should be given the opportunity to see the index before it is typeset but should be discouraged from making changes. The index is a tool for the reader, prepared by an expert; even minor changes can destroy its carefully designed structure. You may sometimes need to explain that the index is not a list of word occurrences and that it isn't usually necessary to index every name mentioned in the text. An index is a key to significant treatments of subjects, requiring harmonization of vocabulary and collocation of treatments described differently, especially in multi-author works. It also has to supplement the author's terminology to accommodate the language in which the reader may formulate questions.

Help – I need to make last-minute changes!

Don't – it's a recipe for disaster. Whatever changes are needed, the indexer with their specialized software and familiarity with the text will be able to do the job much more efficiently and avoid introducing errors. Any additional fee will be money well spent compared with the dangers of destroying a carefully constructed index.

Shortening the index

Don't even attempt this yourself. Decisions on size should normally have been made at the outset and the index tailored to fit the space available. If you do find the index is slightly too long, the simplest option is to

- change from a set-out style to a run-on style (see p. 11) if there is only one level of subheading, and/or
- reduce the type size and/or increase the number of columns a page. (But narrow columns with many turnover lines may confuse the index user.)

If shortening the index is unavoidable, it may be necessary to amalgamate subentries, subsume specific entries under more general headings and replace multiple postings with more cross-references – all of which reduce index usability. It is essential that such changes are done by the indexer, whose moral right not to have their work subjected to 'derogatory treatment' should be respected. An index is a complex structure and any changes to one section are likely to have repercussions elsewhere.

Accommodating proof corrections

If the indexer has not been working from final proofs, author's and proofreader's corrections may mean adding or deleting index entries and

adjusting page numbers. Again, these changes must be done by the indexer, who will be alert to their implications for the structure of the whole index. Some pagination changes can be easily dealt with using indexing software. The indexer will need **revised proofs**, preferably with changes highlighted.

Making stylistic changes

Avoid the temptation to adjust the layout, capitalization, punctuation, alphabetization and page-range elision yourself. Using specialized indexing software, the indexer can make all these stylistic changes (and more) both quickly and accurately and then output the index in the required format.

Should the index be proofread?

Like anything else, when the index has been typeset, it should be proofread, preferably by the indexer. With electronic delivery of PDF proofs, there should be little delay to the schedule. At this stage it is important to check that:

- the **complete** index has been typeset
- any **missing location references** or personal name initials or forenames are supplied
- the **first page number** of the index matches that in the contents list
- **'continuation' lines** are included if subheadings straddle a page or column
- **subheadings** have the correct indentation
- indentation of all **turnover lines** is greater than that of the deepest level of subheading
- **bold and italic text** are clearly indicated

Final stages

Some indexers like to be identified as the author of the index, others prefer anonymity. An indexer's name may be credited in the index or in the prelims. The indexer might also appreciate a complimentary copy of the book or the opportunity to purchase it at a discount.

Where can I find out more?

The Society of Indexers' website (http://www.indexers.org.uk/) should be your first port of call, particularly for links to advice on emerging technologies and their implications for indexing. In addition, you may find the following useful.

Butcher, J., Drake, C. and Leach, M. (2006) ***Butcher's copy-editing,*** 4th edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The whole of chapter 8 (pp. 185–206) is devoted to indexes. Although aimed primarily at copy-editors, this is an invaluable resource for anyone involved with commissioning indexes. (It also includes an excellent and comprehensive index.)

Chicago manual of style, 16th edn (2010). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Although focusing on American style and conventions, this includes an excellent chapter on indexing (available as a separate offprint).

Horn, B. (2006) ***Editorial project management.*** London: Horn Editorial Books.

Taking the reader through the whole process of managing a project, this includes plenty of useful advice on indexing, with practical exercises on briefing the indexer and assessing the completed index.

New Hart's rules (2005). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chapter 19 (pp. 354–70) covers indexing. In addition to discussing matters of style and presentation, it also throws some light on the indexing process and the intricacies of alphabetization.

Glossary and examples of indexing features

alphabetization: there are two alternative systems:

word by word ('nothing before something')	**letter by letter ('all-through' – ignoring spaces)**
gas burner	gas burner
gas pipes	gasket
gas tap	gas pipes
gasket	gas tap
gasworks	gasworks

cross-references: *see* references do not contain information themselves, but direct the reader to an entry that does, e.g. agriculture *see* farming
see also references direct the reader to additional entries containing related information, e.g. schools *see also* teachers

double entries: two (or more) entries for the same term or for synonyms (as opposed to a cross-reference), e.g.

inert gases 2, 10, 230
noble gases 2, 10, 230

elephants, in Kenya 25–8
Kenya, elephants 25–8

location references (locators): numbers (sometimes combined with letters) which identify the location of text. They may include volume numbers or may refer to paragraphs, clauses or sections rather than pages.

subheadings: there are two main styles for secondary entries appearing under the main entry:

run-on (subentries continue on the same line as the main entry, with punctuation to indicate subordination):

cats: baskets 12–13; eating habits 21; health 43–6

set-out (each entry starts on a new line, indented to show subordination:

cats
  baskets 12–13
  eating habits 21
  health 43–6

turnover lines: text in entries extending beyond a single line. In this example the turnover following 'College' is indented further than 'nineteenth-century' so that it is not confused with a subheading or subsubheading:

Royal Agricultural College
      of Herts 11–16
  buildings:
    nineteenth-century 11
    twentieth-century 14
  student numbers 545–7

society of indexers

information from A to Z

Understanding indexes: workshop for editors

In addition to giving you a run-down on the basics of the indexing process, the workshop will take you through the whole process of commissioning an index in more detail than is possible in a booklet of this size. Check the Society of Indexers' website

http://www.indexers.org.uk

to find out when the next one will be running or contact the office (admin@indexers.org.uk) to arrange for a professional indexer-tutor to run a half-day in-house workshop at a time that suits you and your colleagues.

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