

Self-assessment hints for Online Tutorial indexes

Choice of entries and unsought terms

- Think carefully before making long entries under the metatopic – can you avoid using it as the lead term?
- Do all your entries begin with words that index users are likely to look for when searching for that concept?
- Have you identified the main themes of the text? Are there any passages where the concept being discussed is not explicitly named?

Each heading (or first word of a multi-element heading) must be a word that a user is likely to look up, and each locator must refer to text giving worthwhile information. When you make an index entry ask yourself these two questions:

1. Would anyone look this up?
2. Would they find anything useful if they did?

If the answer to either of these questions is no, leave it out.

Wording of entries

Try to make your headings as concise as possible – remember, unnecessary turnover lines are a waste of space. Try to avoid making long sequences of entries beginning with the same word (though sometimes it's unavoidable).

Cross-references

Normally you should avoid using a 'see' cross-reference if the heading you're referring to occupies the same amount of space (or less) than the cross-reference would. You're not creating a thesaurus here; the 'see' cross-references are there to save space, and if they don't you should make a double entry. Remember, though, that if you do make a double entry the locators must be the same in both places.

Make 'see also' cross-references when you need to direct the reader to important related information; do not scatter them around indiscriminately! Make sure your 'see also' cross-reference actually leads to new information.

Subheadings

If the entry as a whole has no more than six (different) locators, you probably don't need to subdivide it (although sometimes you might want to if space allows and it makes life easier for the index user). If you have a long entry with a LOT of subheadings, take a long cold look at the number of locators they cover. Can you subdivide the concept in a different way that allows you to cover all those locators in fewer subentries? Frequent repetition of the same locator(s) in a succession of sub-entries can be a warning sign of poor subheading construction; it usually indicates over-analysis of a topic.

Locators

Have you been consistent about which locators to include? (see above, *Choice of entries*) Have you included a locator for a minor mention, but omitted a more important one? Have you strings of more than six locators which need analysing into subheadings?

Checklists

HAVE YOU AVOIDED ... ?

- references to uninformative (insignificant) mentions
- overlong headings
- unsought headings (unlikely to be looked for by the user)
- unnecessary prepositions and articles
- direct use of 'combinations' from text. Separate headings may be needed, unless they have a different meaning combined, or are closely related forms: 'sports and leisure' – two concepts, two headings; 'fish and chips' – one concept (a meal of ...), one heading.
- cross-references that are irrelevant in the context
- *see* cross-references where full entries would be better
- *see also* cross-references from related terms, each leading to the same locator(s) (e.g. aphids 47 (*see also* pests); pests 47 (*see also* aphids))
- circular *see* cross-references (leading to each other) (e.g. curtains *see* drapes; drapes *see* curtains)
- long, undifferentiated, strings of locators (more than six) after headings
- subheadings that (collectively) merely repeat the locators given at the main heading
- 'hidden' sought terms in subheadings and sub-subheadings; terms that may be sought should feature as headings in their own right (but may be used in subheadings, etc. as well)

CHECK FOR ACCURACY AND CONSISTENCY:

- alphabetical order
- spelling
- capitalization
- punctuation
- spacing
- layout
- Headings or subheadings longer than one line should turn over to the next line, indented more deeply than the deepest subheading indent in your index.