

How I index: advice from real indexers

Indexers of whole documents use various different methods and tools for compiling their indexes. Some input the entries via a keyboard directly into a computer file (usually using a specialized indexing program that can automatically merge and sort entries into order), editing and amending the index on screen and then printing it out in the required format. Others use 'embedded' indexing software that generates index terms from 'tags' inserted within the text of the document itself. All recognize the need to work speedily but accurately.

Remember that computers can help with some of the chores of indexing; they cannot do the intellectual work. Only the indexer can create the index.

Every index needs to be individually considered in relation to context (including the needs of the user) and may need tailoring to suit the publisher's house style, specified length and number of entries, layout and other special requirements. The ideal situation (plenty of time, ample space available in the document for the index, acceptance of everything the indexer produces) often contrasts with the reality (last-minute commissioning of the index, resulting in tight deadlines; late or piecemeal arrival of proofs; restricted space; quibbles about forms of heading and layout).

Here some experienced indexers describe their own working methods. You will learn that indexers work in many different ways, depending on personal predilections as well as document type and the pressures of publishers' schedules.

Note that descriptions of individual indexing methods also appear from time to time in The Indexer. Discussion with other indexers, whether in the virtual environment of the Society of Indexers' email discussion list, Sideline, or at local group meetings, workshops and conferences, is also an invaluable way of really finding out what is involved in working as a professional indexer.

However, it is impossible to learn how to index without actually doing it. Once you have studied Module A and read these descriptions you should know enough about the theory and practice to attempt to index a simple book.

[Pat Booth describes her methodology](#)

[Jane Horton describes the process of analytical indexing](#)

[Ruth Ellis describes indexing using SKY Index Professional software](#)

[Caroline Diepeveen describes embedded indexing using Index-Manager](#)

[James Lamb describes how he produces an embedded index](#)

[Rebecca Linford describes the process of indexing a website](#)

[A working week - Paula Clarke-Bain describes a week in the life of an indexer](#)