

PRACTICE INDEX: NEWSPAPER LETTERS

Suppose you are working with a team indexing the daily letters of a long-standing national newspaper. There are some general headings, e.g. 'agriculture', 'Parliament', 'rural economy', and hundreds for more specific items.

Index the following three letters from one day's issue, noting the following points:

- include the names of the writers
- include a few entries for possible subjects from each letter
- invent the general headings under which the entries might be placed
- devise suitable locators for such work, e.g. date/issue number and page number
- use a line length of about 45 characters with appropriate indents for turnovers, where necessary

The Daily Dispatch, 4 August 2001

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Letter 1

Dear Sir

I should like to emphasize certain paradoxes that now cause problems in present-day farming (Features, 1 August). Many farmers who could carry out the government's recommendations for "efficiency farming" for maximum production find themselves faced with being environmentally unfriendly, which they have no wish to be. On the one hand, increased production, but on the other, grubbed-up hedges to combine smaller fields into larger ones, and drained wetlands; both these methods kill off local wildlife drastically. Furthermore, "efficient" farming with bigger machines means that fewer men are needed to work the land; tenants may manage in this generation but certainly younger people with rural knowledge are going to leave the land to gain moderate incomes elsewhere.

On top of this, the trade treaties mean that we have to have imported foodstuffs, e.g. meat of the sort that we ourselves can produce; these imports force our own prices too low so that animals cost more to rear than can be recouped when they are sold – hence we are giving up rearing them.

None of this can be called "efficient" in any general sense.

If we want a decent rural environment and jobs for future generations, the trade treaties should be altered.

Alan Brownlow,
Shropshire

Letter 2

Dear Sirs

I write in connection with the letter from Mr. Peter Ringout published by yourselves last Wednesday on the subject of educational standards. In his letter Mr. Ringout referred to the recent confirmation by the Secretary of State that class sizes are falling and

examination results are improving despite consistent levels of difficulty. This is quite clearly ludicrous.

From experience both with my own children and those of friends, it is clear that exam standards have fallen at an alarming rate over the last few decades so that a current "A" level student would be unlikely to pass an "O" level of my generation. Class sizes are inconsistent, with increases in some age-groups and decreases in others. This, however, hardly seems relevant in view of the fact that teachers seem equally incompetent whether dealing with a group of five bright 16-year-olds or thirty-five eight-year-olds with learning difficulties.

The government must be aware of the true situation, or they would not feel the need to educate their own children privately!

Yours fee-payingly,

Stan Darslipt,
Filey

Letter 3

Dear Sir

About three years ago a hole appeared in the road opposite our house. As a considerable amount of water was seeping through we called the local water board. It took them six weeks to appear and deny that it was their responsibility.

Six months later BT dug a large hole close by and the leak transferred its allegiance to their repair. A complaint to them (following an accident caused by the leak) produced the comment that their sub-contractors were at fault. Three months later the sub-contractors inspected said leak and denied responsibility.

Following another accident, this time caused by ice, the local council were informed and, remarkably, appeared a matter of hours later. They denied responsibility but said that they would sort out the matter and have it repaired within a week.

Eighteen months later water is still pouring down the road.

Frustrated and annoyed,

Sylvia Mortimer,
Cheltenham