Commissioning an index

a guide from the Society of Indexers

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. The Society of Indexers' Directory of Professional Indexers (www. indexers.org.uk/find-an-indexer/directory/) will help you find an indexer with the skills, experience and subject expertise that is right for your project.

When should I commission the indexer?

Good indexers get booked up months ahead, so it's best to identify and 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. If there are delays or changes to the schedule, keep your indexer informed – we are accustomed to managing shifting deadlines.

Scheduling and deadlines

Discuss how long the job will take and agree a return date with your indexer. Timescales for indexing vary depending on the complexity of the text and the length of the book. On average, you should allow two or three weeks for a book of, say, 200–300 pages (50,000–70,000 words). Factors that may increase the time (and therefore the cost) include:

- **texts which require complex and detailed index compiled by a subject expert**, such as reference or scholarly works
- **detailed indexing** of figures, tables and footnotes
- **early stage texts** where the indexer has to raise queries about apparent inaccuracies and inconsistencies
- **late amendments** to proofs (see p. 7)
- **non-standard index style** or presentation, including multiple index sequences

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 on the Society of Indexers' website (http://www.indexers. org.uk/) is the starting point for negotiation. Higher rates 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
- **embedded indexing** into Word, InDesign or XML file.

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 (a shorter index is not necessarily a cheaper index)
- production schedule and deadlines
- format in which the index is required
- whether the indexer is required to proofread the typeset index

The fees of most indexers include making minor changes to the index after submission, such as rewording a few headings, adding a couple of additional page numbers, or checking a small section of reflowed text. However, if unexpected substantial changes are required after submission, for example a chapter is replaced, the fee may have to be renegotiated.

How do I brief the indexer?

Style

A skilled indexer will use their professional judgement, using 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** styles 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. 9) 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. 8).

Format

The indexer will also need to know:

- what your preferred file **format** is for the index (e.g. RTF, Word doc)
- any specific **formatting requirements** needed for typesetting
- how the index should be **delivered** (e.g. as an email attachment or by file transfer)

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

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.7).

What sort of proofs does the indexer need?

Send the indexer a complete set of **final page proofs** if possible. If the pagination changes after the index has been completed, don't forget that the indexer will also have to update the index (see p. 8). 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.

For embedded indexing, send the Word, InDesign or XML file to the indexer at the appropriate stage in your workflow. For some publishers, this is done before copyediting and the indexed and copyedited documents are merged once both tasks are completed.

It's a new edition – can 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. Indexers are professionals with relevant subject knowledge, so it is not necessary for authors to provide lists of terms they think should be included in the index. Depending on the circumstances, it may be useful for the indexer to contact the author or editor directly to resolve queries more speedily.

Contracts

You may wish to use or adapt the draft contract from the Society of Indexers' website (https://www.indexers.org.uk/find-an-indexer/commissioning-an-index/). A contract should cover the fee and any expenses.

If you don't use a formal contract, you should ensure that all the details of the project are clearly described and agreed by email.

Ensure that the invoice is settled promptly under the terms of the contract.. 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, 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. 10).

You might want to satisfy yourself about the accuracy of locators (page numbers and/or chapter/section numbers) by spot-checking both from index to text and text to index, but remember that the indexer will avoid indexing minor mentions of a subject.

A high-quality professionally produced index will have the following characteristics:

- all the **major topics are** covered adequately
- any **introductory note** to the index is helpful
- **subheadings** are logical, clear and grammatically consistent, and necessary.
- **complex names have** been correctly indexed.
- long '**strings**' of page references have been avoided – these are annoying to readers and are usually resolved by adding subheadings

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 examples on p. 11)
- **'continued' statements** (repetition of main heading) are useful for the typesetter to add 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 review the index before typesetting, but this is not an opportunity for making major changes. An index draws together the significant topics of a book, harmonizes vocabulary and brings together subjects that may be described differently in the text, making them more accessible to the reader. Even minor changes to a professionally produced index can destroy its carefully-designed structure. Bear in mind the following:

- an index is not a list of word occurrences
- it's not usually necessary to index every name in the text
- minor references will not have been included in the index
- indexers build on the author's terminology to accommodate readers' likely search terms
- synonyms are used to create useful cross-references or double entry of topics, to improve accessibility
- subheadings are used to clarify and amplify main headings, helping readers find the specific information they need.

Indexers may be able to accommodate a reasonable number of requested changes to the index, but may have to charge additionally if substantial changes are requested. Also, the indexer's professional judgement may mean that some requests cannot be accommodated if they would result in a less effective index.

Help – I need to make last-minute changes!

Don't do it yourself – it's a recipe for disaster. An index is a complex structure and any changes to one section are likely to have repercussions elsewhere. Your indexer, with their specialized software and familiarity with the text, will be able to make the changes 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 If you 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)

It is advisable to refer more significant shortening to the indexer. This will be quicker and easier, and will also avoid compromising the indexer's moral rights in their work. Indexers will consider several options for reducing the length of the index, including:

- amalgamating subentries
- subsuming specific entries under more general headings
- replacing double entries with cross-references

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 types of pagination changes can be easily dealt with using indexing software. The indexer will need **revised proofs** with changes highlighted.

Making stylistic changes Avoid the temptation to adjust the layout, capitalization, punctuation, alphabetization and page-range elision yourself. Using 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
- **'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.

Crediting the indexer 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, the prelims or the acknowledgements. 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.

Workshops

Indexing 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. This is available as an online workshop which you can study at your own pace, or as a half-day in-house workshop run by a professional indexer, which can be tailored to your individual needs. Contact admin@indexers. org.uk to discuss in-house workshop options.

Reference sources

- Butcher, J., Drake, C. and Leach, M. *Butcher's copy-editing*, 4th edn, 2006. 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*, 17th edn, 2017. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
  Although focusing on American style and conventions, this includes an excellent chapter on indexing (available as a separate offprint).

- Waddingham, Anne. *New Hart's rules*. 2nd edition, 2014. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  Chapter 19 (pp. 377–95) 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	**set-out**
(subentries continue on the same line as the main entry, with punctuation to indicate subordination):	(each entry starts on a new line, indented to show subordination):

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

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

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indexers
information from A to Z