

# Conference 2025:

## The Heart and Mind of Indexing

Edgbaston Park Hotel, University of Birmingham

Friday 19 September – Sunday 21 September



### Session details

#### Friday

##### **14:00 Plenary: 'Indexing parliamentary papers' (Anya Somerville)**

Anya leads a team of indexers and thesaurus editors in the House of Commons Library. The team index the proceedings of Parliament, helping searchers, browsers, researchers, and data wranglers to find what they need to support the services that they provide. Anya's presentation will cover how the team's work has evolved from indexing for the back of a book, to indexing for databases and eventually for the open web – and the enduring importance of collaboration and conversation to support that work.

##### **16:00 Parallel breakouts: session 1**

##### **New indexers (Ruth Martin/CPD committee member)**

With guidance from experienced members of the CPD committee, this session will focus on some of the issues that confront indexers early in their careers, from setting up their indexing business and marketing their services to learning how to manage their time and working more efficiently to deal with the demands of the commercial world.

##### **Experienced indexers (Alan Rutter)**

Led by an experienced indexer of many years' standing, this session will focus on some of the issues that more experienced indexers face in planning for and adapting to changes in their working environment, particularly changes in their client base, as well as technological changes. Participants will be encouraged to contribute to the discussion.

#### Saturday

##### **09:15 Plenary: 'AI and SI update' (Tanya Izzard) + 'Adapting with agility' (Xiaoyuan [JoJo] Chen)**

In an era where generative AI and digital publishing are reshaping information landscapes, the role of human indexers remains irreplaceable. After an update from Tanya on SI's current situation in relation to digital developments, and on how indexers can respond to AI issues individually and collectively, JoJo will explore how global indexing societies are navigating challenges through adaptive thinking and organisational agility. The future of indexing lies in harmonising human ingenuity with technological advances.

##### **10:30 Plenary: 'X-Men united, indexers divided?' A roundtable on differing approaches to indexing the same text (Jolanta Komornicka and panel)**

In this roundtable discussion, a panel of indexers and the panel chair discuss their approach to indexing the same text. The conversation will look at how indexers address the various challenges that arise in our work. The indexes will be made available to attendees in advance and questions from the floor are encouraged. Attendees are also welcome to try their hand at indexing the book (J. Andrew Deman's *The Claremont Run*) – the proofs will be on the conference website, available to those who have registered (thank you to University of Texas Press and Andrew Deman for letting us do this!). Attendees can also use the proofs to follow-along with the discussion.

### **12:15 Parallel software discussion groups: informal sharing of tips and tricks**

Each group will have a facilitator(s) to guide discussion.

- SKY Index (facilitators Sheree Mosley and Susie Marques-Jones)
- Cindex (facilitator Alexandra Peace [ISC/SCI])
- MACREX (facilitator Caroline Diepeveen ([SI and NIN])

### **13:45 Parallel breakouts: session 2**

#### **Embedded indexing (TBC and Katharina Munk)**

After an introductory overview, the session will mainly focus on Index-Manager, giving participants the opportunity to exchange tips, ask questions and see particular features demonstrated. Participants are expected to have a basic understanding of embedded indexing and will be asked to give details of their experience prior to the conference.

#### **Cross-references (Ann Hudson)**

A good index needs some *see* and *see also* cross-references, to direct the reader to material elsewhere in the index as simply as possible. But in a large complex index this is not always straightforward. How do you direct the reader to a subheading in another entry? Are two-stage cross-references ever justifiable? Should you ever cross-refer to an adjacent entry? We will chew over these and other conundrums in this session, which is suitable for experienced indexers and students on the final stages of the training course.

#### **Mindful collage: an introduction to creative journaling for wellbeing (Lyndsay Marshall)**

The SI member resources leaflet [TP7: Looking After Yourself](#) addresses the stresses and challenges faced by indexers and provides details of sources of support. This breakout session will offer participants the opportunity to engage in a creative activity as a way to relax and unwind from indexing, in a simple form of art journaling using index cards to create collages, while discussing other ways to regain or maintain a sense of wellbeing.

### **15:30 Plenary: 'Working with authors' (Dennis Duncan, Caroline Sanderson et al.)**

Authors' contracts often state that they are 'responsible' for the index, and increasingly indexers are being contacted directly by authors rather than publishers. How do these relationships work without the intermediary of an in-house contact? This panel session will look at the working relationship from the point of view of both author and indexer, with discussion between panel members and attendees encouraged.

### **16:30 Plenary: Lightning talks**

Speakers each have a five-minute slot to speak about a topic they are passionate about (which may have only a tenuous connection to indexing or freelancing), and using a maximum of 10 PowerPoint slides, if necessary. Lightning talks provide a good opportunity for any attendee to gain more confidence in presenting to a friendly audience.

## **Sunday**

### **09:15 Plenary: Humour and bias in indexing (Paula Clarke Bain and Ann Kingdom)**

Indexers are advised to be neutral in the wording of our entries, acting as an impartial conduit between reader and writer, and purists may argue that an index is no place for bias or humour. But a back-of-the-book index is a work of creativity in which the use of language and choice of terminology play a role in drawing the reader back into the text. Is the cleverly worded entry an effective device to catch the user's attention or an irritating impertinence on the indexer's part? Ann and Paula will begin by looking at various different kinds of humorous and biased index entries (both deliberate and unintentional) and then focus on the particular issues of indexing funny texts and comedy books.

### **10:45 Parallel breakouts: session 3**

#### **Indexing the *Buildings of England* (Nicola King)**

The Pevsner room at the Edgbaston Park Conference Centre was named after Sir Nikolaus Pevsner – a University of Birmingham research fellow and the author of a ground-breaking series of architectural guides to the UK. This session will look at the scope of the *Buildings of England* volumes, the format of the index entries and the approach taken to maintaining consistency between the volumes. Examples will be drawn from Nicola's experience of indexing the *Oxford and South East Oxfordshire* volume.

#### **Reader, I indexed it: strategies for indexing literary criticism (Devon Thomas)**

Literary criticism presents the indexer with some unique challenges; texts can be complicated and often include elements of other subjects, such as biography and history that also need indexing. This breakout session will look at some of the knotty problems of indexing books about books, including titles of works in texts (more complex than one thinks at first glance), how to handle characters, and what to do about plot.

### **12:00 Parallel breakouts: session 4**

#### **Working on large projects (Caroline Diepeveen)**

This session will look at how to handle large and very large indexing projects. The different stages of an indexing assignment will be covered, to see how working on large projects differs from regular indexing projects. The aim of the session is twofold: for those who have not worked on large indexing projects before, to enable them to decide whether taking on large projects is for them, and for those who have experience with large indexing projects, to discuss and learn from each other's experiences and to share tips and tricks.

#### **Indexing emotions and emotional indexing (Ruth Martin)**

This session aims to encourage colleagues to reflect upon the rarely discussed emotional dimension of indexing work. How does emotional intelligence interact with, and complement, the other cognitive processes of indexing? Amongst other issues, it will cover indexers' reluctance to use emotion terms, why they may sometimes be justified and, indeed, essential, and how to index emotive subject matter in a neutral fashion. It will also look at how AI systems classify us on the basis of our emotions and how to counter the AI threat by embracing our emotional intelligence.

### **13:45 Parallel breakouts: session 5**

#### **Breaking the rules (Madelon Nanninga)**

Indexing for New York University Press's Library of Arabic Literature is a highly rewarding experience. Their books take the reader on an adventure to an ancient Middle East. These annotated translations of 1,000-year-old texts are highly interesting, but the press's indexing instructions come with some caveats. How does an indexer navigate having to work with a 15-page long 'Index List' featuring terms that have to be indexed, no matter their significance? What if close to every noun on a page should be indexed? With an average of 20 indexable terms per page, Madelon found that she couldn't rely on her standard indexing software alone to ensure that she could adhere to the complex guidelines and had to come up with a way to simplify the indexing process. The subsequent discussion will focus on other participants' experiences with breaking the rules.

#### **Client communication (Sue Penny)**

By working together, initially in small groups, the aim of this session is to co-create a series of pro-forma responses for dealing with those difficult or awkward situations that crop up from time to time: low fee offers, clients who are unhappy with (or don't understand) the index, clients who aren't paying up, clients who aren't keeping to the agreed schedule, and so on. Newer indexers will find this particularly useful, but the input of more experienced indexers will also be appreciated.

### **14:45 Closing plenary: international update followed by close of conference**

Delegates from the indexing societies affiliated through ICRIS (the International Committee of Representatives of Indexing Societies) will briefly highlight major developments in their own societies and what we can look forward to in 2026.