

Mentoring scheme in Australia

Max McMaster

The ANZSI mentoring scheme provides the opportunity for novice indexers to develop their indexing skills under the supervision of a well-qualified mentor. Finished indexes may be eligible for publication in the ANZSI Index Series. This paper outlines the development of the scheme, initially by the Victorian branch of ANZSI, the criteria for selecting mentees and mentors, and some of the pitfalls.

Until two years ago ANZSI (the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers) had no official mentoring scheme, although a few individuals offered mentoring privately on a one-on-one basis. Although the topic of mentoring had been discussed at various branch meetings within ANZSI, the problems of such a scheme always seemed too difficult, and the topic was consigned to the 'too hard' basket.

By 'mentoring' I have in mind a training mechanism whereby novice, trainee or less experienced individuals are provided with professional guidance and advice by a well-qualified practitioner in the appropriate field of endeavour, in this case indexing. Through mentoring the novice can gain his or her first professional experience. Within ANZSI we have established eligibility criteria for inclusion in the mentoring scheme, as well as developing guidelines for mentors. I shall return to these later.

How did the mentoring scheme come into being?

Training within ANZSI was and still is offered at two levels:

- Introductory back-of-book indexing – a one-day training course, which covers basic indexing theory with some short indexing exercises.
- Intermediate back-of-book indexing – a one-day practical indexing course, where the participants use one of the dedicated indexing packages on the market to index a small 50–60 page non-fiction work, during the course of the day.

That was the extent of the training offered by the Society, and trainees were then effectively left on their own. With the exception of a couple of the legal publishers, there is virtually no in-house indexing training in Australia.

Now to gain Registration (the only peer-reviewed indexing mechanism available within ANZSI), participants must supply to the panel of assessors one index which they have compiled, and nominate two others. This means they must have completed a minimum of three indexes before they can even remotely consider applying for Registration. But how are the indexers going to gain the necessary indexing experience? Many of our new or less experienced indexers have difficulty in obtaining worthwhile materials to

index, yet the new indexers need quality materials to build up their level of expertise. No publisher is going to let an inexperienced indexer loose on its publications.

This is where the mentoring scheme, developed initially by the Victorian (Vic) branch of ANZSI, comes in.

Mentoring scheme proposal

There are a large number of books and journals held in state, academic and public libraries, particularly from the 19th century but also from the 20th century, that have been published without indexes. Many of these are significant works, but because of the lack of indexes their usefulness is less than it should be.

To overcome the difficulties experienced by new or trainee indexers it was proposed that they be given the opportunity to index some of these unindexed books under the supervision of an experienced indexer (mentor). To ensure the best outcome for each mentoring project it was essential to match the mentee's (although we prefer to call them mentees) subject background and knowledge to the books to be indexed as much as possible.

Mentors ideally have an initial consultation with their mentee to discuss their particular project, and to consider approaches or strategies that might need to be considered in the indexing of a given work. The mentor is not to do any of the indexing work, but of course can provide suggestions on how something could be done, for example dealing with Asian names. After the initial consultation mentors usually ask the mentee to send an electronic file of the index after he or she has completed some 40 or 50 pages of the text. In this way feedback can be provided at any early stage and any serious errors rectified before too much damage is done.

Based on our experience of the scheme so far, most mentors and mentees interact five or six times (either by phone or email) during the course of a project (usually over a period of two to three months, though sometimes longer), equating to about four to six hours of interaction. The final task of the mentor (if he or she hasn't been doing this all along) is to check the mentee's index against the original work for accuracy. Once the mentor has signed off the indexing project as being up to an acceptable standard, the indexes are eligible to be published by ANZSI under the title of Australian and New Zealand Indexing Society Index Series.

ANZSI checks the library holdings through the Libraries Australia network (which acts like a national union

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catalogue). Indexes published in the ANZSI Index Series are direct marketed to those libraries and institutions holding the title. In this way the Society gets a small return to defray the publishing costs.

The beauty of this proposal is that it is a win-win situation all round. The trainees gain some important indexing experience; they end up with a published index which they may decide to submit as part of the Registration process, and the Society gets a valuable new indexer within its ranks. The library providing the original text of what was a valuable but under-utilized work gains a new tool for rendering that work accessible. How the libraries handle the cataloguing and linking of the separate original work and the new index is up to them.

Selection of texts for the mentoring scheme

Initially ANZSI Vic branch approached the State Library of Victoria for suitable titles for inclusion in the scheme. Our specification was for worthwhile 19th century titles without indexes. The State Library came back to us with a list of titles, some quite useful, but others completely unsuitable. For example, a few of the titles were only held in the rare book collection, which made access for the mentee difficult, and from a sales perspective was not a viable option. Some titles had had subsequent editions or reprints. Some of the reprints had different pagination, which made the task of marrying titles together almost impossible, and in a final group it was found that later editions had been indexed, even though the first editions had not been.

As a result of these setbacks, we decided to let the mentees themselves choose a suitable title for indexing. We suggested they ask their local historical society, church group, genealogical society, sports club or public library if it had any title suitable for indexing. Once the mentee had chosen a title he or she felt comfortable with, it was vetted by the mentor prior to the commencement of the mentoring project, for suitability and for saleability.

As a Society we have taken a very mercenary approach to the selection of titles. If there are two suitable titles, one held in six libraries and the other in 100, we will take the one with 100 every time. This is not to say the one in six libraries is unsuitable in indexing terms, but there are better pickings! As a result of this approach we have had a range of books and newsletters indexed under the scheme.

In more recent times Vic branch, under John Simkin, has begun compiling a list of 19th century titles suitable for indexing under the auspices of the mentoring scheme. John has ensured the titles are well represented in public libraries (for ease of access), do not have several editions or reprints, and have not been indexed previously.

Our ACT branch (based in Canberra) has also gone down the mentoring path, and is working closely with the ACT Heritage Council for suitable material. It had originally approached the National Library of Australia in Canberra for material. The National Library came up with a list of titles it would like to be indexed through the mentoring scheme. Unfortunately many of them were 'one-off' titles, and the National Library had the only copy in existence.

Worthwhile to the National Library, yes, but not of benefit to any other organization.

Our New Zealand branch has also come on board the mentoring scheme. Being aware of the problems the ACT branch had with the National Library of Australia, it has stipulated that materials for use in the mentoring scheme be readily accessible through a range of institutions.

Difficulties with the scheme

Finding enough people who were prepared to be mentors has been the major problem. The general comment has been, 'I can't afford to give up between five and six hours of my work time to train a mentee.' We have partly overcome this difficulty by paying the mentors. Mentees now pay a flat fee of A\$200 per title to ANZSI (through a mentoring coordinator) to participate in the scheme. On completion of their mentoring project, the mentor is paid the A\$200 less a small administration fee. The A\$200 figure was based on the equivalent cost of attending an ANZSI training course. Training course participants pay A\$200 for around six hours (or one day) of instruction, so it has been decided to charge those receiving the same number of hours of tuition through the mentoring scheme a similar rate.

Some mentees are not prepared (or able) to put in the necessary effort, and drop out of the scheme. Some find they are not cut out for indexing, others find they don't have the motivation, and others find the time commitment is too great, when they are trying to balance family, work and social activities.

Finally, with mentees choosing their own titles, mentors have had to spend time chasing up the work chosen, and then doing an evaluation for suitability. Some titles have been quite unsuitable. The publication may not be worthwhile in terms of subsequent usefulness of the index; it may be too short; or the material may be too simple.

Requirements for inclusion in the ANZSI mentoring scheme

To be eligible, candidates must

- be a financial member of ANZSI
- have completed the Introductory and Intermediate indexing training courses run by ANZSI, or demonstrate an equivalent level of understanding
- have read the chapter on indexing in the *Style manual* (2002), 6th edn, and be familiar with one of the standard indexing manuals: Booth (2001), Mulvany (1994) or Wellisch (1996)
- have access to the Australian and New Zealand Standard for indexing, AS/NZS 999: 1999
- provide a written proposal for the indexing project and register on the appropriate application form
- pay a fee per indexing project.

The mentee can index up to three items under the scheme, each with a minimum of 200 pages, and requiring an index of at least four double-column pages. This may be a book or

the equivalent in a newspaper or journal index. Mentees can choose their own books or journals to index, subject to approval by their mentor, or they may select a title from an ANZSI compiled list.

Mentees will receive four to six hours individual contact with their mentor over each project they work on within an expected two to three-month period, to be negotiated between the mentor and the mentee.

Selected indexes may be eligible to be included in the ANZSI Index Series.

Requirements for mentors

Mentors must be very experienced back-of-book indexers who are Registered Indexers. Mentors of journal indexes should be either experienced database indexers or Registered Indexers. Their role is to provide guidance and professional advice. They are concerned with the structure and consistency of the index, and advise on particular problems. They do not get involved in the intellectual content of the index, or index the work in any way, but provide feedback to mentees during the course of the project, and make a final assessment of the index against the original work, prior to signing it off as being of an acceptable standard.

References

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Max McMaster has been indexing for 17 years, working predominantly on back-of-book indexing, but delving into database, journal, newspaper and web indexing as well. He arrived at indexing after 19 years in the library and information fields, mainly involved with scientific disciplines in government organizations. He has in excess of 1,300 indexes to his name. He lectures on indexing at a number of universities, and runs training courses for ANZSI and other organizations throughout Australia and New Zealand. He is three-times winner of the Australian Society of Indexers Medal for book indexing and is currently president of the Vic branch of ANZSI. Email: max.mcmaster@masterindexing.com

[For a mentee's view of the scheme, see Jane Purton's article on page 179 – Ed]

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