THE CORRECTION OF INDEX PROOFS

G. NORMAN KNIGHT

“If life had a second edition, how would I correct the proofs?”

—John Clare.

Essential though it is, it cannot be said that reading the proofs is the most interesting part of index-making. Nevertheless, I feel that we should always offer to correct the proofs of our indexes and even insist as far as possible upon doing so. Nor does the Society of Indexers encourage the making of a separate charge for this service, which is indispensable if the indexer is to have any responsibility for the form in which his index reaches the public. Normally publishers send the proofs (preferably in duplicate sets) without question. Only one set need be returned.

About a fortnight, then, or even a month after we have sent off our carefully edited index manuscript (whether it be in the form of nicely typewritten sheets or of the rubber-banded bundles of index-cards or slips on which it was compiled), we may expect to receive the whole thing back again together with the printed proofs for our attention. The length of time elapsing before this happens will depend upon the length of the index and how free the printer may be to devote his time to it.

These proofs reach us in one of two forms; they are either long galley sheets, which are not even divided into columns; or else they come in the form of paged-proofs, which again may be either paged galleys or ordinary pages, but are sometimes bound up elaborately with the text of the book into a rough paperback.

Whole lines can be safely added or deleted on ordinary galleys but this should never be attempted on paged-proofs without full compensation in the same column, as otherwise every single succeeding page of the index may have to be disturbed, or at the very least until the next letter of the alphabet is reached. In the same way, in the case of a long set of run-on sub-headings, the insertion or deletion of a whole word should be avoided except in the last line, since otherwise the resetting of every subsequent line of the entry will probably be involved.

Why, it may be asked, are such stringent precautions necessary? They are required because of the enormous expense of making corrections on the printed page, regarding which I am able to supply some figures. I am assured by those whose business is the printing of books that the cost of setting corrections in linotype, including the work of the proof-reader, the linotype operator and the stone hand, comes to as much as three guineas per hour; while the insertion of a single comma, if done as a lone operation, would reasonably take a full half-hour.

Why these operations should be so costly is explained in a useful little six-penny pamphlet entitled Author's corrections cost money and cause delay, produced by the British Federation of Master Printers in collaboration with the Publishers' Association. It contains also a table of the more commonly used symbols employed in proof-correction.

Consequently, at the paged-proof stage trivial verbal amendments are rarely worth while, and when tempted we should bear in mind Sir Francis Bacon’s
dictum: "The most corrected copies are commonly the least correct." When editing one's script for the press is the time for making corrections.

Now for the actual work of proof-reading. There are in reality (though not officially) two classes of corrections: those due to printer's errors and those which are genuine "author's corrections", i.e., due to mistakes in the indexer's original copy—but if he carefully edited and prepared his script for the press, there should be none—or else due to afterthoughts. When correcting the former class, the printer's own errors, it is my invariable practice to put a ringed-round note in the margin: "See copy". This is not strictly necessary but it may save the publishers' being unnecessarily charged.

The proofs will often be found to contain marginal notes from the printer's reader, querying ambiguities, inconsistencies or possible inaccuracies. If you agree with the printer's suggestion, strike out the question mark. If not, strike out the suggested alteration as well.

Sometimes an unfamiliar touch in the proof will turn the indexer to his copy, an examination of which will reveal that the publisher's editor has himself taken a hand by "tampering with" or "improving" (according to the point of view) the script. This is a case requiring the greatest tact, but I would suggest that if the indexer does not consider the amendment to be an improvement, he should at least inquire the reasons for it. He may learn that his own style infringed one of the "house rules" of the firm concerned.

Proof-reading should be carried out by scanning the index, line by line, for possible errors. Except in case of doubt, it should rarely be necessary to refer to the copy or to the text of the book. A commonly adopted method of focusing the attention on one line at a time is to place under it a ruler or sheet of paper, which can be gradually moved downwards.

The question is sometimes asked: Is it necessary to check the accuracy of each page number entry by looking up the appropriate reference in the text? Ideally, of course, that should be done, since the page number entries are a vital part of any index. But my own experience seems to show that very rarely do the page numbers on the proof not correspond to those in the copy and that any error (other than the indexer's own) will be due to a new paragraph or two having been inserted, or an old one deleted from, the book's text at the last moment without the indexer's having been notified. Such things have been known to happen, although fortunately not too frequently. I believe that the majority of indexers are content to check the page numbers on the proof with those in the "copy" or else to sample a few pages of the text at random and check off the indexable references in them with the page numbers set out in the index.

**The Symbols**

How should corrections be made? They should always be marked in ink. Certain symbols are used, which it is convenient to know. The 38 appearing on page 39 have been selected as being the most likely ones to be required in correcting index proofs. They are extracted (by permission of the British Standards Institution) from the half-a-crown card B.S. 1219: 1958—Table of symbols for printers' and authors' proof corrections, which contains 64 symbols in all. If any
reader is feeling particularly “flush”, he can for the modest outlay of six shillings obtain the table enshrined in a far more elaborate outfit—a pamphlet with the same B.S. number and called: Recommendations for proof correction and copy preparation. This not only contains examples of corrected pages of print but even includes marks for clarifying and correcting mathematical copy. In my opinion one or other of these B.S.I. publications is a “must” among the tools of the indexer’s trade.

This standard (B.S. 1219) was first published in 1945, although some of its symbols must be nearly as old as printing itself, as signified by the use of the Greek letter delta and the Latin word “stet”. The correction marks it contains are understood and followed by printers throughout the whole of Great Britain and America and in most other parts of the world, but the practice is materially different on the continent of Europe. The important question of promoting international agreement on this matter is being considered by a Committee of the International Organization for Standardization.

It will be observed in the table of symbols on page 39 that every textual mark has its corresponding symbol to be used in the margin. The marginal marks can be used in either the left or the right margin, whichever is nearer the text to be corrected.

No. 1 (/) is a marginal mark, placed after letters and words and certain punctuation marks to be inserted or substituted, to show that the correction is concluded. No. 2, “the caret mark”, is very common. It denotes that the letter(s) or word(s) indicated in the margin is/are to be inserted in the place marked. The new matter in the margin is followed by No. 1. No. 3 is probably the most used of all. It is the Greek letter delta (though its origin might never be guessed from some writers’ attempts to reproduce it), followed by No. 1, and is the deletion mark, signifying that the characters struck out in the text are to be erased. When these are in the middle of a word and it is required to close up the remainder, then the close-up symbol (No. 16) must also be used both in the text and in the margin, as shown in No. 4. Similarly, where it is important that space should be left (as, for instance, after deleting the hyphen in “no-one”), No. 18 marginal mark should follow No. 3 in the margin.

No. 5. If you have crossed out something in your proof index and later wish it to remain as printed, you put dots (......) under the characters to be retained and the word stet (Latin for “let it stand”) in the margin opposite. No. 6 indicates the method of changing type into italics by means of an ordinary underline (_) under the word or words in the text and placing ital in the margin. No. 7 similarly demands changing to Bold type (note the wavy underline in the text), while from Italics or Bold type to ordinary Roman needs No. 8. In this last case the characters affected in the text of the index are encircled.

How to change to and from capitals (large or small) is shown in Nos. 9-12, two underlines being placed under characters to be put into small caps (s.c.) and three for large caps (caps). Note that “i.e.” stands, not for “large capitals”, but for “lower case” or ordinary type, as opposed to capitals. In this last case the characters affected are encircled in the text. No. 13 “wrong fount” (w.f.),
which must also be encircled, will scarcely ever be found in the linotype or monotype in which our indexes are usually set.

No. 14 (X) is often required to get damaged type (to be encircled in the text) replaced. Here it is not always easy to distinguish between genuine damaged characters and cases where simply insufficient ink has been employed in that particular part of the proof, it being remembered that proofs are rarely printed with the same care as is the finished product. In such conditions duplicate proofs are invaluable because they can be compared to see if the character appears deformed in both. In cases of doubt I should advise inserting the cross in the margin. No. 15 is useful for the substitution or insertion of the apostrophe or quote marks or other characters to appear above the line. It can be used in conjunction with the delete mark, where an above-the-line character must come out.

No. 16 is the close-up symbol I have already mentioned in connexion with No. 4. It should be used in both text and margin for deleting space between characters and for denoting ligatures (e.g., fi) or diphthongs (e.g., ae or oe), the actual ligature or diphthong required being shown enclosed by the wings of the symbol in the margin. The reverse process is denoted by No. 17, the separate letters being written out in the margin, followed by No. 1. The provision of greater or less space, either between words or between lines, is demanded by Nos. 18-20.

Nos. 21-6 denote how matter is shifted; it sometimes makes for clarity in the case of transposition (No. 21) if small numerals are put in addition under misplaced words or letters to show the order in which they should appear. Thus, if confronted in our proof with such a jumble as “rebels the up”, we could put “1” under “up”, “2” under “the” and “3” under “rebels”, with trs. in margin. Similarly, if presented with a mix-up like “tarpsnose”, we could put figures under the letters to show that it should read “transpose”. An alternative method, in either case, would be to strike out the offending passage and rewrite correctly in the margin, ending with No. 1.

Nos. 23 and 24 are for moving matter to right or left, the former textual symbol being placed at the left of what is to be moved, the latter at the right. Nos. 25 and 26 are for taking over to next line or column or for taking back to the previous line or column. Nos. 27 and 28 are for correcting faulty alignment, the one, vertical, the second, horizontal; both are occasionally required in correcting index proofs.

The only occasions on which I have used No. 29 (n.p.) in an index is where new paragraphs seem indicated to break up an excessively long series of run-on sub-headings. In such a case, bearing in mind what I have already said on the question of expense, we should use it rather in preparing the script than in correcting paged proofs (see next paragraph). No. 30 is to obtain the reverse process. Nos. 31-8 denote how punctuation marks are inserted or substituted. Observe that the full stop and the colon are invariably encircled in the margin, the reason being probably that otherwise they might escape notice. The others, excepting Nos. 37 and 38, are followed by No. 1. No. 38, indeed, the dash (frequently needed in an index) is inserted upon my own responsibility as no symbol for it appears in B.S. 1219.
As well as for proof-correcting, the symbols on page 39 may also be employed in making amendments to one's own script. It might be mentioned that some occurred fairly frequently in the preparation of this article, which, elementary as it may be, it is hoped may prove of practical use to indexers who are faced (perhaps for the first time) with the problem of correcting their proofs. It is believed that even experienced indexers (and consequently proof-readers) may find some of the hints contained in it to be not without value.

Example

Page 36 represents the extract as it should look. On the next page certain deliberate mistakes have been made—far more than are ever likely to be found in a proof of this length. These are to be detected and put right. When this has been done, check your effort by turning to the corrected proof (page 38).

First, let us have a look for a moment at one or two points on the proof.

(1) It is not easy to guess from the extract what kind of book is being indexed. Actually it is a very recent *History of Trinidad and Tobago*, by Mrs. Gertrude Carmichael (Alvin Redman Ltd.).

(2) My name at the top. This is not printed here in order to push my own wares, but as a hint to the reader to try inserting his (or her) own name in the next analytical index of over six pages he may compile. More publishers every year are agreeing to give this form of credit or else to arrange an acknowledgment in the preface to the book. The practice is strongly recommended in the American Standard of Indexing and it is to be hoped that it will also be in the forthcoming British Standard.

(3) First entry. “1672...304”. The dotted lines are simply a device for avoiding confusion between dates or other digits appearing at the end of the entry on the one hand and the page numbers on the other. Another method is to put such dates or digits in italics.

(4) Notice the colon after “British Guiana”. Whenever a heading is not followed immediately by page numbers, but only by sub-headings, it is of the utmost importance that the punctuation after the heading should be a colon and not, as so often seen, a comma. If the latter is used, the first sub-heading may be taken as part of the heading. Consider, for instance, the following:

  Churches, basilican, 763; Byzantine, 813; circular, 596

Here both the Byzantine and the circular could be interpreted as modifications of “basilican churches”.

(5) Page numbers in italics. In this index these denote main references. It is, I feel, far preferable to employ bold type for this purpose, but in this case the printers did not possess any bold type in the size used in the original. The one example of bold type on the proof is simply put there for the purpose of correction.

(6) Bracketed descriptions (*Governor*, *Alcade*, etc.), it will be noticed, are printed in italics. This may be regarded as a whim of my own and need not be followed by others. It was possibly adapted from the style used in theatre programmes (e.g., “Lady Macbeth (*wife of above*)”)

35
Extract from Index

Compiled by
G. Norman Knight, M.A., M.S. Ind., Barrister-at-Law

Bridges, Sir Tobias, Tobago captured by, 1672...
304
Bristol merchants’ petition on Trinidad’s laws, 92
British American Corporation, 288
British American Exchange Bank, 259
British and Foreign Bible Society, 200
British Guiana:
   East Indian immigrants in, 214, 242, 243; immigration bounty system, 188; See of (R.C.), 250
British Trident, repatriation ship, 243
Brodie, Rev. G., 272.
Broome, Sir F. Napier (Governor, 1891-7), 288, 301, 376
Brougham, Henry Peter (later Baron Brougham),
   89, 159, 242
   — speech by, 1824...404
Brown, Alexander (Lt.-Gov. of Tobago, 1764-6),
   306, 434.
Brown, Charlotte (Mrs. Burnley), 247
Brown, Frederick (Alcades), 160
Buchanan, R. T. (Agent in New York), 207
Buckingham, Richard Grenville, 3rd Duke of
   (Secretary of State), 269-70
Buckley, Dr. James (Vicar-Apostolic), 128, 134, 149,
   177, 250, 432
Buildings, 239-40, 247-8, 277-8
Burnley, William (Depositor-Gen.), 93, 136, 145,
   154, 170
   — career of, 246-7; delegate to England, 1832...
   161, 164-6; estates of, 211, 239, 247; immigration and, 206, 209-10, 247, 419-21; Immigration
   and Agricultural Society chairman, 211; Llanos’s councillorship objected to by, 172-3; railway opposed by, 1847...
   245; sales of estates stopped by, 127; slavery amelioration and, 122-4; Survey Committeeeman, 221; will
   of, 247
Burnley, William F. (estate owner), 272
Burns, Captain, 188
Bushe (Alcades), 160
Buxton, Sir Thomas Fowell “Elephant” (abolitionist), 121, 164, 242

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Textual Description</th>
<th>Marginal Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>(monē)</td>
<td>(money)</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td>new matter</td>
<td>/</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>followed by</td>
<td>/</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g. &quot;&quot;)</td>
<td>(e.g. &quot;&quot;)</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Strike through</td>
<td>what is to be</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>deleted.</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Strike through</td>
<td>and use mark</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No. 16</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>....... under what</td>
<td>is to remain</td>
<td>/</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>under characters</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to be altered</td>
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<td>7.</td>
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<td>as in No. 6</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>encircle</td>
<td>characters</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to be altered</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td></td>
<td>s.c.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>as in No. 6</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td></td>
<td>caps</td>
<td>/</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>as in No. 6</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td></td>
<td>letters</td>
<td>/</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>under rest</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>encircle</td>
<td>characters</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to be altered</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>encircle</td>
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<td>/</td>
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SYMBOLS AND MARKS FOR CORRECTING INDEX PROOFS.
COMMAS AND COLONS

I have heard tell of an indexer who on a family occasion became noticeably abstracted from those around him by meditative thought. His wife and family waited in respectful silence, expecting some pronouncement which would affect their welfare and their fortunes. At length, descending from the clouds of thought, the indexer said with the vibrant voice of one who has reached a moment of decision: "I will omit the comma."

As, or so I understand, this event took place not so very long ago, the indexer cannot lay claim to original thought. I do not know when the first index appeared in which the comma was relegated to do no other duty than to mark an inversion or to separate one page number from another. The smooth effect of modernity thus obtained may be studied in one notable index, that to Kathleen Coburn's great edition of the Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the first volume of which appeared in 1957. There may be earlier examples.

So quickly do we become adapted to change that the obtrusive comma gives an old-fashioned look to an index today. In a useful text book only recently published, called Indexing Books, Mr. R. L. Collison advises the omission of "superfluous commas". He puts the indexer on his guard, however, against the printer who will put them all back again. The printer here may well retort that indexers as a class are apt to expect the printer to find his own way through a shower of cards, putting up his own signposts in the way of dashes, commas, colons and semi-colons. Punctuation is so important a tool in the indexer's trade that an indexer should never neglect to use it himself with care, thought and precision; an index is but rough-hewn otherwise.

In turning out the comma from its prevalent position, I should like to say a good word for the colon. To quote Mr. Collison again: colons, he says, are sometimes used to indicate "that all the references following the colon are descriptions of or are aspects of the main subject". Mr. Collison knows the temperament of indexers too well to allow himself to be dogmatic. He knows also that the indexer loves rules provided he does not feel he must be bound by them. He is therefore the best of guides, and if any of his readers turn, as I do, his "sometimes used" into "should always be used", that is our doing and not his. He gives examples:

Wilson, Alfred 13, 15; birth 15-16; education 16-17
Wilson, Alfred; birth 15-16; education 16-17

Both the above commend themselves. What by implication should be avoided is:

Wilson, Alfred birth 15-16; education 16-17; other refs. 13, 15

The absence of punctuation between "Alfred" and "birth" brings them too closely into relation, and it is easy to think of entries where it might be difficult to know when the subject of the entry ends and the descriptive or analytical material begins.

I would therefore hazard a rule (if I may so dignify a personal preference). The comma can be omitted after a word followed by a page-number, but between word and word a colon is necessary when one word belongs to the subject of the entry and the subsequent word belongs to the descriptive material relating to the subject.

J. C. THORNTON.