CORRESPONDENCE

Lower-case for Headings

Dear Sir,

With reference to Mrs. M. D. Anderson's very apt and interesting 'comments' that appeared in your last issue, may I be allowed to say that I entirely agree (as I almost invariably do with any view she expresses) with the first of them in particular? I believe that, in certain contexts, lower-case for the initial letter of purely abstract headings renders the index user a distinct service (distinct in its literal sense of making a distinction); nor have I ever yet, when acting on that belief, encountered interference from either printer or publisher.

Yours truly,
G. V. Carey.

Headings and Sub-headings

Sir,

Mr. Roberts's difficulties over sub-headings and their arrangement (Indexer, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 190) might well be eased, if not eliminated, by a little closer consideration of what subject headings and their attendant sub-headings really are. A SUBJECT HEADING might be defined as a word—or, when unavoidable, a phrase—which, when standing alone, expresses the concept that is to be indexed. Note the emphasis on the avoidance of phrases and on the integrity of the heading. Similarly, inverted headings should be admitted only when no other course is open. The tendency should be to use substantives in the plural. SUB-HEADINGS on the other hand could be described as those words and phrases (here phrases can be more freely permitted) which are intended to clarify the heading by more closely characterising it, and it is suggested that this should be done as frequently as possible by choosing a sub-heading which puts the heading into a wider context.

If the above is acceptable, then Mr. Roberts's three categories of sub-headings disappear, each becoming a full heading in its own right except that possessive phrases can surely almost always be avoided. It would appear that most of the problems under discussion stem from the practice of hanging sub-headings on to a word which is capable of varying meanings or indeed of no meaning at all as it stands. This sort of thing should not be countenanced:

- London
  - belongs to me
- Bridge
- School of Economics
- Librarianship and Archives

All these should be rendered in full as separate headings unless we wish to be trapped into something as absurd as the following:

- French
drawing
Equatorial Africa
language
literature
polish

If it be objected that these suggestions entail the employment of more type and more space and would therefore be more expensive, then the answer is that this is a small price to pay for clarity and effectiveness.

What follows is a list of some of the headings used as examples by Mr. Roberts treated along the lines of the above:

Either Or

| London architecture | London architecture |
| London central areas | London environs |
| London growth | London growth |
| London houses | London houses |
| London northern areas | London northern areas |
| London Architectural Association | London Architectural Association |
| London Architectural Society | London Architectural Society |
| London Transport | London Transport |
| London’s lodgings | London’s lodgings |

COMMISSIONING THE INDEX

Mr. Negus asks for comments on his article (p. 189 of the same issue). May I say that the practice which he outlines seems to me admirable, but there is just one plea I would make. That is that more time should be allowed to the indexer in the schedule for the job. A fortnight is not
really very long, particularly if the indexer
is working part-time only. In the latter case
the time allocation should I think be
doubled.

Yours faithfully,
G. Dixon.

[Mr. H. V. Molesworth Roberts writes:
The letter by Mr. G. Dixon on my (I fear)
inadequate article in the Autumn issue is
useful; certainly the subject is more complex
than might appear. A more advanced study
appeared in an article (ironically) in the
same issue (p. 169 ff.).
I agree generally that the more phrases
(especially those capitalised) are made separ-
ate main headings the better; but where one
draws the line is the crucial point, and Mr.
Dixon’s argument seems inconclusive.
His two single-column examples, as purely
verbal arrangement, seem unobjectionable;
and the phrase ‘central areas’ in his left-
hand column is inadmissible as being other
than the words to be indexed.]

[Mr. Negus writes: Mr. Dixon makes a
useful point, but I fear that the time for
indexing is usually determined by the printer
rather than the publisher.]

Sir,
Surely some of Mr. Molesworth Roberts’s
difficulties (Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 190) could have
been eliminated by correct punctuation.
Thus he cites:

London, central doctors, libels against
north marriage guidance by

In both cases the comma in the heading
seems to me quite inadmissible. As it stands,
the sub-heading in the first instance can
only refer to central North London, and in
the second instance to marriage guidance
by libels. Both ‘London’ and ‘doctors’
should be followed by a colon. There can be
no ambiguity about:

London: doctors: libels against marriage
guidance by

Yours obediently,
G. Norman Knight.

SOCIETY ANNOUNCEMENTS
A discussion meeting will be held on
Thursday, 25th April, 1968, when Dr. David
Diringer, D.Litt. (Lecturer in Semitic Epi-
graphy, University of Cambridge, author of
The alphabet, etc.), will talk on ‘The Origins
of the Order of the Letters’.

The Annual General Meeting will be held
at Aslib, 3 Belgrave Square, London, S.W.1,
on Thursday, 30th May, at 5.30 p.m. and
will be followed by a talk and a reception
for members and their guests. Details are
being sent to members.

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS
Among other periodicals which have taken
to commenting on the indexes of the books
they review is the weekly Nursing Mirror.
On September 22nd, 1967, it stated that
101 facts an expectant mother should know,
by Claire Rayner (The Dickens Press) ‘is
well indexed’. It had not been so enthusi-
astic the week before in the case of A hand-
book for nurses, by M. C. West (The English
Universities Press), in which ‘common medi-
cal and surgical conditions’ are described in
alphabetical order, ranging from Abscess to
Varicose Veins. We are told that ‘the index
is incomplete; under “A” 13 conditions are
described but only nine indexed.’

On 26 January, 1968, it says of A field
guide to disease, by Berton Roucché
(Gollancz): ‘There is a table of contents
but unfortunately no index.’

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Of the fully revised second edition of the
Oxford junior encyclopaedia, costing £30 for
the set of thirteen volumes, Sarah Preston
writes in the Sunday Telegraph of Novem-
ber 26th, 1967: ‘Vol. 13 has a complete in-
dex to all the volumes with full cross-
references and a splendid ready reference
section which ranges from maps of the great
empires of the world throughout the ages to
foreign exchange rates for the pound (as
they stood in September, 1963, alas!)’.