CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,

Few reviews can be wholly laudatory. But I venture to think that the review in the Spring Indexer of Rules of Printed English, by Herbert Rees, does scant justice to a work that I have been consulting with profit ever since it happened to come into my possession in its early proof stage.

May I be allowed to mention one or two instances of seemingly unfair comment?

The section on indexes mentions that outsize works of fiction would benefit from indexes! What the book actually says is: ‘Such outsize works of fiction as The Forsyte Saga or War and Peace would benefit considerably by the inclusion of an index’—a very different thing. The book continues: ‘the same is true of novels approaching more normal length, such as Dombey and Son or Tom Jones’. Now the plea for including indexes in reprints of classical novels has been pressed in Training in Indexing and other textbooks on the same subject and has not been absent from the columns of The Indexer. It scarcely deserves, therefore, the note of horror signified by an exclamation mark in the sentence quoted from the review.

Again, the impracticable suggestion is made that indexing should be done from the MS. or galley proofs’. But I would maintain that it is perfectly practicable to compile a complete index in advance of the page-proof stage where the text’s paragraphs are numbered, as is the case with Rules of Printed English—indeed its pages bear no page numbers at all. Even with an index using page references it is advisable to start preparation as early as possible. The difficulty here is that publishers and printers seem nowadays to have entered into a conspiracy to forgo, alas, the galley-proof stage entirely.

Finally, the author is slated for not having included ‘galleys’ under his index heading ‘proof correction’. But it would have been wrong to have done so, since the only two allusions to galley proofs in the text are not concerned in the least with their correction.

As regards the book’s own index, while I admit that the preliminary notes might have been fuller with advantage, I was surprised that the review does not spare a single word of praise for a very comprehensive index of 18 pages which struck me as, on the whole, a quite admirable effort by an author who had taken the trouble to attend one of the earliest of the Society’s training courses.

I am, Sir,

Yours obediently,

Norman Knight.

[Our reviewer writes: Readers will be able to judge as to any difference in meaning between my comment on the indexing of fiction and Mr. Knight’s quotation from Mr. Rees’ book, which includes the additional statement in paragraph 435 ‘nearly every work of non-fiction should be provided with an index’ (with which no one would disagree) ‘and many a work of fiction would be better with one’. There are two references in Training in indexing to the indexing of fiction. One is in Mr. Knight’s editorial introduction: ‘It is certainly arguable that new editions of classical novels (e.g. Don Quixote) would be greatly improved by the inclusion of indexes’ with a note to the effect that on Dr. Johnson’s urging, Samuel Richardson published a 450-page volume containing indexes to Pamela, Clarissa and Sir Charles Grandison. The other is R. L. Collison’s statement that one argument for indexing novels is simply to keep the novelist on the straight and narrow path of avoiding inconsistencies in his writing’. He goes on, ‘Perhaps this is not important although you will find that Norman Knight is one, and the author is another, who firmly thinks that any good novel should be indexed’. He provides no other arguments. This is hardly ‘pressure’ for the indexing of classical novels, and I cannot find any pressure in the pages of The Indexer. With the publishing trade in the economic situation that it is to-day we
surely must be realistic about theorising as to the provision of indexes to novels.

With regard to Mr. Knight's comment on the indexing of a book where the text's paragraphs are numbered, I would agree—but Mr. Rees made no reference to such a circumstance; he indicated that indexing should be done from typescripts or galleys.

I agree also that the index to Mr. Rees' book is comprehensive—18 pages relating to a text of 88 pages—but one would expect this as there are 600 numbered paragraphs of concentrated information, many with several indexable ideas and items. Such a book would be difficult to use without a comprehensive index. It is also usefully analytical.]

Mr. J. Arthur Greenwood writes:

The Chicago Manual of Style.

You let Chicago off rather gently in your review. Herewith my caveats:

The revisers of the manual have blinked the question whether they are issuing a manual of rules to be followed in preparing MSS. for books and journals to be issued over the imprint of the University of Chicago Press, or a promiscuous guidebook (editors' and printers') style for the use of authors and editors, within and without Chicago. The 1949 edition was unabashedly the former; thus it was logically beyond criticism, except as one might criticize the propriety of vending an intramural memorandum to the public. Conspicuous among the signs of vacillation in the 1969 edition is the repeated use of the niggling auxiliary verb should instead of the forthright shall; for example, paragraphs 1.13, 1.27, 1.39, 18.1, 18.11, 18.19, 18.33.

The division of the table of contents into a summary on p. v and a detailed one at the head of each chapter is convenient when issuing offprints, like the nine-shilling pamphlet Indexes; it affords few advantages to the user of the book; and no allusion to the detailed lists of contents appears on p. v.

Paragraph 18.1, which you have passed over without remark, is the most pernicious in the chapter. It raises three invidious and probably unenforceable distinctions: between the serious book and the frivolous; between non-fiction and fiction; between the pertinent statement and the peripheral. The third distinction will operate to the disservice of the reader: the anfractuosities of memory assure that the word the indexer discards as peripheral will be the sole word that sticks in the mind of the reader trying to retrieve a locus. The paragraph fails to note that it is wasteful for an index to duplicate the table of contents; I return to this point in criticizing the index supplied to Chicago.

I do not fault you for clamouring (p. 31, 1.12); there are two competing disciplines—follow the spelling-book in text, follow copy in extracts—and occasionally the wrong discipline prevails. But to omit the ! at the end of 18.16 alters the tone from urgent plea to resigned murmur.

In 18.19 we read 'In every aspect—spelling, capitalization, use of italics, and so on—the index should scrupulously reflect the text' (emphasis mine). An excellent rule, not borne out by the examples or the index to Chicago; to capitalize common nouns deserves the reader by making it harder to pick out the proper nouns. Curiously, that Chicago practice capitalizes all main entries must be learned by studying examples: no precept is given; at least, I discover none by leafing, and the index is silent both at 'Capitalization: indexes' and at 'Indexes: capitalization'.

'18.28. Abbreviations should be used sparingly in an index'. Why? why is the use of every legitimate space-saving device not encouraged? In particular there is no mention of the device of reducing a biographical subject to initials (cf. paragraph 15.46).

18.38: What rule does the entry 'Roosevelt, Eleanor' illustrate? Anna Eleanor Roosevelt (who dropped her first name) married her cousin Franklin D. Roosevelt. And why should not all the entries for one person be brought under one head: would you countenance, and would the reader be served by,

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separate strings of page numbers under Wesley, Wellesley, and Wellington?

18.44: The second example beats me completely. Where is the substantive in Jewish Daily Forward?—‘forward’ is an adverb. The title of the newspaper in Yiddish is ‘forwerts’; and this, too, is an adverb.

18.50. Does the must in line 5 of your paragraph 10 reflect the should in ‘should be so arranged’ or a private communication from Chicago? An indexer with gumption will alphabetize word by word, and politely point out to the University of Chicago Press that if they meant shall in paragraph 18.50 they should have printed shall.

18.86: Two to five per cent strikes me, too, as short: I should have said three per cent for a superficial index and six per cent or more for a thorough index. Lola Deming’s index, mentioned in my note ‘Alphabet Soup’, runs to 10 per cent in 7-point type!

18.92: I am aware that a title index is customary in anthologies. Has the question been raised whether title main entries have any retrieval value that is not better supplied by titles as subentries under authors?

p. 518, s.v. Spiker. Is analytical a recognized epithet in the indexing profession, and, if so, what does it mean? In the written proposal from the Institute of Mathematical Statistics to the [U.S.] Office of Naval Research in 1960, soliciting funds for indexing 30 (eventually 31) volumes of Annals of Mathematical Statistics, ‘an analytical subject index’ was named as a component of the proposed index; in the index as published the term is not used, because when the time came to compose the preface we could find no definition for it.

Now turning to the index, the injunction ‘to provide a key to the significance of the different kinds of type’ (paragraph 18.85) has been ignored. Specifically, the names of words (what Chicago call ‘words as words’) have been italicized; this use is neater than inverted commas, but is not self-explanatory.

Chicago practice with cross-references is different from, and more confusing than, Chicago precept (paragraph 18.10). As near as I can deduce, when sub-entries are run on (or run in), see also follows at the end of the complete entry (illustration at paragraph 18.9); when sub-entries are indented, see also follows at the end of the main entry, be it immediately after the catchword (p. 521 ‘Acknowledgements’) or after a numbered entry (p. 524 ‘Capitalization’).

To put ‘indexes vs. indices’ as subhead under ‘Indexes’ is a bad blunder in semantics. It is remarkable that Chicago, with their solicitude for not mixing adjectives and substantives (paragraph 18.4), should have mixed the subject ‘indexes’ with the word indexes.

Finally, the index has been permitted to duplicate the table of contents. If the main entry ‘Indexes’ had read

Indexes, chapter 18: see contents on pp. 399-400


[Our Reviewer writes: ‘In the above criticism, so full of pertinent observations, Mr. Greenwood complains of inability to find anywhere a definition of “analytical index”. It forms, however, the first definition on p. 9 of Training in Indexing (M.I.T. Press, 1969): “Analytical Index. One that by
means of sub-headings classifies the concepts contained in its subject entries in accordance with the text”.

‘I confess to no longer being very happy about the use of “classifies” in that definition, since the aim of an index should be not classification, but the employment of specific headings. Moreover, a name entry can also be analytical. The term really seems to imply little more that the adoption of a number of sub-headings.’


Dear Sir,

Following the various references in your journal to humorous index entries, I wonder if any of your members can throw light on the following, quoted in F. E. Smith’s (Lord Birkenhead’s) Points of View (Vol. 1 [1922], p. 204):

‘“Chief Justice Best—his great mind”. On turning up the reference [in Williams’ Law of Real Property], the entry will be found “The Chief Justice said he had a great mind to commit the plaintiff”. I have not verified this reference myself, but I was told by a very learned counsel that he had done so.’

I have consulted all the editions of this work at the British Museum from 1 to 13 inclusive, with the exception of the 9th edition of 1870, without finding this alleged entry. I suppose it is possible that Lord Birkenhead was writing with his tongue in his cheek, but one cannot be sure.

Your readers may also be interested in the following, from Palmer’s Index to The Times of 1822 and 1833, published in 1899 and 1900:

(First Quarter, 1822) ‘Weather Incessant Rains, &c’

(Second Quarter, 1822) ‘Weather, Excessive Heat of’

(Fourth Quarter, 1833) ‘Weather, the Barometer, Periodical Rise and Fall of’

Yours faithfully,

George Chowdharay-Best.

EXTRACTS FROM REVIEWS

A reader has been sending regularly extracts from reviews, mainly from the Times Literary Supplement, during the past three or four months. It is good to know that so many reviewers are looking for, and at, indexes when reviewing books. The editor is always pleased to receive comments on books and extracts from reviews.


‘A bibliography, an author index and a subject index complete a useful highly expert and specialised volume. Presentation is glossy and immaculate with first class easy-to-digest line drawings and well designed typography.’


‘The notation is generally explained at the start of each chapter (there is no index of symbols) and there is some measure of consistency from one chapter to another. There is a rather short bibliography at the end of the book, to which little reference is made in the text, and which lists Russian works to the near-exclusion of all others. The subject index is short to the point of inadequacy.’


‘It is extraordinary how much Dr. Anstey manages to pack into less than 100 pages. It is a very concentrated and efficient little book. But I cannot resist poking fun at its index, for under “P” we have “Pegs, round, fitting into round holes” and further down the page appears “Round pegs, fitting into round holes”!’