SYMPOSIUM

The Inadequacies of Book Indexes

From time to time we find the expression of members’ views on a particular topic both interesting and stimulating. I sent the following theme to a number of members recently and asked for their views. I have pleasure in printing their contributions.

A member has recently had occasion to refer to a large number of books for information on a specific subject and has been appalled at the inadequacies of their indexes. On reading many of the books concerned he has frequently found that the information he was seeking was in them but not indexed. Often personal names only were indexed. Where it was obvious, all well and good—but disappointing; in other cases it was impossible, from examining the indexes and reading the text, to determine what criterion there had been for deciding what to index and what to ignore. There were no entries for either the subject matter concerned or for the place concerned with it—and the place was important.

None of the indexes contained an introductory and explanatory paragraph, and as the indexes appeared adequate, it was assumed that they were comprehensive.

It is very frustrating for the person who has to read much of a book in order to find information which he suspects is in it but which he cannot trace through the index.

Librarians, especially those dealing with readers’ enquiries, are constantly having to use indexes to trace information, and their work is rendered much less effective, and the readers’ opinion of the book stock much less favourable, than it should be.

Some years ago The indexer included a report of a survey by a number of library school students of indexes to periodicals, which commented very unfavourably on such indexes in the field of management. This situation is not—alas—confined to periodicals but is also true of books on management, and it is with this area that I wish to deal. I became very conscious of this between 1961 and 1964 when I was librarian of the British Institute of Management and my opinion has been reinforced during recent years when I have had occasion to consult a large number of management books in connection with a particular project. There are some very good indexes but many are completely inadequate and make retrieval of specific information very difficult.

What concerns me more, however, is the complete absence of indexes from many books including some of the more important standard material. The noted British writer E. F. L. Brech justifies the absence of an index from his Management: its nature and significance (Pitman 4th ed. 1967) by arguing in his preface that the book is an essay rather than a textbook. So what? The essay extends over 238 pages and contains useful information on a large number of management topics. Mr. Brech’s excessive modesty should not have been allowed to prevent librarians, managers and students from being able to trace this information. Brech’s Managing for revival (Management Publications, 1972. 292p.) also lacks an index, as do at least three contributions by the late expert on work study, Russell M. Currie: The measurement of work (British Institute of Management, 1965. 416p.), Simplified PMTS...
A feature of management literature is the large number of 'readings', which collect several previously published writings (and sometimes some original material). Very rarely are such works provided with an index, except perhaps an author index, although the papers included in them are presumably regarded as outstanding contributions to their subject. One example is Managing people at work, compiled by Dale S. Beach (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), which contains 515 pages of readings on organisation, employment and development of personnel, motivation, financial rewards, health and safety, collective bargaining, ethics and social responsibility but has no index. There are many similar examples, and the number of pages in works I have examined ranges from approximately 400 to more than 800.

Similarly, conference proceedings and collections of case studies are often provided only with indexes of authors and/or companies. It has not occurred to the editor or publisher of such works that a subject index could perform a very useful service for the student of, say, job evaluation by enabling him to locate different views on or experiences of the subject which have been scattered throughout the publication. The proceedings of the third International Congress on Project Planning, published as The practical application of project planning by network of techniques by Almquist and Wiksell (Stockholm) and the Halsted Press of John Wiley (New York), contains 110 papers in more than 1,600 pages spread over 3 volumes. It has an author index but no subject index.

Publishers really should appreciate that if material on a subject is worth publishing it is also worth indexing properly so that it can be retrieved when required. Librarians and readers should see that publishers are made aware of this fact by being quick to complain when they are inconvenienced by the absence of an adequate index.

It is some time now since I used indexes in order to find information for reference library users and I leave this aspect of the inadequate index to others. Recently my main use of indexes has been for assistance with indexes I was compiling to other books, and often that assistance has been of negative value; at least in some cases I was shown what to do.

In books for the general reader, and those which are not intended to be the last word on the subject and are of no scholarly depth it is easy to see from one's own experience how the inadequate index can come into being.

There is the seemingly inevitable haste in which the indexer is required to work and this is bound to affect his judgment. There is the restriction on space and this calls for a judicious assessment of every entry. Sometimes the restriction is so severe that it is possible to take only one theme for the index and to provide names only or subjects only; it can be so bad that one has to be selective even of these and that is worse than having no index at all, since no one selection is going to meet all demands. On occasion I have refused to do indexes with this last instruction.

These two factors in indexing at least have some cause behind them, however unreasonable it may seem, but occasionally one receives an instruction that can only leave one disclaiming responsibility for the final result, since neither judgment nor skill play any part in it. There is the list of 'keywords' provided by the author and the 'indexer', so-called, is expected to pick up the references in the text—not so much an indexer, more of a mind-reader. In my own experience of a book by a very well-known author, published by a highly reputable firm, I had to index the word 'daffodils' in a guide book to London; the author was merely describing a photogenic sight in spring, but no matter how silly, this author's word was law to his publisher however strongly I protested against this and other non-entries. Not all are as bad as this and one editor allowed me to construct my own index when such entries were pointed out.

One of the worst kinds of indexing to come my way is that of re-paging the entries of an index to a reprint of a book which has actually been re-set. This is in many ways worse than
mind-reading, and a most effective way of showing how inadequate the index was in the first place. Nevertheless one has to go ahead with the work, regardless of the fact that it might have proved cheaper to compile a new index. If one has the original edition the pain can be over quite quickly but is more usual to be given the old index and the new proof and to have to sort it out from there. Recently I took on holiday to Greece a guide book (borrowed I’m glad to say) with ’1973 Edition’ prominently printed on the jacket — so it may have been, but the index was an old one and I soon learned to look several pages ahead of the numbers given in the index!

Sometimes the old index is used to a new edition of a book and the ’indexer’ has to try somehow to fit the two together. I have had the misfortune to do only one index of this kind and was nearly driven frantic by it. There would be a couple of chapters intact, another two fused into one, whole sections deleted, some sentences fitted into other paragraphs, there was new material. The original had been profusely illustrated and from the excisions it was clear that some of the illustrations would not be reproduced in the new edition. They had been indexed in the original and I had not been given a list for the new one. My question how to deal with this problem brought the response that I could forget about the illustrations because they hadn’t been finalised yet! There was more which I will leave to the reader’s imagination—it begs an entirely different question about publishing!

from Miss V. M. Carruthers

In the preface to his ‘Lives of the chief justices of England (1849-57)’ the 1st Baron Campbell wrote: ‘So essential did I consider an index to be to every book, that I proposed to bring a Bill into Parliament to deprive an author who publishes a book without an index of the privilege of copyright and moreover to subject him for his offence to a pecuniary penalty’. However it sometimes seems to me, as a librarian, that no index to a book is preferable to an inconsistent, misleading one. Preliminary notes to an index are vital and so is the indexer’s familiarity with the British Standards Institution’s Recommendations for the preparation of indexes.

Literary critics nowadays frequently point out the deficiencies of an index when reviewing a book and this has led to some improvement.

I think the subject indexed should be as specific as possible and that every book should be treated separately on its merits. Nothing is more daunting than a large number of page references after an entry. Inconsistency must be avoided at all costs.

An example of an inadequate index: ‘Royal Society of Arts journal 1952-1962. 77p. 1964’. This must have been compiled without forethought or planning. The indexer must determine the relative importance of a subject. An item not indexed is an item lost.

from Bruce Harling

A list of faults which would make an index less than adequate might include: alphabetical confusion, errors in page references, misprints and too few entries. Such faults as these—and there are many more—concern the index in an individual book; but if we extend our vision to include the indexes in a collection of books, then two weaknesses, neither of which is necessarily the fault of the individual indexer, become apparent: lack of consistency in the choice of (a) subject headings, and (b) cross-references. (Although there are undoubtedly many problems in the indexing of proper nouns, such as names of people and places, I am here concerned with topical, or subject, entries.)

This lack of consistency contributes to a third problem, which is that the user can never be certain whether the information he seeks has not been indexed or is not in the book.

“As yet no method has been discovered for indexing material that is not included in a book but which one might reasonably assume might have been there” (The indexer, 8 (1), April, 1972, p.16). Before writing that sentence I had quoted Samuel Butler’s remark about Erewhonian scholarship and good breeding not allowing the expression of a definite opinion on any subject; I should have extended the quotation to include the qualification that it referred particularly to having an opinion which might be shown to be mistaken.

In the next issue of The indexer, Pastor Luther Poellot explained an interesting practice that he had employed to deal with this problem. Another technique might simply be to give the entry
followed by the page number '0', with an explanatory note about this usage at the beginning of the index.

However, I might claim that I was more concerned with a method for assessing what might reasonably have been included rather than with the technique of expressing it.

If we take the whole problem of headings, cross-references and excluded matter, the situation could be compared with that in which librarians were placed before the production of standardized classification schemes such as the Universal Decimal Classification and the Colon Classification. The existence of such schemes has led to a more consistent approach to classification although individual classifiers must remain creative in relating the scheme to their own stock and requirements. Might not the same sort of approach, mutatis mutandis, be similarly beneficial if applied to book indexing?

"Although an alphabetical index should not be classified, yet it is necessary to gather together the synonyms, and place all the references under the best of these headings, with cross-references from the others" (Wheatley: How to make an index, 1902, p. 70).

Would it not be valuable if the individual indexer did not have to do all this work himself with the inevitably idiosyncratic results involving the searcher in more effort? I would suggest that the time might have arrived for indexers to come together—perhaps through the medium of a sub-committee or working party of the Society of Indexers—to produce their own "classification" schemes.

These I would expect to be on the lines of the information retrieval system thesauri (such as the English Electric Thesaurofacet) that have been appearing over the last twenty years or so. Constructed with book indexing in mind, a series on different subjects would offer both the indexer and user guidance on preferred terms and cross-references together with an indication of topics which the subject embraces but the particular book does not.

The need for the individual indexer to make decisions concerning the particular work in hand is not denied; but I am suggesting that much intellectual effort is being duplicated unnecessarily in an anarchic situation which contributes to the discrepancies and inconsistencies which are apparent when the information store is seen, not as an individual book, but as a collection.

An index which takes no account of other indexes in books on the same topic which might be consulted during the same search might be regarded as less than adequate. An attempt to harmonize the approach to indexing books in a similar field could help to avoid the need continually to re-formulate the search strategy every time a different book is consulted. This, in turn, could lead to greater efficiency in the retrieval of the information and this, surely, is one of the main aims of indexing.

from Dr. J. E. Holmstrom

The hindrance to improvements in indexing practice aimed at making the end product more useful to the searcher—especially if he is a reference librarian who may at any moment have to search any kind of subject matter what—-is not so much technical as economic. Obviously the greater amount of effort expended by the indexer in using his skill to combine specificity of detail with comprehensiveness of coverage (both for names and for subject entries) the smaller will be the risk of the user being left unaware of something in the text or footnotes that might be of value to him.

If the indexer could be given a free hand and did not have to rush, this would be an enjoyable exercise, but all too often the finalised page proofs of the book in question may have been delayed and the printer's copy for the index is impatiently awaited as the last thing outstanding before it can go into production. Moreover, the publisher may at heart be only half convinced of the value and necessity for an index. It is he who has to pay not only the indexer but also for the additional paper and printing, which in turn will affect the price and selling prospects for the book. And indeed there is no gainsaying the fundamental fact that governs the economics of indexing, which can be stated as follows:

Limiting the index entries to only one or two for each chapter in the book would be pointless as that much information is given anyway in the list of contents. On the other hand, trying to index the purport of every sentence throughout
the text would be futile, and indexing also the names cited in footnotes may or may not be desirable, according to the nature and purpose of the work. Somewhere between these two extremes a line must be drawn, and where to draw it must ultimately be decided on a basis of personal judgement informed by background knowledge. Furthermore, however well versed in the subject matter of any given book its indexer may happen to be, he cannot foresee what items may at some future time chance to be of interest to some individual reader. Perhaps nine-tenths of his index entries may never be looked at again by any human eye. In this sense, indexing is analogous to insurance, and the only rational statement one can make about its economics is that if, over a long period of years, the value that has been gained from its existence as a whole exceeds the value of the work originally invested in it, the premium paid in advance will not have been excessive. Unfortunately from the publisher's point of view it is he who has to pay the premium as a lump sum once and for all, the amount of which is all too evident, whereas the benefits (if any) will accrue to an unpredictable number of people possibly including some who are not yet born.

Whereas life assurance premiums are able to be scaled in accordance with precise actuarial calculations (made possible by the fact that everyone will eventually die, so the only thing that has to be averaged from past experience is how soon) a closer analogy here is the insurance of boilers and other industrial plant which is based on the ascertainment that the things to be insured satisfy established technical standards and on the fund of experience gained by the inspectors who certify this. It may not be too fanciful to suggest that a study of the principles on which these inspectors work might indirectly yield ideas for improving the observance of proper qualitative standards in indexing and the checking of indexes, especially if it were linked with a scientifically controlled investigation aiming to correlate different styles and details of indexing with the opinions formed by index users.

The outcome from such a survey could be valuable as an objective indication of the rates of payment that qualified indexers may reasonably expect, also as a basis for the education of publishers and book buyers as regards what is worth paying for. Clearly the most suitable body to sponsor it would be the Society of Indexers, but it would need a good deal of work by experts whose time is valuable. The question arises whether there is any source from which a grant of funds for the purpose might possibly be obtained.

Meanwhile, can anything be done to improve book indexing, as at present conducted, without taking up more space? The following ideas are suggested at random as a few starting points for thought:

1. The frequent practice of following a name or a subject keyword by a long string of undifferentiated page numbers is more often irritating than useful, for the searcher in a hurry cannot bother to turn up each page number in succession if he has no means of knowing beforehand which of them are more likely than others to coincide with what he wants and he suspects that even if some of the references are apposite they are as likely as not to be too trivial. Rather than this, it is better to give ranges of page numbers like 139-45 (meaning that the name or topic in question recurs on each of the intervening pages with not more than one exception) or 237-53 passim (meaning that it is more or less continuously relevant even though it may not necessarily be printed on all the intervening pages).

2. This device—to be explained, of course, in an "Important Note" at the beginning of the index—is one of several ways that common-sense advantage can be taken of the faculty acquired by every experienced reader, of noticing a particular word if he knows it occurs in a stated range of text, without actually having to read all of it.

3. In some books each chapter is subdivided into sections with headings of their own, or the text of each chapter is preceded by a summary of the matters treated in it giving the page numbers at which each topic starts. This is a practice to be encouraged for, among other advantages, the alphabetically arranged index entries can then be shortened without losing specificity if the reader is recommended to cross-refer from them to the chapter or section headings which will enable him to judge how exactly they correspond with what he wants to find.

4. In subject indexing, the only possible criterion for deciding what needs to be indexed and what can be omitted would seem to be the
indexer's understanding of the background to the subject matter, fortified wherever possible by consultation with the author or some other specialist. In other words, efficient indexing depends on ability to make value judgements; it is therefore an art not a science. In name indexing the criterion is even more difficult to establish; there may be cases where every name without exception must be indexed or none at all. But the name entries can be made more useful if, in appropriate cases, they are followed by the word "cited" to mean that sufficient detail is given of a publication by the named author for it to be findable in a library or by "quoted" if some of his own words are reproduced verbatim. ("Quoted" will normally imply also "cited".)

from Mrs. H. B. King

From personal constant daily use of books with children and with teachers, I endorse the view that indexes are often inadequate. I speak from experience of books of information written specifically for school libraries, but also of text books, and adult general books which are necessary in a large school of very mixed ability, ranging in age from eleven to nineteen.

I began my enquiry by asking the teachers their opinion of book indexes that they were using. Older teachers retorted that even 'A' level candidates had no knowledge of the alphabet, could not use a dictionary easily, and had to be led by the hand and shown the use of the index. Here I felt that school librarians and tutors in teacher training colleges were to blame for failing to give adequate frequent instruction and guidance.

Given the fact that a book had an index and that children were prepared to use it—how then did they fare? I quote from a clever Vth former studying 'A' level history. "Indexes?" says she, "I don't trust them. I use them, but more and more I study the table of contents and am forced to read great chunks to find just what I want". I took her up on this, and studied the index of a social history text book universally used. I found an entry under FULL Employment but nothing at all under Employment—an entry under Department of Education but nothing under Education.

Several years ago I wrote that not all books intended for school libraries were indexed, but that the provision had now increased, although often the quality was poor and frequently no explanation of the index was given to the children—that is whether pictures were indexed, and the meaning of italics and bold type when these were used.

In the last three issues of the School Librarian some two hundred and fifty-five non-fiction books were reviewed. As far as I can ascertain, only twenty six made any mention of an index whether good, bad or indifferent. Here are a few comments "The index does not seem complete". "The index lists all composers mentioned in the text and some other items haphazardly chosen. The reader will not find it adequate". "The index is desirous". "Reference is difficult in the absence of an index!". "Missing—an INDEX". "Highly selective index is of limited use". On the credit side are clear complimentary references, praising clear cross-references and using such terms as 'substantial index', 'comprehensive index' and 'first class'.

From my own experience, I do not find the indexes to school library books so appalling, although some could be improved. I am always grateful in my busy single-handed day to find an index at all! The lack of confidence in indexes negates surely much of the scholarship which has gone into even the simplest of books. An introductory explanation should head every index. Adequate cross-referencing and simplicity as well as comprehensiveness should be taken for granted—but cannot be—at present!

from Oliver Stallybrass

My first reaction to the Editor's request for this contribution was: Why have I not, all my adult indexer's life, maintained a card index on inadequate book indexes? My second: generalities are useless—but if in search of specific examples I spend my spare moments during the next twelve days burrowing in putative IBIs, how can I be sure they are not the handiwork of fellow members of the Society of Indexers? (With the corollary: which of my unsigned IBIs is about to be publicly pilloried?) My third: there flashed upon the inward eye the weirdest and most incompetent index I have ever needed to consult—consult, moreover with a constancy found perhaps only
in reviewers and translators. In this case I was the checking-editing-polishing-and-getting-the-technical-and-historical-terms-right half of a two-man translation team engaged by an American university press for a work kinkily entitled _L'Amérique et les Amériques_; and since, surprise, surprise, it is written in French, the likelihood of my treading on any reader's toes is negligible.

With a French book one is, of course, lucky to find anything more substantial than a table des matières. _L'Amérique et les Amériques_ offers the dubious advantage of providing not one index but three: of personnes, lieux and sujets. Such a scheme results in some curious classifications. 'Diable (Le)' has one entry as a person and one (without his article) as a subject. 'Rhett Butler héros d'Autant en emporte le vent de Margaret Mitchell' ranks as a person, while those rather more substantial people the English, French etc. figure as subjects. 'Places' include such oddities as 'Bible Belt', 'Chrétiens' (with a subheading 'occidentale'), 'Extrême-Occident (chrétien)' 'Megalopolis', 'Nord soviétique', 'Old West', other variations on the points of the compass, 'Pampa (La)', 'Parallèle (Le 40e) américain', 'Quadrilatère industriel Atlantique-Grands Lacs', 'Thule' and 'Sea Bord' (sic)—with a cross-reference from 'Tide Water' to 'Sea Bore' (sic); after which one is mildly surprised to find 'Raleigh Tavern (Williamsbury)' (sic), 'Tumuli', 'Utopie', 'Wall Street' and 'Western' among the subjects.

The 'index de sujets' is in reality a concordance—a concordance limited, however, to words with initial capitals, words in italic or quotation marks, and words with certain easily identified characteristics: for example, nouns denoting products or ending in -isme. The idea of indexing concepts rather than words is wholly alien to the indexer. Thus 'Red Coats' are indexed when they are so designated, otherwise not. Similarly, when the statement that (in our translation) 'the vocabulary used to denote racial nuances is astonishingly inventive' is followed by 24 examples drawn from Mexico and Peru, there is no entry under 'raccisme' (to give the suitable term actually found in the index); instead there is an entry under each example, from mestizo and mulato all the way through to salto atrás and tente en el aire.

Such catalogues go a long way towards accounting for the indexes' delusively impressive extent: 41 triple-column pages. Another factor is that they cover not only the 342 pages of text (including illustrations), but all the bits and pieces as well (except for one or two which follow the indexes). Pages 350-79, for example, consist of fifteen double-page, four-column spreads of 'Tableaux Chronologiques'. Every time that 'États-Unis', 'Canada', 'Mexique' or 'Antilles' appears at the head of a column it receives an index entry. Rather surprisingly, the column-heading 'Le monde et l'Amérique' is not indexed; but, as far as I can see, every single item under it is from 'Australopithéciens', 'Pithécanthropiens' 'Néanderthaliens' and 'Hommes Sapiens' down to 'Spoutnik I' and 'Lunik 2'. Similarly, several hundred authors' names from the 'Orientation bibliographique' are solemnly repeated in the name index. But the prize for fatuousness must go to the indexing (for all three indexes) of the list, facing the title-page, of the twelve volumes in the series to which this one belongs; thus volume 1, _L'Homme avant l'écriture_, is indexed under 'écriture' as well as under its author, while the author of _L'Amérique et les Amériques_ itself has a string of index entries which includes references both to this list (2) and to the title-page (3). After that, one only wonders why the indexer stopped short of indexing the index.

If headings are chosen on a purely verbal as opposed to a conceptual basis, so too are the rare subheadings. Thus 'Mexique' has 98 undifferentiated entries, followed by five for 'humide' and a few others for other phrases which the author happens to have used. Perhaps the most useless wodge of all is the half-column and more under 'États-Unis', which gives no fewer than 198 undorned page numbers, from 5 (for chapter-headings in the 'Sommaire') to 396 (actually it's 400, but what of that?), on which page there is a caption for a facing plate that includes the words '... à Salt Lake City, États-Unis'.

As the last parenthesis may have suggested, the indexes are no more accurate in matters of detail than their conceptual framework is intelligently constructed. To start with, no fewer than 100 headings—26, 25 and 49 in the three indexes respectively—are either wrongly alphabetized or correctly alphabetized under a wrong spelling—so that, for example, 'Armstrong [sic] (Duff)' is half a column away from 'Armstrong' (unspecified but Louis), which itself follows instead of preceding 'Armytage (Francis)'. Of the misfiled index cards a number have resulted...
in duplicate or near-duplicate headings; thus there are, correctly alphabetized in the index of places, entries under "Potosi (ville, Bolivie)", "Prairie (États-Unis)" and "Prairie (États de la), Canada", while on the next page, between "Punta del Este" and "Pyrénées", there occur further entries on "Potosi (Bolivie)" and "Prairie (Ouest des États-Unis)". Similar duplications arise from inaccurate versions of names; thus the author of Prejudices has two entries as "Mencken (Henry)" and one as "Mencken (M.L.)". Of the bogus names, some—such as 'Armstrong' and 'Chesman (Caryl), criminel'—are the invention of the indexer; but for the most part—as with Mencken, Lord Seldkirk (sic), Book (sic) T. Washington, Thornstein (sic) Veblen, Roger William (sic) and Postdam (sic)—he or she has merely been all too faithful to the text. Peers and other possessors of complex or outlandish names are treated with predictable eccentricity: 'Rhett Butler', already mentioned, rubs shoulders with 'Cochrane (Lord)' (i.e. Thomas Cochrane, later Earl of Dundonald), 'Beecher Stowe (Harriett)' (sic), 'Brigham Young', 'Dred Scott' and many more.

I could go on all night. But what is the English index like? It doesn't, and won't, exist. With our translation I submitted 30 foolscap pages documenting our repeated and repeatedly ignored assertion that, despite an illustrious author's name on the title-page, the book, like its index, was a disgrace that should never have been published in the first instance. Sadly the prospective American publisher agreed that he had made a ghastly and costly mistake, and kissed the abortion goodbye. Perhaps, at least, it has provided readers of The indexers with a little relief, as well as a supreme demonstration of how not to make an index.

from John L. Thornton

I have generally found indexes to medical and scientific books inadequate, mainly because indexers tend to carry out what they believe to be a routine job, urged on by publishers who have given them insufficient time to perform the task properly. Every index should be tailored to fit the specific book, catering specifically for the person who has already read the book, and wishes to check certain information, but also for the potential reader who is searching for any book containing the information he requires at that time. Librarians frequently consult in vain the indexes to books which they know must contain the answers to queries that have been posed. The problem is sometimes solved by consulting the list of contents, or running through the chapter headings. This should not be necessary. These should all appear in the index, but I have found successive chapters of thirty pages devoted to subjects which are not featured in the index.

There is a similar reluctance on the part of some indexers of scientific literature to index plates, diagrams, tables and other supplements to the text. They often contain useful information that is not readily available by reference to the text, and are sometimes located pages away from the text to which they refer. Some years ago I indexed a book on forensic medicine which contained very extensive lists of poisons, with information relating to them. These had not been included in the index to the previous edition, but I made entries for every single item mentioned—and appreciated why some indexers ignore these time-consuming, but extremely important, tabulated facts!

Many scientific books contain bibliographies, or lists of references either at the ends of chapters, or at the back of the book. References to authors quoted in the text, as footnotes, or in separate lists of references should all be indexed, even if these are arranged alphabetically by names of authors at the end of the volume. This will ensure that joint-authors, editors, translators, etc. can all be traced by reference to the index. This is important in tracing scientific literature—and not only to those who want to see if their work has been quoted by other authors!

Appendices should be indexed as fully as the body of the text, not just from the heading, since they may contain vital information. Lists of staff of institutions, drugs, etc. might well be found relegated to the end of a book, but they should be traceable individually by means of the index.

Prefaces and introductions are often overlooked, and they probably seldom contain anything of significance that does not also appear in the text. However, an introduction can be lengthy, informative, and possibly contain useful historical material that is worthy of being indexed.
These features should certainly be perused for possible entries. In 1949 a colleague in America wrote words to this effect: “You say the nicest possible things about my work in your Introduction, but there is no reference to this page in your index!” I have since read introductions with a view to indexing them, but have seldom found this necessary.

I appreciate the provision of introductory notes to indexes, and usually include them in my own books, but I must confess that I never deliberately look at the beginning of an index to see if there is an explanatory paragraph. I know that it would usually be in vain! However, in lengthy, complicated indexes with unusual features I consider that they are essential, and such books constantly used for reference purposes demand these time-saving devices. Without them it can be like consulting a very complicated map with no scale, and no key to the symbols provided!

Index Specifications

Charles L. Bernier

Specifications, already found useful for audio amplifiers, automobiles, and the like, should also be helpful for indexes. Index specifications can include, amongst many others: existence of an index, kind of index, size, indexing density, error percentage, percentage of omissions, breadth and adequacy of modification, incorrect references, and non-subject entries. Specifications should help users to evaluate indexes for acquisition and use. Once specifications are found to be useful, then standards can be developed. Indexers should find specification to be useful as goals and as recognition of quality work. The index-publisher should find the same and also be able to justify extra expenditure for indexes of high quality. He can also take pride in publishing indexes of quality as advertised by specifications.

Specifications have been found useful for audio amplifiers, automobiles, books, bridges, buildings, cameras, equipment, highways, and the like. Specifications for indexes should likewise be helpful to index-users, indexers, and index-publishers. It seems likely that standards can be developed after specifications have been published and found to be useful. It is unnecessary that all specifications become and remain standardized. For example, in the early days of radio, the number of tubes in sets was invariably specified; today, the number of transistors and tubes is virtually meaningless.

The simplest possible specification for indexes is whether or not the work has an index. This specification could helpfully appear on advertising, bibliographies, catalogue cards, citations, references, and reviews. As a convenience, a microform insert on a catalogue card or a microfiche could carry, for example, the table of contents in full. The same could be in a book.