Dear Sir,

I have done a number of 4,000 entry indexes and have derived a scheme which seems the inverse of the obvious and orthodox. I soon found that any arranging in alphabetical order is most boring, and the handling of large masses of slips of paper both cumbersome and dangerous.

I start by opening a large index book and write in each topic worthy of mention, depending on a brief glance through the text, and at the topic and the class of person the information is likely to be addressed. One then goes methodically through the page proofs, adding into the index book all the page references against the title of the entry, which is already nearly in its proper place. If this is done with the greatest care, it is conceivable that the index book could be handed to the printer for composing right away, because it is then as it will appear in print. Naturally it is preferable to type it out for clarity, at which stage any minor adjustments can be made.

Cross-references of the "see" type do not appear, extra references being put in when it is decided that a topic goes in at all. There are no capitals, except for proper names. Where a class of objects are important, e.g., persons, ships, places, these should have a separate index to themselves. There may be some "see also" type of cross-reference, but this must depend on the indexer knowing the subject sufficiently well to add a little creative touch of his own. This means that one should index books only if one understands the subject, which is a counsel of perfection.

I have never found it worth while checking back all the page numbers until the final pageproof arrives, when all entries should be checked back into the text. If the typing of the index manuscript is good enough, the chance errors are extremely small and do not justify going through it all over again, apart from saving time.

In a large symposium I edited and indexed, the page numbers were disregarded altogether, as being of interest only to the printer. All references were to paragraphs, which I numbered with the fourth of a four-figure reference for each paragraph, the same reference being to any
associated table or figure. In this way much of the indexing was done from the heterogeneous manuscripts of the authors before being set. This procedure saved some three months in publication, because we did not have to wait for complete pageproofs, which also involved an indefinite amount of advertising, before indexing.

Yours faithfully,

L. E. C. Hughes.

Sir,

In his illuminating article on typography, Mr. S. I. Wicklen quotes with apparent approval the following remark of William Aldis:

"With the exception of Dictionaries and Cyclopaedias almost every book that aims at being useful requires an index to make its store of knowledge accessible."

While I prefer this view to that of Mr. Philip Unwin, as enunciated in the preceding article by Mr. L. R. McColvin, I feel I must challenge the qualification I have ventured to underline. For of all works of general knowledge the encyclopaedia most requires an index. The fact that the subject headings are given alphabetically provides no guide to the host of other important matters dealt with, a number of which occur under many more than one heading. This is recognized by the publishers of the best encyclopaedias and the Britannica and Chambers' are furnished with handsome indexes. So is the Encyclopaedia of Social Science, 1935, while the new two-volume Focal Encyclopaedia of Photography will also be published with a comprehensive index.

Unfortunately some of the cheaper cyclopaedias continue to be issued devoid of indexes. I constantly find myself cursing my own (otherwise excellent) ten-volume one (the New Universal, 1948) for the omission. The other day, when compiling an index, I came across a reference to Uraniborg (the "Castle of the Heavens") in Denmark. There was no reference to this in my encyclopaedia under "U", but eventually, after wasting much time in research, I ran it to earth under "B", where I found considerable information regarding the Castle of the Heavens under Tycho Brahe, the Danish astronomer, who owned it. But if only there had been an index!

I am, Sir,

Yours obediently,

G. Norman Knight.