Style manual for authors, editors and printers of Australian government publications


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This Style manual is the best of any such book published by a government department for the guidance of editors and printers which has useful and fairly adequate instruction for indexing.

It has eight pages devoted to indexing—the same number as in the previous edition—and, like the rest of the book, this section has been subjected to minor revisions and modernization. In the second paragraph, BS 3700: 1964 is referred to instead of the current 1976 edition The preparation of indexes to books, periodicals and other publications—but this is understandable as the text was probably prepared before the 1976 revision was heard of in Australia.

The writer mentions the generally-known misconception that an author is the best qualified person to prepare the index to his own work, but rightly states that few can match the skills of the professional indexer. It is then stated that consultation between author and indexer should normally follow the indexer's first reading of the publication in page proof, and having reached an understanding and made preliminary notes on the headings required, the indexer may then set to work. Some such consultation might in this writer's opinion be of advantage, but if the indexer is familiar with the subject matter of the book—as he should be, otherwise he ought not to be compiling the index—this could lead to waste of time and possibly altercations.

The layout of the first example with the subentries ('subheadings' according to BS 3700: 1976) indented instead of run on as in the previous edition shows how much easier it is to consult this typographical arrangement which so many publishers consider wrongly (except in certain types of index) to be wasteful of space. Run-on entries are always more difficult to consult.

There has been a change in terminology for the kinds of index entries since the second edition when 'major entries (or headings)' had page references as did 'subheadings' which were linked to 'major entries'—these were typographically indented but were run on and had one or more page references—and 'minor entries' which had a single page reference only but were totally unrelated to the 'major entries'. Now 'major entries' remains the same but the term 'heading' has been discontinued; the 'subheadings' are now known as 'subentries', and the 'minor entries' remain the same.

The Committee which prepared BS 3700: 1976 had problems with terminology and now calls a 'heading' an 'entry' without page references, and related entries, i.e. 'subheadings', with at least one reference, 'sub-entries', each group being indented. Now that four national indexing societies are affiliated it would be very useful to have a working party to prepare identical terminology and basic procedures, using the two national standards and the few national style manuals which exist as the bases for discussion. Bibliographical references might also be included. International agreement might then be achieved as has recently been done over the cataloguing of books and related materials.

The matter of typographical layout is important to the ease with which an index can be consulted and this is a matter on which the indexer should be well informed, and be in a position to discuss effectively with the publisher's editor. The effect of layout is seen in comparing the two editions of this book. The second edition has

sheep numbers in Australia (1850), 259; (1851-61), 270; (1870), 304
and the third edition has

sheep

numbers in Australia, in 1850, 259; 1851-61, 270; 1870, 304; 1970, 400

How much clearer the dates appear when in curves!

There is a similar gain in abandoning the antiquated practice of using 2-em rules in substitution for the major heading or a subentry (subheading and sub-subheading in BS 3700: 1976 terminology) a practice which is permitted in this manual. Spaces certainly look better than rules.

The author of this new edition has got his abbreviations for Mac somewhat mixed up, and instead of putting all the abbreviations for Mac together as if spelt out Mac, with the result that Mace comes after M'Cay and before McEwen, Macintosh, Mack, Macphee, McPhillamy and MacQuillan, he has put them at the beginning of all the entries beginning with M. This is an original and confusing arrangement for which no reason or justification is offered. This is in the text, not the index.

On p. 108, when dealing with foreign personal names, it is recommended (in both editions) that the entry for General von Kluck should be entered

Kluck, General von

as if 'General' was his personal name, instead of

Kluck, Alexander von, General.

I regret to see that this edition has introduced a paragraph permitting the ignoring of prepositions in alphabetical listing (especially in a book which recommends neither the letter-by-letter nor word-by-word method—but uses the latter in its own index) for the simple reason that it makes a nonsense of both systems. The example which is given of five subheadings has the first two only in alphabetical order, and these should be in the middle of the sequence whether arranged letter by letter or word by word. This is a method which is sometimes used in order to bring the more important word following the preposition into prominence, but it upsets alphabetical order. If such prepositions are intended to be ignored alphabetically they should be printed in italics.

There are some other aspects of this important publication that I would like to comment upon. There is a useful new chapter on Units of Measurement, and the section on government publications has been expanded from three-quarters of a page to two-and-a-half pages. Although the successive editions of this manual reflect the publishing and bibliographical changes which are taking place as the result of international co-operation, the modern tendency, when referring to the titles of books, to use lower-case letters for all words except proper names has not whole-hearted support here. The advice to use initial capitals for all words for 'scholarly researched works' seems rather naïve: where capitals are used for the initial letters of all words in a title it looks extremely odd to see subtitles following a colon begin with a capital A or The. But it is not only in Australian publications that one can see such references in bibliographical lists as well as in texts. [No, indeed, Ed.] This practice is not followed in international bibliographies and catalogues, as is recognized by the author, who writes on p. 78 'The first word of the title and proper names carry an initial capital and it is usual for other significant words' [whatever they are or may be] 'to be capitalized. This convention has been followed throughout this manual but there is a growing tendency to capitalize only the first word and proper names and there are sound arguments to support the practice' one of which is that it 'is consistent with systems used internationally for cataloguing publications'. So eventually we may find Australian publishers changing their set ways.

It is recommended that definite articles preceding the titles of periodicals should not be italicized; but is this correct in respect of a periodical which includes the definite article in its title, and in its own pages always italicizes the article? Herbert Rees, an authoritative copy editor, in his Rules of printed English says that in such cases The must likewise be italicized.

The sections on bibliographical references need modernization. Widespread usage, international cataloguing rules, and all British Standards recommend that the place of publication should precede the publisher's name but the reverse is recommended and used in examples in this book. Similarly, where there are two authors in bibliographical references the ampersand is used instead of 'and' to connect the two authors, again contrary to standard practice and recommendations, e.g. BS 1629 s. 4.2.6 and BS 5261 s. 16.7, although extracts from the Australian National Bibliography are reproduced on pp. 102-3 illustrating the contemporary practices on these points.

The common publishers' practice of placing an
author's forename before the surname in footnotes is recommended, but there is no justification for this when in the bibliographical lists the surname is placed first. BS 1629: 1976 Bibliographical references does not anywhere recommend that the surname should not come foremost.

On p. 82 there is a statement that a second bibliographical reference relating to a former one should be (by the example given) merely to the title of the periodical previously referred to and its page number, omitting any reference to issue number or date. Such a reference is practically useless without this information unless the previous reference was only a page or two back. Having had to work on hundreds of history books in recent years I know from experience that this could be a very reprehensible practice because one has to hunt back sometimes a very large number of pages to find the required original reference. A much better scheme is to use the Harvard method, rechristened in this edition the Author-date (Harvard) system, or the 'numeric' system which allocates a number to the documents in the order in which they are first referred to in the text, and at every point in the text at which a particular document is subsequently referred to, its number is inserted, either in parentheses or in square brackets, or as a superscript. The full bibliographical references are placed, following the appropriate numbers, at the ends of the chapters or of the text. With a little ingenuity and extra work, the author can arrange his bibliography entries in alphabetical order and number them consecutively for the same purpose.

In the section on bibliographies it is stated that a 2-em rule may be substituted where there are two or more entries for the same author to save printing the author's name more than once. This use of rules is a rather antiquated practice and it is also being made impracticable now by the use of computer and other forms of typesetting for extensive works.

In the Bibliography, M. D. Anderson's Making an index 1971 (mentioned on page 104), should appear in place of Carey's book of the same title (which it has replaced), and Herbert Rees's excellent Rules of printed English, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970, is worthy of inclusion.

The 38-page glossary is intended for the working printer; the definitions seldom extend to more than one line of type and never more than four, and are sometimes inadequate, for example there is only one definition of 'back' whereas there are two other meanings. Because of their brevity, the glossary could well be extended, possibly with the aid of the more comprehensive one published by Deutsch.

The 27-page index is well set out and would appear to be adequate, but I have noticed a few entries which might well have been included, e.g. terms, 105 under 'indexes': International System of Units (SI) and Système International (SI) should refer to the entry 'SI (Système International)' which is the major entry; indexes, 110, 203 under 'references' (i.e. providing a double entry); footnote reference marks, 76 appears under 'punctuation marks' but does not appear under 'reference marks'; page 77 is given at 'author-date (Harvard) reference system' but not at 'Harvard system of references' or at 'references, author-date (Harvard) system'.

There is only one page reference error that I have noticed; this is 107 instead of 109 for 'letter-by-letter system' under 'indexes'.

On page 10 it is stated that the full titles of organizations should be given, but International Standards Organization (ISO) is given both in the text and in the index whereas the correct title is International Organization for Standardization. Incidentally a 'z' and not an 's' should be used in all the international bodies incorporating the word Organization or Standardization connected with UNESCO and related international bodies; this is their official spelling.

The commendable practice of repeating a main entry or subentry followed by continued at the head of a column or page when a series of entries extends to a following column has been followed on five occasions but missed on 14!

Despite my criticisms and comments which are intended to be helpful in the preparation of a revised edition (which I am sure will soon be taken in hand for printing practices are undergoing considerable changes and international co-operation is changing and thereby affecting many branches of information dissemination) I consider this is a worthy style manual to be carefully considered by any government producing or revising one of its own.

Have you compiled any good indexes lately? See page 201.