

A glossary for indexers

Alphabetical scatter, closed circuit references, double entry, KWAC, KWIC, KWOC—indexing has acquired its own esoteric terminology. Let us compile also a lighter and more general glossary catering for the fantasies of indexing, including such terms as:

Chained indexing: the sensation that all one's being, mental and physical, is committed to the mighty task in hand, so that no other-directed thought or action will be possible for the next eight or so years.

Eternal promise applies to those page proofs for an index that one has undertaken to compile, that are always *coming next week*, so that in a recurrent loop of time, one turns down other, interesting, profitable, immediately available work while living in deferred expectation.

Guilt-edged index (rare) is introduced in the following terms: '150-page book, half of them illustrations, is three months long enough, could you possibly do it for £450?' Should be accepted promptly and the terms confirmed in writing; agonizing may take place after the cheque is banked while the misguided editor is starving in a garret.

Index apparent occurs when a distracted editor requires 'something that will fill the three pages they've left me and I must have it the day after tomorrow'; it contains all the proper nouns, chapter and section headings and bold or italicized phrases in the book, together with one noun, preferably technical or abstract, chosen from every tenth page. For academic works two or three levels of subheading may be achieved by the judicious grouping of such entries under chapter-headings or other comprehensive terms.

Indexing at sight: when a tight schedule has not permitted pre-reading, making out cards as one first goes through the text, endeavouring not to be distracted by the unknown content and development.

Indexing out of one's depth may occur if one is so unwise as to accept work in a specialism not one's own.

Indexing to death: obsessively over-doing it to the extent that the final length of index does not fall far short of that of the text, as *nothing* is omitted.

Intimate knowledge: the conviction, after despatching an index frantically worked to a circulation-restricting deadline, 'Ah, what an index I could compile to that book, starting from where I am now!'

Invisible indexing described by Liz Cook (*The Indexer* 11 (4), 214–15) 'consists of mulling over choice of sub-

headings, cross-references, or any other thorny problems while sitting on a park bench or supervising the paddling pool'. Or, indeed, weeding the garden, washing the dishes or lying in the bath.

Lending respectability: some texts are so thin or woolly, unstructured or devoid of cogent content, as hardly to deserve the compliment of being indexed. What is there to retrieve, and who would want to? Pearls and swine come to mind. One's labours are unworthily bestowed.

Parsimonious indexing comes naturally to the frugal of disposition or those accustomed to practise economy on a limited budget. Where space is short for the index, and much matter clamours for inclusion, one resorts to many tricks to save space; abbreviation to the bone, conflation of terms; seeing indented subheads as reckless squandering, grudging subheadings their high proportion of characters to information conveyed, as against the elegant terseness of mere page numbers. The clever thing is to effect economy by means of style and typography rather than your actual omission of entries.

Pin-stripped index follows a sleepless night of lovingly modifying an index to fit precisely the specified space: the editor has lost half a page to Acknowledgments and removes 38 lines in one minute by sticking a pin in the page at random.

Spotting the caps: names-only indexing can reduce to this—with the danger that boredom may switch off the exclude-openings-of-sentences automatic drive.

Time-serving: the compulsive noting down of the exact minute at which one seats oneself at or rises from one's desk, allied with cursing that one omitted to note the starting time of a telephone call or visit. Eventually one must add wiggly columns of 25 mins, 9.47–10.20, 2½ hours minus coffee and milkman, to obtain the precise sum which must be multiplied by the current recommended hourly rate for indexing.

Wild goose chase, exemplified in the index to G. V. Carey's *Making an index* (C.U.P., 1951) as:

Chase, wild goose. *See* Von Kluck
Goose chase, wild. *See* Kluck, von
Kluck, von. *See* Von Kluck
Von Kluck, *See* Kluck, von
Wild goose chase. *See* Kluck, von.

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We invite readers to send in their own contributions to this glossary for indexers.