Since nobody has felt moved to comment on the two indexing problems mentioned in our last issue, perhaps a little editorial dilation on the second of these would not be out of place—namely, the question of punctuation in headings. It is of some importance, surely, for purposes of consistency and clarity at least (not to mention filing order), that inverted headings should be distinguished from heading-plus-subheading. Consider the following series of entries:

London: architecture; history; theatre;
transport
London, Central
London, Tower of
London, University of

It can perhaps be assumed that no one would argue about the punctuation of these headings—or about the filing order, come to that. If this is so, then the reduction of the number of subheadings under ‘London’ to one (e.g., ‘London: transport’) would result in:

London: transport
London, Central
London, Tower of
London, University of

Having come thus far, it will be seen that heading-plus-subheading must always be separated by a colon, and never by a comma. The distinction between inverted heading and heading-plus-subheading must be preserved, and the example quoted in the last issue—‘Spain, population’—ought not to be allowed. QED! Would anyone like to take issue with that?

If it be permissible to follow one editorial stance with another, here is a further problem, concerning the filing order of headings beginning with numerals. ‘Classical’ indexing theory would require that titles such as ‘1984’ (Orwell) or the film ‘2001’ should file under ‘N’ and ‘t’ respectively. The constraints of computer programming, however, result in all headings beginning with numerals filing in a separate (and numerical!) sequence which precedes the letter ‘A’. Should we not demand that the computer people get their act together and cater for the index-user (what were those old-fashioned sentiments about bearing in mind the user’s convenience?) whose common-sense tells him that in an alphabetical index the principles of search should be based on the alphabet? After all, the computer is supposed to be servant—not master!

The following is something of an old chestnut, but still unresolved for all that. Where should ‘see also’ cross-references be placed? Should they come immediately after a main heading, preceding a series of subheadings; or should they be placed at the end of the entry after the last subheading?

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Your suggestions and opinions please, as well as any further problems you would like considered, to: Geoffrey Dixon, BA, ALA, 93 Carcluie Crescent, Ayr, KA7 4SZ.

Geoffrey Dixon

More haste, less accessibility

Extract from Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies annual bibliography 1982–83 (published 1985)—Canberra City:

‘This issue of the Annual Bibliography appears in a simpler form than the previous two issues. Names, subject and geographical indexes have been omitted. Entries have been grouped under broad subject headings . . . The Library and Publications Committees decided it was preferable to produce the Annual Bibliography in a less elaborate form in order to make it available to members and other users as soon as possible.’

(Discovered by Cherry Lavell. Discuss, using one side of the paper only and using no Oz swearwords . . .)