

# The business side of indexing

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A comprehensive review under the following headings: freelancing; commissions; contracts for indexes; copyright; instructions from the publisher; delivery of the index; fees; expenses; tax concessions; complaints; suggested Code of Conduct for indexers; summing up.

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## *Freelancing*

As indexers are usually self-employed, a few general comments may be helpful. The advantage of the freedom offered may be negated by the uncertainty and irregularity of the work flow. The opposite situation of too much work may also mean that there are intense periods of work with no let up. For a freelance it is often very difficult to turn down work for fear of losing the contact, especially when a new client approaches you for the first time.

If a freelancer is not setting up from a situation where he or she has access to contacts made when working full-time or part-time for an organization, breaking into the world of publishing may be very difficult. However, whichever way you start work it is vital to know your craft and to be sure you are competent and have a knowledge of the subject and the vocabulary of your chosen indexing specialities.

Remember, you will be dealing with a variety of people, mainly publishers' editors, authors, business personnel, and civil servants. In fact, anybody who wishes to employ the skills of an indexer.

You will find that the person approaching you is an individual: no two approaches will be identical. Each has a different way of ascertaining your competence, a clear or confused way of giving instructions for the work required. They will, however, all have the same expectation that you are going to give them the index they want. So it is up to the freelancer to elucidate the brief in order to satisfy the customer. No freelancer will stay in business without providing a high level of satisfaction.

## *Commissions*

Obtaining commissions may be a matter of judgement, luck, or common sense and at different times, no doubt, each in turn, or an amalgam of all three. Many make the decision to become a freelance indexer with confidence, as contacts have already been made and work offered or promised. Many who take up indexing have worked in some capacity in publishing or have followed some other profession entirely. The desire to work independently at home is attractive at some times in life and inevitable for many, especially women. Many people choose indexing at home as an answer to their unemployment, financial

problems or boredom. None of these motivations in themselves is a good enough reason for taking up indexing. I have never met a successful indexer who was not fascinated by the activity and good at it as well.

If you have no contacts at all and decide to train as an indexer, then you would be well advised to join the Society of Indexers (or your own country's society) from the start. Meeting other indexers will increase your knowledge, stimulate your interest, and give you the confidence to contact publishers offering your services. If no response is forthcoming then other strategies are called for. You can contact other indexers in your field and seek their advice. You can take a book published by the publisher you hope will one day employ you: if it has no index, compile one; if it has a bad one, correct it. It is all good experience. It may come to nothing or to fruition months later as the editor has added you to her list of contacts. Your speculative letter to a publisher may hit the target if you write in holiday periods when regular indexers may be away.

The Society of Indexers publishes an annual list of indexers, all of whom are members of the Society, who are offering their services for the compilation of indexes. Indexers may be Registered members of the Society and have satisfied the Society as to their competence, or they may be non-Registered, but as a minimum have completed a course in indexing or had at least one published index to their credit. This list, *Indexers available*, is distributed to at least three hundred publishers, free of charge. Now in its sixth year, it is accepted as an excellent source for finding indexers. As you might go to the telephone book to find a phone number, so it is hoped that all those seeking indexers will use *Indexers available*, a new edition of which is published in July each year.

## *Contracts for indexes*

It is advisable not to undertake indexing work without a written commission or contract for the work. In the course of time you may develop a relationship of trust with an editor or author, but even in such cases it is still advisable to have something in writing. It is always possible for an index to be completed and despatched and neither acknowledged nor published. There may be a decision not to proceed with publication due to legal problems, or a dispute may arise, or bankruptcy over-

come the publisher—the last is not so rare as you might think. In all these cases, if nothing has been put on paper proving your claim for payment for work done, you may end up with a bad debt. Another problem is that many publishers are very slow to pay for work. They fail to observe the 28-day net terms you have conspicuously placed on your invoice. You may even have to pursue the matter in the Small Claims Court, and that would be more difficult if you had nothing in writing to prove your claim.

If the publisher does not have a formal contract letter, a commissioning letter should at least contain the title of the work to be indexed, the time schedule, the fee offered and assignment of copyright (see section on Copyright). It may also contain instructions for the compilation of the index and the form the manuscript may take: i.e., computer printout, disc, typed manuscript or a set of slips or cards.

A contract or commissioning letter also serves the publisher should the indexer fall down on the job in one way or another. Members of the Society of Indexers may contact the Registrar if they run into problems—another benefit of membership of SI.

### *Copyright*

Copyright subsists in an index. The question of ownership of copyright should be raised when the indexer and publisher are negotiating the contract. If the indexer agrees to part with the copyright, then he should make a written assignment. If it is decided that the publishers should enjoy limited rights only, then this may be implemented either by partial assignment of copyright, or by a licence to print, publish and sell, subject to the limitations agreed upon.\*

If the work is to be published in countries other than the UK, this could mean that the indexer can be paid additionally if this is negotiated. Learned Opinion was sought by the Society following the publication in *The Bookseller* on 4 December 1971 of an article by the late Oliver Stallybrass on the subject of indexes, and the publication in *The Times* of articles on Copyright by Ronald Irving. There followed a dispute in the correspondence columns of both publications. To my knowledge only the late founder-President of the Society of Indexers, G. Norman Knight, raised this matter with his publisher. However, as he was an established and reputable indexer, treatment accorded to him cannot be expected by others as of right. Because indexing generally has a fairly low status in book production publishers for the most part do not know about this copyright position, nor has it been tested in the courts. If more indexers requested that the matter of copyright be

stated in the commissioning letter, then publishers' consciousness on the question would be raised. Unfortunately the charge of amateurishness can be laid against indexers in this matter.

### *Instructions from the publisher*

It is unlikely that the letter commissioning the index will contain instructions on the compilation of the index. Successful freelance indexers score highly on providing workmanlike indexes of the appropriate length in the form required, delivered on the due date or before if possible.

1. In ideal circumstances the index will be commissioned well ahead of time and the approximate date for the despatch of proofs will be given. If proofs are delayed the editor should inform you, as you may well turn down work for the period booked. A new date should be given for the despatch of the proofs.

2. You should be advised as to any limitation on the length of the index.

3. Has the publisher a house style? You should also be informed if the index copy is required typed or printed-out, in one column or two, with run-on sub-headings or each one set out; whether or not the initial letter of each entry is to be capitalized; details of punctuation requirements.

4. Are there any instructions or recommendations for subject headings? Should all names be indexed?

5. If errors are found in the text, or names are incomplete or variously spelt, should time be spent searching out correct forms of the name? Does the editor wish to be informed during the ongoing process of indexing?

6. Will you be required to look at page proofs? It is highly desirable for indexers to do so, but seldom happens despite technological developments which should speed printing up. No time, no time is usually the cry, but not always; it is worth asking to see them.

7. All typed pages, slips, or cards should be numbered; they may be dropped, and it is easier to rearrange them by number than by the alphabet.

### *Delivery of the index*

It may be cynical to say that many publishers are unconcerned about the quality of the index, but it is certainly true that every editor cares deeply about the delivery date of an index. Late delivery is a cardinal sin. If more time is needed, the indexer should give the editor as much warning as possible. Problems may have been caused by the despatch of the proofs in batches and not necessarily in chronological order. If more time is needed because of this factor, tell the editor. Similarly, if alterations have been made to the text or the pagination, requiring work to be redone, and this will affect the delivery date, tell the editor as soon as possible.

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\*Opinion In The Matter of the Society of Indexers, Sotheby & Co, 5 Upper Brook Street, London W1. D. Micklethwait QC, 6 March 1972; copies £1.00 from Registrar.

However, more time should be requested only under exceptional circumstances. If the proofs are delivered later than indicated in the early discussions on the commissioning of the index, you should make it clear that you require the time originally negotiated to produce the index. If you are expected to make up the time, if this is possible, you should request additional financial remuneration. Do not accept a commission for an index if the time to be given is quite unreasonable. Too often time lost at the printing stage means that the indexer will be pressurized to make up this lost time. Indexers suffer greatly from being last in the line of the book production process.

All freelance indexers must learn to cope with this problem—or they will have to opt for a less stressful and exacting activity.

### *Fees*

In June each year, the Society of Indexers announces a minimum recommended rate for indexing in the forthcoming year. It is emphasized that this is a *minimum* rate. The Society has no power to enforce this recommended rate, though it hopes that indexers listed in *Indexers available* will not accept commissions paying below the current rate. Work is estimated by the hour, and the recommended rate refers to payment by the hour. Many Registered Indexers and others who are highly specialized or highly respected may command a fee well in advance of this minimum rate.

Publishing houses have individual agreements with the National Union of Journalists. Indexing is one of the categories, along with copy editing, proofreading, etc., for which different rates are negotiated. There is a wide variety in fees negotiated with publishing houses. The Society of Indexers attempts to set its fee between the highest and the lowest rates negotiated between the NUJ and publishers.

Payment by the hour is widely accepted as the most suitable method of paying for indexing work (though some publishers may offer payment on the basis of so much per printed page of text or index lines). If this is so, it is advisable to translate this sum into an hourly payment to assess whether or not the work is being adequately paid.

Inexperienced indexers may find they are working very slowly and thus cannot expect to be paid for learning the job at the publisher's expense. Most editors have a very good idea what a job is worth; an index will have been included in the budget for the book, and a sum set aside for this purpose. However, there must be some flexibility within the budget for an individual book. It is well to find out in advance what the budget for the index is; the indexer can then decide whether or not to undertake the work. More often than not you will be asked to estimate for an index. Sight unseen, this can be very difficult. It may be advisable to give a maximum and minimum sum

as an estimate, and not be too rigid. Unfortunately, new indexers are not in a very strong negotiating position: confidence with estimating can come only with experience. It is informative to talk to experienced indexers on their approach to estimating for jobs.

### *Expenses*

Additional expenses to the fee negotiated may be: travelling to and from the publishers' office; phone calls; postage; purchase of a special reference book. Indexers will have to spend money on servicing their computer, word processor or typewriter, stationery, ribbons, reference books, etc.; and possibly spend extra time in a reference library.

It is most important to adopt a methodical approach to your work as an indexer. This will include recording payments for work done and listing all payments on outgoing in connection with the work.

A suggested method is to give each index worked on a job item number and record them all in a ruled book. A typical page entry might for instance contain the following items:

1. Title of book
2. Author of book
3. Name of publisher with address, or packager with address
4. Name of editor with phone number
5. Date of letter commissioning index
6. Date of phone call commissioning index
7. Date of acceptance of commission with estimate of cost
8. Date of receipt of proofs. If the complete set is not posted at one go, list additional dates when papers are received. Also note dates of any corrections sent or advice of re-pagination
9. Date of additional phone calls to editor with length of call
10. Date of any letter written by you to editor or author
11. Date of replies from editor or author
12. Date and method of despatch of index to publisher
13. Date of acknowledgement of receipt
14. Date of invoice for work, 28 days net; state amount
15. Date of any reminders for payment
16. Date of payment
17. Date of paying cheque into bank and amount

### *Tax concessions*

Freelance indexers should keep records of all financial transactions concerned with their work. A record of all expenses and payments can be made in a simple ruled cash book. Payments received should be shown separately from payments out.

Invoices, bills, copies of receipts given, cheque stubs, letters, bank statements and anything relating to income and expenditure of the business of indexing should be kept. It is easier to claim expenses due if you are advised

by a qualified accountant. The accountant will, for a fee, compile your accounts and deal with the Inland Revenue Inspector on your behalf. The accountant's fee is tax deductible. Whether or not an accountant is employed, make a note of everything that might possibly be allowed for tax purposes. These will include such items as:

1. If you use a room as an office, a proportion of the rent or rates, lighting and heating of the whole house may be claimed. If the house has 5 rooms and you use one as an office one fifth may be claimed. But the office room should also be a living room of some kind: a room used exclusively as an office may make you liable for Capital Gains Tax when you sell your house
2. A proportion of the telephone bill for business purposes, perhaps a third
3. Newspapers and magazines purchased
4. Reference books
5. Professional subscriptions
6. Conference fees
7. Stationery including headed notepaper
8. Assistance with indexing if you have to take on help
9. Office equipment purchased, including computer, word processor or typewriter, including maintenance, replacement, and purchases associated with running of equipment
10. Decorating office.

Annual accounts will have to be submitted to the tax inspector. See Inland Revenue leaflet IR56 *Tax: employed or self-employed?* Remember, the Inland Revenue can claim back tax from you for six years, so all records and receipts should be kept for this length of time.

### *Complaints*

Occasionally complaints arise. Most commonly they occur in one of three categories:

1. the quality of the work
2. late delivery of the work
3. the fee requested is too high for the index.

Different publishers' editors will deal with these matters or pass them onto the managing editor. It will obviously matter a great deal to the indexer if a complaint arises with a publisher where there has been a long-standing relationship. The indexer will in such a case, if hoping to receive future commissions, be very accommodating.

With a new publisher, with whom there have been no previous dealings, the indexer may wish to take a very firm line if believing himself to be in the right. Members of SI may contact the Registrar of the Society, or the Training and Accreditation Board via the Secretary of the Society, if they need help and advice or an impartial referee.

However, it must be said that complaints seriously

affect self-esteem and professional confidence, whether the indexer is in the right or wrong. They are very stressful and should be avoided as much as it is possible for the indexer to do so.

Often, lack of communication between editor, author and indexer is the cause; so indexers should have a very clear idea of what is required for an index before commencing work. Do not proceed with an index until you are sure you know what is required for it. It is better to contact the author a number of times than risk a complaint.

Indexers' complaints about treatment by publishers nearly always relate to low payment or late payment of an agreed fee. Unfortunately, too few indexers are prepared to make a stand for indexing standards when they are given too little time for the index or an absurdly inadequate brief.

### *Suggested Code of Conduct for Indexers*

1. Indexers shall have received training in indexing and will not undertake the compilation of indexes without the necessary skills.
2. Indexers shall accept only work for which they are qualified.
3. Indexers shall continue to strive at all times to improve their professional competence.
4. Indexers shall use all their skills to provide the best possible index to the text provided in the time allowed.
5. Indexers shall give the maximum support to their professional association in order to raise the standards of indexing and to support and encourage their fellow professionals.

### *Summing up*

There are many easier ways of earning money than compiling indexes. The sporadic nature of the commissions means that there will be periods of intense activity followed by periods when you may feel you may never be asked to compile another index. Some indexers work flat out all the time; to cope with this type of pressure you have to have good health, strong nerves, remarkable eyesight, and the right sort of temperament for the job. Such indexers are proficient in the craft of indexing and have a good knowledge of the subjects offered for specialization. One characteristic of the outstanding indexer is an infinite capacity for taking pains. Observe the indexes produced by Wheatley Medal winners: you will marvel at the skill, patience, stamina and inventiveness of their compilers. Kurt Vonnegut observed in his novel *Cat's cradle* that an index told you more about the indexer than about the book: on reflection, not such an eccentric comment as it might seem.

Indexers must keep up to date with developments in indexing. The draft of a new British Standard on Indexing has been prepared and will be published in the next

few months, and has implications for all indexers. Computer-generated indexing is now taking over from manual indexing at an exponential rate. These are but two developments.

You have to be methodical in your business approach and to have a pleasant and co-operative manner towards all your contacts. As most of these will be by letter or phone, the likelihood is that you will never meet any of those you do business with. There are, of course, exceptions. The rapport, for example, between author Bernard Levin and indexer Oula Jones has been remarkably constant, and there are few authors with such high regard for indexing and understanding of the intricacies of the art. But at all times you will have to be the sort of person that it is a pleasure to talk to, however unreasonable you may think the requests that are sometimes made of you.

Finally—you will never become rich by indexing

alone. You will be an occasionally much appreciated facilitator for those seeking information and knowledge.

All the above recommendations are a counsel of perfection, of course. None of us is a Jehovah, and publishers as well as indexers may make mistakes in any aspect of their work. Just try, try, try not to!

Joining the Society of Indexers will link you to others like yourself who will help, support and inform you and stand by you in time of difficulties. Your solidarity with the Society will be much appreciated and help towards the goal of rising standards and an increase in the status of indexers.

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### From *Abantiades* to *Zygophyllum*

Guaranteed to strike dread into any indexer's heart was an article that began 'Cotyledon anatomy has been investigated in approximately 900 species representing all the major tribes of the Leguminosae...'. 'Just the authors having a little joke,' I thought, 'they cannot be serious, they won't mention them all', but they were... and they did! That particular index ran to 24 pages, by far the longest Linnean Journal index that I have prepared in seven years of indexing, mostly *Zoological Journals* with some *Botanical Journals* in recent months.

Of course, after seven years I see the articles in the Journals in a rather different light from most people, who simply read them for their scientific content. I can glance through a volume and *know* whether it is going to be a doddle or a slog, or to put it into English, a quickie or a long job. It really depends on what sort of articles are present, invertebrate or vertebrate, dealing with higher taxa or genera, straight morphological descriptions or reviews. The articles most designed to promote tearing of hair (from an indexer's point of view of course) are those produced by the vertebrate taxonomists, sorting out the classification of the higher taxa. Not only are these articles freely besprinkled with a bewildering assortment of taxa from species to phylum and all ranks in between, but the terms are almost always anglicized—just to make life more difficult for the poor indexer it often seems. So please, dear workers in vertebrate taxonomy, somewhere in your article, just once that's all I ask, put in the correct Latin version of your names so

that I do not have to go and look them up. And you can be more sure that they are indexed correctly! These articles are always long ones, with complex introductions and lengthy discussions. Sometimes it seems like every taxon in the whole of the reptiles, fish, birds or mammals (sorry, that should read Reptilia, Pisces, Aves or Mammalia) has been included in the article—and the pile of index cards at the end would appear to confirm this impression.

By contrast, complex taxonomic articles by invertebrate zoologists are usually confined to a single family or order; the majority of entries are for genera and their (scemingly numerous) species. Most of the article is taken up with a review of the genera or species and the discussion is short. However (there is always a 'however'), where vertebrate zoologists cannot agree on what is the sister-group to what (or whether this is the correct way to describe a relationship), invertebrate zoologists cannot even agree on a name. So the lists of synonymies get longer... and longer... and longer. If every time I index an article I index six new *combs. novs.*, then by the year 2000 it will take me (or my computer substitute) twice as many pages to produce my index. The index will be longer than the article! So please, dear workers in invertebrate taxonomy, leave them where they are now. (Oh well, I do realise it's just a pipe dream, accurate taxonomy must come before indexing.)

Entomologists seem to be obsessed with certain letters of the alphabet—most of their generic names appear to begin with A, C, L, M or P. It is probably an optical illusion or a figment of my imagination but when two or three related genera are being discussed they always seem

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