Indexes: a chapter from The Chicago manual of style, 14th edition*: a review

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The chapter on indexes in The Chicago manual of style serves as a standard for index format and as a self-teaching tool for authors and novice indexers. The 14th edition is reviewed for logical sequence, accordance of the guidelines and rules with those of other manuals and authorities, and the quality of its index. It is found wanting in all these areas, but contains much useful information on the indexing process and book index format.

The Chicago manual as a standard

The Chicago manual of style is the most widely cited authority on book indexing. Liddy et al. reported that 76% of publishers refer indexers to this source. An indirect piece of evidence for the ubiquity of this tool is that the index to Nancy Mulvany's Indexing books2 does not include locators for passages which state simply that The Chicago manual is a general authority (e.g., pages 17 and 22), although it does provide references for passages that discuss specific rules in the Manual. Some indexing software packages provide for automatic formatting according to Chicago's rules. The Manual thus serves as a de facto standard for book indexes.

The chapter on indexes is also a self-teaching tool for authors compiling their own indexes as well as for students of indexing and novice indexers. The chapter thus merits evaluation both in terms of its adequacy as a basic text for book indexers and as an authority for the format of indexes.

The author of the chapter is not identified, although Mulvany is credited in the Preface to the Manual for 'expert advice on indexing' (p. ix). She clearly did not write the chapter, however, as in her own book she disagrees with several rules in The Chicago manual. It may be assumed that the chapter is a composite work, with ideas filtered from the literature and individuals who have made suggestions for improving the text or changing the rules since the prior edition was published.

Mulvany has published an analysis of the changes in format specifications for indexes between the 13th and 14th editions of the Manual. This review is, in contrast, a synchronic one, evaluating the chapter on indexes in the 14th edition as a whole, without limiting the analysis to index format or comparing the 14th edition with prior editions.

Sequence of the text

After a brief introduction, the chapter begins with a section entitled Definitions, which does more than indicate the meaning of terms. For example, the definition of 'Page References' (17.9) includes rules for locators, e.g., 'Never use the abbreviations f., ff., or et seq.'. Only after indexing formats and cross-references have been 'defined' at length is the question of having an author index his or her own book vs. using a professional indexer raised.

The subsequent section, 'The Mechanics of Indexing', begins with a discussion of manual vs. computer-assisted methods, proceeds to treat indexable matter, and then returns to 'Workspace and Equipment'. The rubrics for the steps in the process of indexing are logically sequenced, but all sorts of formatting details are thrown in to this section, which is followed by one entitled 'General Principles of Indexing'. The latter should have come earlier, as it deals largely with indexable concepts. Rules for formulating headings are in this section as well, but such rules are not really principles.

The majority of rules for headings are in the subsequent section, entitled 'Principles of Alphabetizing'. The Manual thus confuses cataloguing with filing, i.e., the selection of preferred forms of headings with rules for arrangement.

Editing an index, typographical considerations, and
examples of various index formats are the sections that complete the text. There is a single reference to further reading—Mulvany's *Indexing books*, issued by the same publisher.

**Guidelines and rules**

It has been noted above that guidelines and rules for book indexes are sprinkled throughout the sections entitled 'Definitions and General Principles'. In this part of the review we focus on the specific advice given.

I could begin by quibbling about the introductory statement, 'A good index records every pertinent state given. ...' (17.1). I tend to recall the digressions in a book and would like indexes to help me return to them too.

*Pertinence* is thus not as good a criterion for indexability as *information*: an index entry should lead to information on the topic represented by a heading. I thus disagree with the opinion put forth in a recent letter to the editor of this journal: that an index should be at least as good as a concordance.4 A concordance lists all occurrences of words; an index should omit words about which no information is given.

Indexable parts of a book are discussed in sections 17.27–17.30. The theme of indexable concepts in narrative text is developed in sections 17.73–74, and is illustrated in the context of a walk through the indexing process in section 17.39. Rereading page proofs to ensure that concepts initially considered peripheral have not been developed later is discussed in section 17.44. While the advice given on all these facets of the basic question 'What to index?' is reasonable, the scatter of these related passages is unfortunate. These sections are linked neither by internal cross-references nor through the index.

The first paragraph under the rubric Definitions, entitled 'Kinds of Indexes', suggests frequently that multiple indexes are desirable, e.g., 'if the material is complex and there is a large cast of characters, two indexes are prepared' (17.2). Three indexes are suggested for poetry anthologies (ibid.), although a subsequent section of the *Manual* (17.148) states that a combined index is 'probably easiest of all on the reader'. Indexing authorities going back to Wheatley5 have called for one index, indivisible, per book. Liddy and Jorgensen have recently demonstrated that users have no idea that there may be multiple indexes to a book, and even little understanding of the features of a single index.6

I endorse the guideline that some index headings should be inverted in order to bring to the fore 'the word a reader is most likely to look under' (17.5). The example provided is 'theology, Navaho' for a book on American Indians. The latest draft of the American National Standard for indexes, however, calls for uninverted headings in all types of indexes.7

I do not disagree with the guideline that sometimes 'it is more appropriate to use subheadings that are subdivisions ... within a larger category' (17.7), but it would have been helpful to explain the conditions under which alphabetic-classed entries such as 'Native American peoples: Aztecs; ... Zapotees’ etc. are appropriate. The locators in the example are non-consecutive, and this is one argument for this type of classification in book indexes: it collocates information that is scattered in the text. A similar example is provided in the section on editing an index (17.50), but since no locators are provided, the reader cannot judge whether direct entry or classified entry is preferable.

The second example in section 17.7, ‘Loans: collateral; default; interest rates ...’ is of a very different kind of index structure: analysis of a topic treated in a consecutive group of pages. The subheadings are aspects of the heading, not more specific topics. Analysis of index headings and the relationship of an index to the classified arrangement of a text are the areas of indexing on which novices request the most guidance,8 and so it is unfortunate that these topics are treated in an undifferentiated manner in a single paragraph of the *Manual*.

The section on cross-references is introduced with the guideline that 'they should never be employed unless they actually lead to additional information' (17.11, emphasis in original). I do not disagree with this, but the guideline does not apply to see references, only to *see also* references. Moreover, this advice (which is repeated in section 17.13 in the context of *see also* references) belongs under the rubric 'editing an index'. One establishes term relationships in the process of developing a book index. When the draft index is complete, the indexer reviews the *see also* references to make sure they lead to entries with additional locators.

A subsequent section on editing (17.48) suggests that cross-references are provided mainly at this stage. That point is made explicitly in section 17.60. Section 17.49 suggests that decisions on synonyms are not made until the editing stage; if so, that stage is likely to be extremely time-consuming. As noted in the preceding paragraph, an indexer should create *see references* when s/he encounters synonymy in a text, and *see also* references when semantic overlap is evident. In reading through a draft index, additional references may come to mind, but if term relationships are not established in the course of indexing, the syntetic structure of a book index is sure to be incomplete.

The rules for cross-references in section 17.12 repeatedly confuse cataloguing and filing: e.g., rule 4 says that a *see* reference should be used ‘When a personal name has been *alphabetized* under the real surname rather than a pseudonym ...’. The term italicized by this reviewer should be *entered*; one has to
alphabetize both the preferred name heading and the cross-reference.

Chicago permits the use of see under to refer to heading-subheading combinations. The term is used inconsistently, however, in the section on generic references (17.19), e.g., 'sacred writings. See under specific titles'. The word 'under' is not necessary here, as the user is not being instructed to see the subheading 'sacred writings' under specific titles, but rather the titles as main headings directly.

The most serious problem is that the section on cross-references does not discuss the need to maintain a record of all cross-references made to a given heading, in case the heading is changed or deleted. This is a crucial control device in indexing.

Except for this omission, the description of the indexing process in the Manual is good. Especially commendable is the emphasis on supplying modifications for all headings in the early stages of indexing (17.40, 17.42). I heartily applaud the statement that 'there is no single and absolutely correct way to construct ... an index' (17.53).

The aspect of index format that I find most objectionable in the Chicago style is the use of a comma, rather than a colon, to separate a heading from a qualifying phrase (17.57). This fails to differentiate inverted headings from heading-subheading combinations in cases where there is only a single subheading. In a run-in index, this has implications for alphabetization, as the delimitation of the filing medium is unclear, although a subsequent section (17.97) says that 'alphabetization ... starts at the first comma preceding a modifying element or an inversion', i.e., the two types of entries are filed the same way. Mulvany in Indexing books has discussed in detail the special filing rules of Chicago that differentiate the various functions of a comma, and so I shall not reiterate those.

The Chicago rules for capitalizing/lowercasing and punctuating cross-references are difficult to implement when working without indexing software. In defense of the apparent inconsistencies in the format guidelines, I can state that capitalizing a see also reference at the end of a run-in entry makes the reference more visible. Insufficient attention is given in the Manual to the position of a see also reference after a main heading that has locators: does the reference precede or follow them? There is one example that deals with this case in the context of indented format (17.10), but no discussion.

On professional issues, I am unhappy with the Manual's statement that an indexer 'may not see the final, copyedited form' of the index (17.64). First, I believe that editors should not tamper with an index; if changes are absolutely necessary, they should be reported to the indexer, the only one who can know whether there are cross-references to a revised heading. A subsequent section of the Manual makes a related point: 'an ... editor should be wary of tampering with ... an index, lest ... the carefully thought-out structure [be] undone' (17.132).

The Manual illogically notes that the indexer will not be given the chance to proofread an index before discussing copyediting (17.64); in my opinion, the opportunity to review proofs is also something an indexer should insist on, even if a machine-readable version of the index was submitted. Review of a type-set index is necessary to check such formatting features as continued headings.

Indexers often say that they do not want a byline because editors have botched their work. The indexes to both the Manual and the separate chapter (more on these below) lack a byline, and the text does not discuss this important professional issue—perhaps because author-indexers are perceived as the primary audience.

The proofreading of an index would logically have been the last topic of the chapter, but this is followed by a section entitled 'Gauging the Length of an Index as You Go'. Useful data are provided here. 'What to Do about Typos You Find' [in the text of a book] should also have been discussed much earlier, but it is good that this important topic is included.

The section on 'General Principles of Indexing' begins by noting that the author's usage is to be preferred in the formulation of index headings (17.69). The subsequent paragraph advises indexers to start by reading through the entire set of page proofs—good advice, which should have come at the beginning of the section on the indexing process. The text then returns to the wording of entries, reiterating the principle of author's usage.

Full-length indexing manuals, such as those of Mulvany and Wellisch, increasingly defer to Anglo-American cataloguing rules (AARC2) for the formulation of name headings. Chicago continues to advise indexers to prefer real name over pseudonym, however, allowing some exceptions, such as Voltaire and Mark Twain (17.77). AARC2's principle—the best-known form of the best-known name—provides more guidance. Chicago does apply the principle of better-known name to married women (17.79), and the Manual echoes AARC2's principle of two bibliographic identities (rule 22.2B2) in allowing headings for both a woman's maiden name and her married name in a single index (17.80). Chicago explicitly defers to cataloguers in section 17.115 in advising indexers to 'consult the catalog of a large reference library in doubtful cases' of formulating name headings.

AARC2, which is designed for large catalogues, does not suggest adding qualifiers such as (brother) and (grandfather) to name headings, and it is good that the Manual includes guidance on biographical indexing (17.78). Another commendable point is that

Another area where Chicago's rules diverge from cataloguing rules is in the handling of newspaper titles. Whereas serials cataloguers are faithful to the title on the piece and add geographic qualifiers as required to differentiate identical titles, Chicago says to index under city of publication, e.g., *New York Daily News*, not *Daily News* (New York) (17.93). The stated exceptions are newspapers 'intended for national distribution' (how would one determine that?) and 'foreign English-language newspapers', such as *Times* (London). Would one reverse the rules in the United Kingdom?

Among debatable points in 'Principles of Alphabetizing' is the statement that 'Hyphens, slashes, and apostrophes are treated as continuing the single word' (17.97). Many systems convert the first two of these characters to spaces. Mulvany's objections to the rule requiring identification of the function of the comma have already been noted. This principle certainly does not lend itself to automatic sorting.

The *Manual* confuses numerical sorting (17.102) with sorting on mathematical value: computer programs that sort on the initial digit will file 9 after 44; a more complicated algorithm is required to sort on the value of a number as a whole. It would have been logical to juxtapose chronological filing (17.105) with this section, but the handling of diacritics and the filing of prepositions in subheadings come between them.

I shall not review the rules for handling names from various cultures except to note my disagreement with the statement that the indexer should not add cross-references from variant romanizations (17.116). Many entries may be completely inaccessible to a user if an author uses a scholarly romanization scheme and the indexer provides no references from the better-known forms.

As is to be expected from *The Chicago manual of style*, the sections on copyediting and typography of indexes are excellent. The text of the chapter itself is well copyedited and attractively formatted, with appropriately positioned and useful illustrations. (There are several errors in Figure 17.5, an indented-style index: a period after a subheading, a lower-cased *see also* reference, and the misspelling 'attitude'.) The concluding section of Examples is helpful as well, owing to the clear annotations pointing out features of interest.

**The indexes to the Manual and the separate**

The index to the *Manual* serves to reveal that all the information on indexes is not in Chapter 17. Copyediting and markup of indexes, as well as the elision of inclusive numbers, are among the topics treated in other chapters of the book. Editing and typography of indexes are discussed in Chapter 17 as well; the discussion of inclusive numbers in Chapter 8 is reprinted in the separate.

The separate has its own three-page index, while the *Manual* possesses one spanning 50 pages. Indexes to works on indexing always bear examination. The index to the *Manual* as a whole will be evaluated first.

A problematic feature of the format of the *Manual's* index is that (*continued*) headings are used only on the first column of left-hand pages. This is particularly troublesome in the section of the index dealing with *indexes*. The column before that of the sought entry begins with the subheading 'offset lithography'; the column in which 'indexes' is found begins with the subheading 'of displayed equations', and the column to its right begins with 'indentation'—leading a full column of subheadings. The University of Chicago Press has not followed its own advice in this regard: 'continued lines are... helpful, and highly recommended, at the head of any column that continues an entry in another column' (17.139).

Although indented style is used for the index, only one level of subheading is provided throughout. Most of these lead to one or two section numbers where a specific rule is discussed, but not infrequently, there are strings of undifferentiated locators that could have been broken up by subsubheadings. For example, the index entry 'notes: punctuation in' has 22 locators, counting continuous locators (e.g., 15.112–17) as a single one. While indexing authorities differ on the magic number for the maximum number of locators, all agree that more than 20 are excessive. The *Manual* itself has the rule of thumb that subentries are needed for more than five references (17.51) and instructs editors to break up 'long strings of unanalyzed locators' (17.134, point 3).

The index includes cross-references, but not all that are warranted: the entries for 'United States' and those beginning with 'U.S.' are not linked. The index is not fully exhaustive either. For example, the limited sorting capabilities of word processing software are discussed in sections 17.26 and 17.134, point 9. There is no entry for or cross-reference from 'sorting'; 'word processors' has a single locator in the index, and it is not either of the aforementioned. From that heading we are told 'See also computers'; the latter heading has the subheading 'alphabetizing with', but no references to these passages. The double entry, 'alphabetizing: computer assisted' has four locators, while its permuted form has only two.

Format choices made on which indexing authorities disagree include ignoring prepositions in the filing of subheadings, and the positioning of *see also* references as the last subheading. The index has an introductory note, but it does not specify whether word-by-word or letter-by-letter filing is used. Inspection of the sequence reveals that the latter was chosen, in accordance with the Press's preference. The former method...
of filing would have created more useful juxtapositions than ‘et cetera; ethnic groups; et seq.’.

The index to the separate is not a mere excerpt from the general index to the Manual. It has no heading for ‘indexes’; most of the subheadings of that term in the full Manual are main headings in the index to the separate, with conjunctions and prepositions deleted. For example, the entry ‘indexes: and tables, 17.30’ in the Manual becomes ‘tables, 17.30’ in the separate. The latter index does not have the strings of locators found in the Manual. Headings such as ‘cross-references’ and ‘punctuation’ have good subheadings, set in a run-in format, no doubt to save a signature: the last page of the index is printed on the inside back cover.

As in the full Manual, there are no continued headings on the right-hand columns of index pages in the separate. The first page of the index has the intriguing words ‘you go’ on the top right, split from the heading-subheading combination ‘computer-assisted indexing: checking entries as you go’. Contradicting Chicago’s formatting rules, see also references at the end of run-in entries are preceded by semicolons rather than periods.

Conclusions

The chapter on indexes in The Chicago manual of style is neither an ideal tool from which to learn indexing, nor does it constitute an ideal standard for index format. The description of the indexing process is, in this reviewer’s opinion, the best feature of the work. The index to the Manual does not serve as a particularly good model of index structure and format; the index to the separate is better.

At the 1989 Annual Meeting of the American Society of Indexers, Jennie Lightner, a representative of the University of Chicago Press, announced the preparation of the 14th edition. In commenting on her presentation, I suggested that the Press award a contract for revision of the chapter on indexes to the American Society of Indexers, but this was not done. An authoritative brief manual for book indexing is needed especially in the US because the committee revising the American standard for indexes has decided (a) not to develop a separate standard for book indexes, and (b) not to develop a manual for indexing. Specifying what the end-product should look like without telling people how to get there is not helpful.

Indexers required to follow ‘Chicago’ will still have to contend with complex formatting specifications and filing rules that cannot be automated. Perhaps the 15th edition will feature improvements in these areas, as well as a more logical presentation of indexing principles.

References