
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Searching for the truth

In the context of the title of Mallory and Moran's recent article 'Scholarly search for the truth, and problems associated with indexing/abstracting', and its publication in *The Indexer* (19 (2) Oct. 1994, 99–101), I assume the specific instance they consider is of interest to the extent that it raises broad issues about indexing and abstracting. Since indexing is not considered in their article, I will confine my observations to abstracting.

It is generally accepted that the objective of an abstract is to draw attention to a publication of potential interest to the reader, not to substitute for it. The abstract will therefore never tell the whole story. The range, length, and complexity of the publications abstracted by most bibliographic 'access' services would preclude any other policy even if it were desirable.

In this instance the examples are two letters to the editor, each less than a page in length. In the circumstances it seems sufficient that the abstracts clearly state the subject and allude to the authors' positions on it, thereby alerting the reader to the existence of publications relevant to the Guidoriccio controversy.

MICHAEL RINEHART,
Editor-in-chief,

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The authors reply:

We wrote our article primarily because BHA did *not* allude to our position. BHA's guidelines state that abstracts 'may bring out significant context'. We feel that our position related to such significant context. Territi's letter and ours were treated quite differently by BHA.

MICHAEL MALLORY and GORDAN MORAN

Indexing books: some cavils

Nancy Mulvany's splendid book¹ came to hand just in time to accompany me on a leisurely camping trip in the Adirondacks and parts of New England. So it had to compete with glorious mountain scenery, moonlit lakes, forest camp-grounds—cruelly unfair competition by any standards, but all the more so when you throw into the scale the fall colours just reaching their peak.

I cannot speak more highly of the book than by saying that it held its own triumphantly and was finished well before the trip ended.

If it lacks the attractiveness of a still-recent manual on indexing by a fellow-American, Ruth Canedy Cross² it more than makes up for this in comprehensiveness and detail. I have only two or three reservations, one of them relatively trivial. This is the author's propensity to express the blindingly obvious, sometimes reinforced by repetition. For example:

By their very nature reference books are designed to be referred to, not to be read straight through. (p. 9)

The sequence of entries in an index follows a particular order. In the case of an alphabetical index, the entries follow the order of the alphabet, beginning with A and ending with Z. In a numeric index, the sequence followed is that of the value of numbers, beginning with lower values and progressing in ascending numerical order. (p. 68)

But it would be totally unfair to suggest that such passages as I have quoted are common enough to be characteristic of her book.

What concerns me much more is her selling the pass over a vital distinction: between continuous and non-continuous references to a topic which extend through several pages of text. Her verdict on this matter is: 'If no mention is made in the [publisher's] style guide of the distinction between continuous and noncontinuous discussion on consecutive pages, the indexer is safe to assume that a page range can be used for noncontinuous discussion on consecutive pages' (p. 92). Shame on you, Ms Mulvany! At least in academic and other serious works, the distinction is surely an important one, serving the reader's needs. To make decisions on the basis of what a publisher will accept, rather than on what will best serve the reader's needs is to embark on a slippery slope indeed. And if the University of Chicago Press, unlike McGraw-Hill, cavalierly jettisons this distinction, then it is surely time for a well organized boycott of that otherwise highly reputable publishing house.

Still more disturbing, however, is one aspect of Mulvany's very comprehensive treatment of that age-old problem, the rival methods of alphabetization. She shows more clearly than any other writer on indexing that this is not just a simple choice between the 'word-by-word' and the 'letter-by-letter' methods: there are possible variations within each. Unfortunately, in the course of doing so she seriously muddies the waters of what is already a complex issue.

The problem arises as soon as you encounter any kind of inverted or qualified heading. It is illustrated by one of Mulvany's examples of word-by-word sorting:

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TYPE-ADF command
Type, Alice Mary
type font
type foundry
Type, James
type metal . . . etc.3
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How does 'Type, James' come to be lost among the other headings, instead of following hard on the heels of 'Type, Alice Mary', where a reader would surely expect (and be most likely) to find it? The answer is that Mulvany decrees (with no attempt to justify her assertion) that 'in a word-by-word sort the comma is ignored'. But why should it be? In the case of inverted headings the word-by-word method, as I have always understood and applied it, *does* take the comma into account and begins a fresh alphabetical sequence after it. Index-users do not need to be aware of, still less to understand, this principle in order to find the resulting index 'user-friendly': they have only to reap the benefit of having all members of the Type family re-united. What consanguinity hath joined let no indexer put asunder.

I am haunted by a dreadful nightmare scenario of scores—perhaps hundreds—of indexing tyros (I deplore the current jargon, 'beginner indexers'!) led astray by their dutiful response to Mulvany's guidance at this point. But there is a gleam of hope. If her disciples use a dedicated indexing programme such as CINDEK or MACREX to do their sorting for them, they will find that when they choose the word-by-word option, the software (not having read *Indexing books*) will come up with what I have no doubt at all is the correct (because the most helpful) alphabetical arrangement. Meanwhile I wish her book every success, so that, as soon as it is out of print, the second edition can include her penitent recantation.

References

1. Mulvany, Nancy C. *Indexing books*. University of Chicago Press, 1994.
2. Cross, Ruth Canedy. *Indexing books*. Cambridge, Mass: The World Guild, 1980.
3. Mulvany p. 111. For other examples see pp. 114, 117.

JOHN A. VICKERS
Emsworth, Hampshire

The author replies:

How splendid that my book accompanied Dr Vickers on holiday to New England this past autumn. However, I fear that when he penned his letter to this journal he was still dazzled by the kaleidoscope of fall

colors and failed to see the forest for the trees. That Vickers takes exception to my discussion of the word-by-word sort comes as no surprise. That he appears unaware that the British (BS 3700:1988), international (ISO 999), and American (ANSI/NISO Z39.4-1993 Draft 4.1) standards assign no special sorting sequence to the comma used in an inversion is peculiar. The University of Chicago Press, whom Vickers suggests boycotting for other reasons, does treat the comma used in an inversion in a special way. On pages 112–13 of my book, I clearly state my objection to obscure rules based upon usage.

For the past ten years my company has been the North American publisher of the MACREX indexing Program. It is obvious to me—blindingly obvious—that the default word-by-word sorting sequence used by MACREX conforms to the international standards and arranges entries as I have illustrated. However, being a versatile program, MACREX can easily accommodate a Chicago sort, a Vickers sort, a Mulvany sort, practically any kind of sort desired. Those who wish to canonize arrangement orders based upon usage will have to explain their methodology clearly. It is not sufficient to assert with no empirical evidence that personally designed sorting orders are 'user-friendly'. In the case of the comma used in an inversion, what shall its value be? Higher than or lower than the space? 28? 232? 30? 143? Should it sort before or after the dash or colon? What shall it be? And why?

NANCY MULVANY
Kensington, California

A postscript from John Vickers:

Whatever our differences, I hope that Nancy Mulvany and I would find ourselves in full agreement on two matters: that alphabetization is a dangerous minefield to enter and that our paramount concern must always be the interest of the index-user. Determining what that interest is, however, remains a matter of individual (if you like, 'subjective') judgement, and is likely to remain so, whatever research may be undertaken. And clearly we disagree about which alphabetical order is likely to prove the most helpful.

I cannot comment on ISO 999 or ANSI/NISO Z39.4-1993 Draft 4.1, having no copy available to repair my peculiar (but unrepentant!) ignorance of them. But I *am* familiar with BS 3700:1988 and do not think that it can be invoked unilaterally on the main issue between us. Mulvany herself quotes the relevant sections (6.2.1.2–6.2.1.3) on pp. 115–16 of her book: 'Punctuation marks other than those listed [i.e. spaces, dashes, hyphens, diagonal slashes] should be disregarded *unless given a function by the indexer*, as, for example, to separate a surname from a forename or to enclose a qualifier. *They then acquire a filing value*

imposed by the indexer.' (Italics mine) In other words, the standard does not pronounce on whether alphabetization should or should not begin again following a comma, but leaves the issue open, for the indexer to decide. My contention is that Mulvany has made the wrong choice at this point; i.e. the one which results in a less helpful or useful order of entries from the reader's point of view.

On this matter, I am glad to note that the 14th edition of the *Chicago manual of style*, as quoted on p. 112 of her book, appears to be on my side, though I rest my case on common sense and pragmatic considerations, not on any official Standards or other authority—all of which, being no more infallible than their compilers, deserve our serious attention, but no more.

J.A.V.

Philanthropic publishing?

In answer to Ann Hudson's question 'What can be done?' about authors who find that academic publishers will not pay for indexes (*Trial Trench* 3, 1994), there seems little to offer at present except sympathy. We know from our own experience as authors that such publishers have had things their own way for so long that they are reluctant to change. As well as indexing, it is usually 'the author's responsibility' to provide all illustrations (camera-ready copy) and copyright clearance for illustrations, and to pay for all reproduction fees. The cost of illustrating a book can far outweigh the cost of indexing it.

As far as academic publishing goes, it is a buyer's market. The publishers know this and shamelessly exploit authors. We issue an indexing fact sheet aimed at archaeology authors, warning of the need to sort out who pays for the index before the contract is signed. Admittedly, as far as academic publishers are concerned, this advice is difficult to follow, as they can be intractable with regard to money matters. If an author does accept responsibility for the index, at the very least the publisher should be persuaded to deduct costs from future royalties; and in any event, the indexing costs are usually tax deductible.

The Society of Authors is campaigning for academic publishers to mend their ways, but it is, as yet, early days! Not being able to afford to pay for the index is an academic publisher's economy with the truth. *The Author* recently stated, '... it is a source of continuing concern and frustration that many academic writers accept unfavourable terms for books which may have a long and profitable life. Contrary to popular belief that academic presses are struggling philanthropic organizations, those which are well run and trade internationally are extremely profitable. The pressure on academics to have their work published is

such that many seek nothing much more from publishers than a commitment to publication.' (*The Author* CV (1) 1994). An author who has had a full-length work (or suitable equivalent) published is eligible to join the Society of Authors, whose members can obtain free confidential advice on any British contracts negotiated after becoming a member.

LESLEY and ROY ADKINS
Langport, Somerset

Indexer, 16C.

The hero of *Thomas Norton: the Parliament man* by Michael A. R. Graves (Blackwell, 1994), proves to be an early indexer among his many other activities as a 'man of business' in Elizabethan times. He translated John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian religion* into English, and

In the initial publication of the *Institutes* in 1561 the text had been followed by a brief index of chapters, together with a table, occupying a mere folio, 'of the chefe maters contained in this Booke'. However, when the work was re-issued in the following year Norton responded to the wish of 'many men well minded and studious of this booke' for a detailed table of contents.

Their honest desire I have fulfilled in the second edition and have added thereto a plentiful table, which is also here inserted whiche I have translated out of the Latine, wherein the principall matters discussed in this booke are named by their due titles in order of Alphabete⁶⁵.

Appointed in 1571 to the new office which 'shalbe called the remembrancer of the Citty' (of London),

Norton's enumerated duties were of a purely secretarial nature: that he was 'to keape all the bookes of the Citty', to record and engross them 'with convenyent spede' and to 'reduce the same with Indices, tables, or Kalendars whereby they may be more easily, readily and orderly founde. All the matters hereafter to be engrossed he shall likewise reduce into Tables and so contynewe the same from tyme to tyme during his enjoying thoffice'.

Vanity of the indexed

Shamefully I admit to having bought one or two books simply on the strength of having seen my name in the index. This peculiar form of human vanity is more common than you might imagine. I once overheard a man at a publisher's party boast: 'This is the sixth index I've appeared in.' It seems some men count their index mentions as others count sexual conquests.

—Kenneth Roy in *Scotland on Sunday*, 5 Sept 1993.