Most current writers on indexing take it for granted that the specific entry method is virtually the only acceptable way of producing back-of-the-book indexes. Probably the best discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of classified and specific entry indexes is that by G. Norman Knight (Knight 1979), which is too long to be quoted in full here. There are several other works in which the specific method is prescribed. Hans Wellisch and Nancy Mulvany, if anything, go further by prohibiting the classified form of entry almost entirely. According to Wellisch (1991 p.39):

Under no circumstances should an alphabetical arrangement of headings be interspersed with a classified array of subheadings.

Referring to this precept, Mulvany adds:

When a hierarchical relationship emerges in an index through the use of subentries, the indexer must carefully evaluate the nature of the relationship. It is not the indexer’s job to create artificial relationships that do not exist in the text... Indexers have been instructed to avoid classification in book indexes... Main headings should be specific; they should be directly related to the concepts in the text... Generally speaking, when index entries become extremely complex, going down to sub-subentry and sub-sub-subentry levels, the choice of the main heading is often far too general; the main heading lacks specificity (Mulvany 1994 p. 72-3).

However, she continues somewhat less severely:

Despite the history of admonishment against classification in book indexes, it is important to maintain a reasonable perspective about this matter (Mulvany 1994 p. 73).

Definitions

Before going any further, it is necessary to make sure what is meant by classified or specific indexes. It is a question of the intellectual structure and shape of the index as a whole, not of the thought processes from which the individual entries arise.

Wellisch refers to: ‘a classified array of subheadings’ which reflects ‘the principles of division and subdivision employed by the maker of the classification’ (Wellisch 1991 p.39). He also defines specificity as: ‘the extent to which a concept or topic in a document is identified by a precise term in the hierarchy of its genus-species relations.’ (Wellisch 1991 p.356).

Anderson (1983) has a slightly different definition:

Specificity of indexing refers to the genus/species relationship between terms used to describe and index particular concepts and the concepts themselves.

Perhaps an easier way to differentiate the two forms is to imagine the subject and its divisions and subdivisions set out like a family tree. An ideal subject might be libraries, which could be divided into publicly-funded libraries and private libraries. The first category could be subdivided into public libraries, academic libraries, hospital libraries, etc., while the second category could be divided into subscription libraries, society libraries, commercial firms’ libraries, etc. Many of these can, in turn, be subdivided until we eventually reach the subject to be indexed, say ‘the effect of funding cuts on the school-practice library in a teacher training college’. In a classified index, working from the top of the family tree, this might be indexed as:

- libraries
  - publicly-funded libraries
  - academic libraries
  - teacher training colleges
  - school practice libraries
  - funding

On the other hand, a specific index, working upwards from the bottom of the family tree, can produce an entry, or series of entries, such as:

- funding,
  - school practice libraries
  - school practice libraries
  - teacher training colleges, funding

To see what the two types of structure actually look like, see Figure 1, a classified type of index, and Figure 2, a specific type.

In favour of classified indexes

A classification scheme, at least one of the older pre-coordinated variety, is designed to show the hierarchy of the subject. This undoubtedly brings a sense of order to what might otherwise appear to be an unorganised rabble of alphabetical subject headings. Therefore, an index compiled on the basis of an accepted method of classifying the subject matter of the book should show its hierarchical constitution in a clear and systematic manner. There should be no ambiguities as to the position of any topic in the hierarchy or in the relationships between one topic and another.

Biography, history, etc.

Collison said, though not directly concerning the structural question: Although alphabetical order is necessary for the index as a whole, and for the order of most subheadings, there are cases where other arrangements are preferable. For instance, in biographical and historical works, entries under the names of persons can very often be arranged chronologically... In some scientific works it may also be necessary to sacrifice alphabetical arrangement of subheadings to a more orderly arrangement by the classification of species, by numerical order of chemical compounds, etc. (Collison 1972 p.88).
He also recommended a classified arrangement for art collections, granted to certain areas of former West Germany, VIII 121-162

natural disasters or exceptional occurrences, compensating for, VIII 106-120

noticification of, VIII 104

other Treaty provision, infringing, VIII 105

social character, having, VIII 106-107

Treaty provisions, VIII 103

Common Market, incompatible with, VIII 168

Common Market, possibly compatible with certain economic activities or areas, development of—aid, requiring, VIII 186

trading conditions, adversely affecting, VIII 187

Treaty provisions, VIII 185

Commission, discretion of, VIII 164

canonical European interests, aid to projects of, VIII 182-184

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justification for, VIII 165-167

serious disturbance in national economy, remedying, VIII 182-184

Treaty provisions, VIII 163

under-employment or under-development, development of areas of, VIII 169-181

contentious procedure, VIII 406-408

Council decisions, VIII 409-462

direct effects, not producing, VIII 509

distortion of competition by—de minimis principle, VIII 50-60

degree of, VIII 50-61

generally, VIII 47

position of undertaking strengthened by, VIII 48

prohibition of, VIII 2

relevant product market, VIII 49

domestic products, action favouring, VIII 41

economic policy, general measures of, VIII 29-41

European Commission policy, III 9

European Free Trade Association, rules of, VIII 3

existing, procedure for, VIII 387

final decisions—approval of aid, VIII 465-466

contentious procedure, at end of, VIII 463

State aids—cond final decisions—cond

illegally granted aids, reimbursement of, VIII 467-508

recent, VIII 463

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General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, rules in, VIII 3

guarantees, VIII 42-43

illegally granted, reimbursement of, VIII 467-508

list of, VIII 10-20

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noticification of—Commission guidance, VIII 401

Common Market, where compatible with, VIII 104

contentious procedure, VIII 406-408

existing aids, VIII 387

initiation of putting into effect, after, VIII 402

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other Treaty provisions, relationship with—agriculture, on, VIII 322

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Commission's approach to, VIII 230-240
differentiated ceilings, VIII 242

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regional specificity, VIII 244

sectoral repercussions, VIII 245

transparency, VIII 246

sectoral aids—agriculture, VIII 309-320

catal and steel, VIII 342-345

environment, VIII 299-305

fisheries, VIII 328-341

general policy on, VIII 287

motor vehicle industry, VIII 290-305

research and development, VIII 306-308

shipbuilding—Directive, VIII 312

monitoring process, VIII 327

operating aids, VIII 322

restructuring aid, VIII 323-326

large number of the main entries are likely to be the names of people and the organisations with which they were connected. Hazel Bell advocates a classified arrangement of lists of authors' works:

The first problem is whether to disperse titles through the index, or to group them under the author's name. I prefer classification: the amalgamated list is itself informative, and I look on literary works as the product of the author's mind rather than items separately existing (Bell 1992 p.25).

She also supports the arrangement of subheadings by theme:

"It is the method adopted for the long entries in most of the indexes cited in this booklet. This is logical or thematic grouping of subheads, into paragraphs with such headings as FAMILY, CHARACTER, CAREER, RELATIONSHIPS, LETTERS, WORKS, as appropriate for each book, within these sections, entries appear as subheadings — in fact, they are sub-sub of the main headings "(Bell 1992 p.23).

The same view was taken by Robert Latham, in an article describing the work on his Wheatley Medal-winning index to Pepys' diary:

"One of the principles of the design was to gather as many references as possible into clusters — under general terms such as FOOD, DRINK, DRESS and so on — so that the Index could enable the diary to serve as a book of reference" (Latham 1980).

Brevity

It is also held by some that the classified structure produces shorter indexes, with less need for see also references and double entry. There is considerable truth in this claim, as exemplified by the fact that the index represented by Figure 1 totals 65 pages, whereas the new specific entry index to the next edition, required 85 pages to cover a very similar quantity of text, an increase of about 30%. Similarly, the professional manual, part of whose new index is shown in Figure 2, experienced an even larger increase. Incidentally, at least two lawyers saw the increase as an advantage:

"Not surprisingly, the new index is very much longer (139 pages as opposed to 82) but rarely can so great an increase in the length of a legal text have so beneficial an effect" (Mathis 1994).
Classified v. specific indexing — continued

Surely, nobody is going to speak either of these examples in a thousand years. But would a searcher think like that? Perhaps he might school himself to do so if he found that most of the indexes he used were constructed in this fashion. But is it right that users should have to train themselves in this sort of manner? Where is the user-friendliness?

I believe that one reason for inverted entries of this type is that indexers could not break themselves of the desire to use a complete phrase: ‘reimbursement of state aids’ or ‘having a social character’, rather than analyzing the subject into its component parts, devising indexing terms to suit each part, and finally putting them together to form complete index entries. They are, in fact, indexing words and phrases, rather than concepts. For a further discussion of this aspect of indexing, see Indexing legal materials (Moyes et al 1993), especially Chapters 3 and 4.

Clearly, it is impossible to use totally natural language for all index entries, unless we are prepared to accept entries made up of more or less complete sentences, such as those delightful items in Swinburn’s book on wills (Swinburn 1590), illustrated in Indexing legal materials (Moyes et al 1993): Account to be made to the ordinary By accusing the testament of falsifie the legatearie doth loose his legacie After the Age of fourteen yeares a boy, and after twelve a woman, may make their testamentes of their goods Nobody today is likely to propose entries quite like that in a serious index. But then, Swinburn was printed over four hundred years ago, so we should have made some progress since then!

As Knight said: ‘The test is under what heading the user most likely to look’ (Knight 1979 p.99). However, this paper is not primarily about the contentious subject of inverted headings, so we will proceed to the next argument.

The familiarity problem

The types of books under consideration are written by experts, who are specialists in their subjects. Whether a book was written for other specialists, either in the same subject or another, or for students, or even for the general public, sooner or later it is bound to be consulted by people who are new to the subject and do not know their way around it. An expert in one subject or branch of a subject may need to find details of another branch or a completely different subject; a student may be approaching the study of the topic for the first time; or a librarian may be asked to help readers to find information which is almost certain to be contained in this book.

In any of these cases, the users are unlikely to have much knowledge, if any, of the classification of the subject. Therefore, a classified index could leave them bemused, frustrated and unable to find the information which is there, but unattainable through the medium of the index.
classified v. specific indexing:

Adams needle 124
cortaderia selloana 126
flax 108
linum perenne 108
pampas grass 126
yucca filamentosa 124

This data comes from my *Field guide to garden plants*, in which the contents are arranged in a very useful classified order (useful to the gardener, that is) and there are two separate indexes of common names and scientific names. Personally, I slightly prefer a single combined index, such as I have concocted above, but the important point is that the indexes are in alphabetical order of plant names.

The last word

As several writers have pointed out, a classified index to a substantial work is likely to run to three, four or more levels of subdivision. This means that the actual subject of a particular index reference is to be found in the last position, i.e. the final sub-sub-subheading under a complicated sequence of headings and subheadings. This can make it more than a little difficult to locate the specific detailed subject being sought. Looking again at Figure 1. How quickly can the references to de minimis or restructuring be found?

On the contrary, most entries in a specific index will be made under 'last words', that is to say the concepts they represent, modified if necessary by a higher level in the hierarchy, e.g.

- restructuring
- manufacturing
- shipbuilding
- water industry

This procedure sometimes has a special advantage in that the resulting collection of entries under any of these concepts can, and frequently does, bring out relationships and connections which could not possibly be seen if a classified order alone is used. It is possible that some of these relationships may not even have occurred to the author, let alone to the newcomer reader.

As an example of this kind of serendipity, an index I produced recently showed twenty-five references under *Third parties*, deriving from 10 Divisions, without any deliberate intention on my part. A trawl through the very full contents lists of all thirteen Divisions of the work produced only five mentions of 'third parties', all of which were 'last words', at the tail end of anything from three to five levels of subdivision. Perhaps I am unduly solicitous on behalf of third parties who are, all too frequently, the customers of the 'party of the first part and the party of the second part', i.e. you and me, but this is just an anecdot to illustrate a serious point. The old, highly classified index to this book could never have supplied a reader with a useful list of references to *Third parties* as they were effectively buried in third, fourth or fifth place (if, indeed, they were there at all).

These arguments were supported by Dorothy Thomas when she wrote:

By the collection of information not discussed as specific subjects within the texts, but brought together in the index, providing the book with worthwhile unanticipated information it becomes a SYNERGISTIC INDEX (Thomas 1983).

Authors and readers

One of the arguments in favour of the classified form of index is that, with a single fixed location for a subject in the classification used by the authors or editors, i.e. divisions, chapters, sections, subsections, etc., the index can be kept short.

Luckily, not all basically classified indexes are as severe as to restrict entries to one per mention of the subject.

The author arranges the material according to his ideas and his purpose in writing the book. A particular subject may have one main place in his scheme, but may also appear in a subordinate role in several other widely separated chapters, as in the *Third parties* example above. There is certainly a great advantage to be gained in complementing this arrangement with a different order, based on specific entries. A parallel can be found in the alphabetical subject catalogue to a library collection, complementing the classified arrangement of the books on the shelves. The enquirer then has two routes available for finding the information he wants, via either the chapter structure or via the different sequence found in the index. In this context, two routes are very much better than one, and the reader is more likely to get to his destination than to get lost.

**Application to law book indexing**

This is the subject area where the classified versus specific indexing question seems to be still highly controversial. Most people familiar with legal literature will know that there is a long tradition of compiling and publishing classified indexes in law books. The assumption that this should still be the case seems to be implicit in two recent comments:

Legal indexing, at least in the major textbooks, reference works and law reports traditionally employs a thorough classified style of indexing, rather than the more straightforward alphabetical style (Brunt 1994).

I am firmly of the conviction (as in Norman Knight) that any true law index must begin with classification. Specific structure follows by the simple rule of breaking up headings which have too many subs — usually more than a column or two (Siebel 1994).

**The influence of tradition**

The law is well known for its conservative tendencies, which can encompass publishers and indexers as well as lawyers themselves. According to Andrew Green's researches (Green 1989), the tradition of classified indexing in law books was in position by 1657, at the latest, and was justified primarily on the grounds that the need was:

to draw attention to the main legal principles dealt with and to recognize other subjects only insofar as they illuminated these principles ... Most writers on legal method refer at some stage to the researcher's need first to analyse the legal principles and difficulties inherent in a particular set of circumstances and then ... 'to classify these points into the headings used in legal digests, indexes and textbooks'. In other words, indexing style is simply reflecting the normal process followed by and recommended to lawyers. However, the crucial question is, should it?

A somewhat different picture of the present day lawyer's requirements is drawn by Robert Spicer, himself a practising barrister:

Most law books are seldom read through, but often referred to: their users demand total accuracy, immediate accessibility and utter comprehensiveness from their indexes, and will complain loudly if these requirements are not fulfilled (Spicer 1994).

Robert Spicer, and other English lawyers used to court practice, have pointed out to me the vital importance, when in court, of being able to locate quickly in the relevant book(s) a point brought up by the opposing party. Whatever thought processes an experienced lawyer goes through, is a solicitor's clerk or some other legal auxiliary expected to go through a system of analysing the principles involved, and so on, when a new question crops up in open court? Supposing a question arises unexpectedly about character witnesses, what everyone in court needs is a specific entry in the practice manual under Character witnesses. In fact, several lawyers have said to me that the more specialised the topic of concern, the more necessary is a specific entry as a finding aid.

**Index or contents list?**

Occasionally, in its most extreme manifestation, the classified index may be little more than an alphabetically arranged version of the Table of Contents. It is fairly safe to say that most law books for professional readers include detailed lists of contents, either in the preliminary Table of Contents or at the beginning of each chapter. Space forbids the reproduction of the relevant contents list, but there is no doubt that there is a remarkably close correlation (though not, of course, complete) between the contents list and the index entries under *State aids*, in Figure 1. As a result of a small study performed on this particular Division and the relevant index entries, there were found to be only 22
entry in the whole of the volume index, relating to the Division concerned, other than those under State aids, which, themselves, formed about 85 per cent of the total entries for the Division. Consequently, an enquiry about the availability of aid for exports, would have to be answered by looking up:
State aids
Common Market, possibly compatible with export aid

Another example, not on the page illustrated, is the provision of state capital to businesses, which must be sought under:
State aids
capital, provision of shares, acquisition of

As a matter of record, there are no entries under Export ... or Capital ... and shares are represented by Share subscription agreements only. Frankly, I do wonder just how useful to readers this type of entry and this type of index structure really is? I am well aware that by no means all classified indexes follow contents lists so closely. But in so far as they do relate to them, how much real value do they provide for the users of the books? If the publisher goes to the trouble and expense of providing a very detailed contents list, and the example above is not at all unusual, the reader who wishes to make a ‘classified’ type of approach to the book can easily do so by consulting the contents list or lists. Does it not make good sense for the index to provide a different type of approach? In fact, is it really worthwhile, in either intellectual or economic terms, to publish a seriously classified index at all?

Looking to the future
Are our lawyer friends as wedded to classified indexes as some people seem to think? A reliable answer to that question would require substantial research. However, I believe that I may have identified a trend, for which I can offer three pieces of evidence, to whose truth I can attest. By a happy chance, three of the largest English law publishers are each represented by one example.

The authors and editors of a large looseleaf work sent the publishers a list of sixty-one leading terms in their subject which did not feature at all as main headings in the index, and which they wished to see added. They probably did not know that they were demanding specific indexing, but that was undoubtedly what they wanted. Incidentally, writers on indexing often forget that the first people who have to be satisfied by the index to a looseleaf publication are the authors themselves. When these busy people come to prepare the next supplement, they have no time for analysing the subject, they need to be led as directly as possible to all the paragraphs which may need amendment. As a result, the publishers commissioned a completely new specific index.

A book review already mentioned (Mathis 1994) gave examples of specific entries of which the writers approved, e.g.:

The old index said ‘Force majeure. See Act of God’. One then turned to ‘Act of God’ and found ‘Act of God, British Railways Board’s conditions of carriage, 3171 ...’. If you didn’t give up, force majeure was indeed further down, but now we have a complete topic heading Force majeure clauses.

Finally, it was reported that at a launch party for the book of which he was a joint author, Jack Black said that ‘The index produced is the best he had ever seen in any publication, recognising the huge significance of a work having a thorough and accessible index’ (Indexes reviewed 1995). The index concerned is quite an ordinary, straightforward specific entry index. It can only be concluded that this unfortunate author had never seen a specific entry index before, but has now been converted.

So, let us hope that all publishers and indexers will unite in insisting on good specific entry indexes so that all readers, including lawyers, can find what they need quickly and easily.

Betty Moys is a Registered Indexer, co-author of Indexing Legal Materials and a winner of the Wheatley Medal.

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