

# Do Mi's Second Rule or the functions of subheadings

Do Mi Stauber

*Subheadings assist the reader in navigating the webs of information presented by the text. This article, condensed from Facing the text: content and structure in book indexing, provides guidelines for the process of choosing subheadings, emphasizing their function of breaking down the information in the main heading.*

When should you use subheadings, and how should you decide which ones to use? Many beginners start by choosing subheadings based on their relationship to the main heading. These specific types of guinea-pig should be subheadings of 'guinea-pigs', shouldn't they? Surely the fact that high-tech companies supported the Democratic Party should be a subheading in the entry for the party? These relationships are important! But this criterion is not sufficient, because it does not take into consideration the reason for making subheadings in the first place.

Do Mi's Second Rule can help you keep the reader firmly in mind as you choose subheadings. The rule, simply stated, goes like this: Make subheadings only for the purpose of breaking down the information in the main heading.

For example, look at these subheadings for a work of fiction:

*The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien)

- Catholicism in
- characterization in
- film adaptation
- good vs. evil in
- influence on fantasy genre
- nature description in
- popularity of

Is this an acceptable set of subheadings? Well, we may say, they are all related to the main heading and give additional information about its topic. No rules are being broken here. So yes, it is probably a fine way to break down this main heading.

But we just made this judgement without looking at the individual text, and that is a mistake. This breakdown may or may not be appropriate, depending on the structure of the text.

For instance, let us first assume that this main entry represents a 20-page chapter about *The Lord of the Rings*. The first two pages are an introduction in which the author refers to all of the individual topics above, before moving on to discuss the recent movie adaptation for the other 18 pages. This scenario gives us the following main entry with locators:

*The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien), 28–48  
Catholicism in, 28

- characterization in, 28–29
- film adaptation, 30–48
- good vs. evil in, 28
- influence on fantasy genre, 29
- nature description in, 29
- popularity of, 29

This breakdown illustrates a very common indexing error. It provides six subheadings for the same two pages, while leaving the reader to wade through 18 pages on one topic. Although the subheadings are phrased acceptably, and record information from the text, they are not helpful. Just because a phrase is appropriately related to the main heading does not mean that it is a good subheading.

A better organization method for this scenario would be one that broke the movie discussion into several segments. The other topics, as part of a general introduction, might receive main headings, but would not appear as subheadings of the chapter topic.

Now let us suppose that this chapter is organized differently. This author is not so obsessed with the movie, and is providing a balanced overview of several different topics about the book. For the first four pages, she discusses the popularity of the work, specifically its influence on the fantasy genre. Next, she reviews Tolkien's writing style, with mixed examples about the use of language for characterization and for the evocation of natural settings. In the third section, she talks about Tolkien's views on the theme of good and evil and the ways in which they are informed by his Catholic faith. Finally, she addresses the ways in which filmmakers have adapted this work to the screen, leading to the following possible subheadings:

*The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien), 28–48  
Catholicism in, 39–44  
characterization in, 33–38  
film adaptations, 44–48  
good vs. evil in, 39–44  
influence on fantasy genre, 28–32  
nature description in, 33–38  
popularity of, 28–32

What do we think of our breakdown now? It is certainly better than the first one, since there are no large chunks of text through which the reader must wade. But it does have

two subheadings for each section – a lot of duplication. For this scenario, a breakdown like this would be better:

*The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien), 28–48  
 film adaptation, 44–48  
 influence of, 28–32  
 style in, 33–38  
 themes in, 39–44

Look carefully at these two groups of subheadings. The difference between them is *not* in the kinds of subheadings or the ways in which they connect to the main heading. It is not in the importance of the topics addressed. The difference is in the ways the subheadings divide up the information in the text. Do Mi's Second Rule is meant to remind us that the purpose of subheadings is to break down the main heading.

Test yourself on this example: Should William Jennings Bryan's 'Cross of Gold' speech be indexed as a subheading under his name? Beginning indexers often ask questions in this form. If you asked a group of experienced indexers this question, I suspect that many of them would say yes – thinking only about the relationship between the two concepts. But in the large encyclopedia where I found Bryan, he appeared on only five pages – not enough for subheadings. Furthermore, the famous speech was discussed on three of them. The answer to our question should be, 'Only if it is needed to break down the information in the main heading.' Before deciding whether a subheading is appropriate, you must first examine the structure of the text.

### What to do with important subheadings

The main reason that indexers break this rule unnecessarily is that individual subheads seem more important than they really are. For instance, a beginning indexer, faced with a dense chapter about the former Czechoslovakia in a scholarly book in political economics, was confused about which topics to use as subheadings under the country name. She was worried that making subheadings under Czechoslovakia for the 20 political parties discussed in the chapter would make the entry too unwieldy. This indexer was absolutely right that those political parties needed to be indexed. Her mistake was in assuming that they needed to be indexed *under Czechoslovakia*, simply because they were Czech political parties.

If a subheading is important in itself, make a main heading for it. In this example, each political party should have a main heading. The Czechoslovakia main heading should be given subheadings that divide its locators into readable pieces of text. One common question is, 'But what if readers are looking for a particular Czech political party? Don't they need to find it under Czechoslovakia?' The answer is no. If the party name is important, readers will look under the main heading for that name. If Czechoslovakia itself is the topic of interest, they need to be guided through its information with subheadings that break it into accessible pieces.

In our original example, we discarded such subheadings for *The Lord of the Rings* as 'Catholicism in' and 'character-

ization in'. You might well protest that characterization, even if only discussed substantively on one page, is an important concept in a book of literary criticism. You would be right. 'Characterization' should be a main heading:

Characterization  
 Tolkien's use of

or

Characterization  
 in *The Lord of the Rings*

Mistakes stemming from breaking Do Mi's Second Rule are extremely common. For instance, in the following main entry (complete as shown) from an education textbook index (Peters and Gega, 2001), the indexer was thinking only about the structure of the text and the relationships of the subheading concepts to the main heading. The relationships are fine, but the subheadings are not useful. Each of these topics should have had a main heading, and the subheadings should have been deleted:

Concrete operations, 34–35  
 cause and effect thinking, 34  
 classifying and ordering, 34  
 conservative thinking, 35  
 relative thinking, 34

### Don't write the book in the index

Another common reason for breaking Do Mi's Second Rule is the urge to preserve subheadings that draw attention to interesting connections between topics or to unique aspects of the main heading. For instance, in a book about sexual abuse (Russell, 2000), I had made a main heading for 'Disclosure reluctance'. One of my tentative subheadings was 'minority women'. This subheading turned out not to be useful in my breakdown of the main heading; its pages were all covered by other subheads. But I hesitated to eliminate it, feeling that the relationship between minority status and reluctance to disclose sexual abuse is important. The rule reminded me that readers interested in minority women will look under the main heading there. The important connection between the two topics was made by the author in the text, and did not need to be made by me in the index.

You do not have to write the book in the index. The author of the book will make the connection. Your job is to lead the reader from every useful access point to the place in the text where that connection is made.

### Text structure, index structure, and Do Mi's Second Rule

Do Mi's Second Rule can help you make crucial distinctions between the text structure and your index structure. For instance, in a scholarly book about the future of universities (Rhodes, 2001) I had identified 'for-profit institutions' as the local main topic of a two-page section. I made a main

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heading for 'For-profit institutions.' Then I read the section more closely. Ancillary topics were sparse, but there were smaller subtopics within the section, including a paragraph about the success of these institutions. This was a real topic; it was the local main topic of the paragraph. It would have made a fine subheading ('success of') under 'For-profit institutions.' But 'For-profit institutions' appeared only on pages 145–146. I did not need to break it down, and therefore I did not make this subheading. Moreover, 'success' as a topic could not stand alone in the index. Even though it was a legitimate part of the text structure, I did not index it at all.

## Exceptions to Do Mi's Second Rule

Do Mi's Second Rule, then, states that subheadings should be chosen for the purpose of helpfully breaking down the information in a main heading. This means that there are some clues that can tell you if you are breaking the rule. If you have several subheadings that include the same locator, if you have a subheading with a large locator span or a long string of locators, or if you have provided six subheadings for a main entry with only two locators, you might suspect a problem. You may have been choosing subheadings by transplanting the text structure, or fixating on subhead-main head relationships, without analyzing how the entry is being broken down. But the 'rule' is not about what kinds of subheadings are allowable. It is about the *reasoning* you use to create them. Any of these normally dubious kinds of subheading structures, in certain situations, may be the best possible choice for providing information to your readers.

### Long locator strings and spans

Ordinarily, you will strenuously avoid making the reader find a way through a long series or span of locators. But on rare occasions, subheadings with 'too many' locators are necessary. One example is a subheading for a feature of the book, such as a sample form, bibliography, or chronology, that cannot be broken down: 'Individual Education programs (IEPs)/sample, 195–210.'

Another case is an encyclopedia in which the same piece of information is duplicated in many articles. For instance, in a very detailed and repetitive encyclopedia on Greek and Roman mythology (Dixon-Kennedy, 1998), each person and event was discussed with similar information in many articles. The story of the death of Patroclus was told repeatedly, in various articles including those about Achilles, Agamemnon, and the Myrmidones. My subheading for 'death of' under Patroclus had nine locators. There simply was no way either to judge any of these discussions as irrelevant, or to break the topic down further.

### Main entries with few locators

Making subheadings for a main entry with only a few locators is another possible sign of problems. It is rare for me to do this with only one or two locators, but with four or five I find the decision much more subjective. For instance, in a film-art textbook (Bordwell and Thompson, 2003), with

clear subheading topics always available and an editor wanting a detailed index, I broke down most film titles when they had four or more locators:

8½  
 costume in, 186  
 depth of knowledge in, 86  
 film production in, 33  
 sound in, 374

I also may provide subheadings for a main heading with few locators when the concept, although important, is slightly vague and needs subheadings to give it meaning.

### Do Mi's First Rule and overlapping locators

Do Mi's First Rule also applies to subheadings. A review of this rule: Once you decide to index a topic, you must index all substantive information about that topic. Therefore, if you decide to use a subheading under a particular main heading, you must include all page references for the main head that fit in that subheading – even if they also belong in another one.

This can happen in a very simple way. For instance, in a mass communication textbook (Baran, 2003), each chapter on a particular medium contained a section on history, which I indexed under 'History' as a main heading. In the section from the chapter on books, newspapers were referenced. This led to a minor overlap: page 71, on which 'newspapers' appears as an ancillary topic in the discussion on the history of books, belongs in the subheadings for both books and newspapers:

History  
 books, 69–72  
 newspapers, 71, 103–110

### Complex indexes and overlapping locators

In a complex, interwoven scholarly monograph, relationships between concepts may overlap so much that some duplication of subheadings becomes unavoidable. For instance, these are the entries I made for a two-page discussion in *The Birth of Bebop* (DeVeaux, 1997), a scholarly book about jazz history:

Armstrong, Louis  
 entertainer role, 136  
 and stereotypes, 136  
 Basie band  
 and stereotypes, 136  
 Calloway, Cab  
 and stereotypes, 136  
 Dance orchestras  
 and entertainer role, 135–136  
 and stereotypes, 135–136  
 Ellington, Duke  
 and stereotypes, 136  
 Entertainer role  
 Armstrong's comfort with, 136

- and dance orchestras, 135–136
- and stereotypes, 135–136
- Hampton, Lionel
  - and stereotypes, 136
- Lunceford, Jimmie, 136
- Stereotypes
  - and entertainer role, 135–136

Note that several main headings have two or three subheadings on the same two pages. As you index, you may make multiple subheadings like this, only to delete some of them when you edit the complete entry. In this case, though, I kept most of them, because once I had indexed all of the pages, I saw that in order to cover each locator with a meaningful subheading, I needed them all – even though they overlapped. Here is the whole entry for ‘Entertainer role’:

#### Entertainer role

- Armstrong's comfort with, 26–27n, 49, 74–75, 77, 136, 435
- and bebop pioneers, 397–398
- and Black mass audiences, 53, 340
- Calloway's facility in, 49, 181, 333, 435
- and dance orchestras, 48–49, 126–127, 135–136, 156, 300
- and Eckstine band, 348
- Gillespie's accommodation to, 49, 172, 173, 183, 435–436
- Gillespie's disdain for, 397
- Hawkins' lack of interest in, 75, 160–161, 329
- and jazz as art, 15
- and racial militancy, 26–27n
- resistance to, 24, 89, 173, 397–398
- and stereotypes, 49, 62–63, 135–136, 258, 397
- and virtuoso role, 134–135

#### Text structure and overlapping locators

Sometimes overlapping locators in subheadings are necessary because of the structure of the text – another type of exception to Do Mi's Second Rule.

#### Overlapping topics

When local main topics overlap in the text, you may have no choice but to overlap locators in the subheadings. For example, in a reference handbook on gay rights (Walzer, 2001), there were many discussions about important Supreme Court cases. These discussions were patterned, with repeating sections on the majority opinion, dissenting opinions, concurring opinions, and analysis. In many cases I could use these local main topics as my subheadings, leading to a graceful breakdown. The ‘analysis’ section for *Bowers v. Hardwick*, however, was so long that I had to look for other topics within the very complex section, which did not break down easily into smaller pieces. The conceptual topics I found within it (constitutional ghetto, due process doctrine, suspect class status, and so on) overlapped throughout the section, leading to these subheadings (note the long span for pages 171–182; this is the Court document itself):

- Bowers v. Hardwick*, 67–82, 171–182, 276–277
  - and *Baker v. Vermont*, 126
  - and constitutional ghetto, 70–72, 76–77, 78–79, 145, 146
  - dissenting opinions, 73–74
  - and *Doe v. Commonwealth's Attorney*, 75, 280
  - and due process doctrine, 70, 71, 76, 80–81
  - and *Equality Foundation v. City of Cincinnati*, 285
  - impact of, 64, 74, 81–82, 94–95, 142, 145, 146
  - majority opinion, 69–73
  - opposition rhetoric in, 71, 77, 142, 153, 154–155
  - and prejudice, 72, 76–77, 79, 148
  - and rational basis standard, 72, 74, 81
  - and religion, 6
  - and *Romer v. Evans*, 93, 98–99, 277
  - and *Stanley v. Georgia*, 70–71, 73, 75–76, 146
  - and suspect class status, 80–81, 126

#### Very small sections

Awkward-looking subheading locators can also be necessary when a span is divided into very small sections. For instance, a chapter on visual aids in a public-speaking textbook (Jaffe, 2003) was 18 pages long and definitely needed a breakdown. The chapter was divided into sections about specific visual aids that were often only one or two pages long. But they were not grouped in any way, and so it was necessary to have, for instance, four subheadings including page 219 – inelegant, but better than not giving the reader the information:

- Visual aids, 212–230
  - charts, 220–221
  - computer technology for, 225–228
  - drawings, 223
  - general guidelines, 229
  - graphs, 221
  - importance of, 212–213
  - informative speaking, 298, 299
  - in introduction, 179
  - lists, 219–220
  - maps, 223–224
  - models, 219
  - objects, 218–219
  - people, 219
  - photographs, 221–222
    - and public speaking anxiety, 31
    - and statistics, 142, 144–145
  - student speech, 231–233
  - technology types, 213–217
  - video materials, 224–225

Other situations in which overlapping locators can be warranted include subheadings that cannot stand alone and add value to a large, complex entry, a definition of the main heading topic, and features in the text.

#### Summary of Do Mi's Second Rule

Do Mi's Second Rule is not really a rule. It is a guideline for the priorities you should follow when creating subheadings.

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The main function of subheadings is to break down, with efficiency and grace, the information you have collected in the main heading. Important topics will have their own main entries. Ask yourself, 'Why am I making these particular subheadings?' If the answer is, 'Because those are the text headings,' or 'Because those concepts are subtopics of the main heading,' then you are breaking the rule, no matter what your subheadings look like. You may sometimes need to overlap page references in multiple subheadings, or to use subheadings with very short spans. But if you are able to answer the above question with, 'Because that is the best way to break up the information in the main heading locators,' then you are indexing well.

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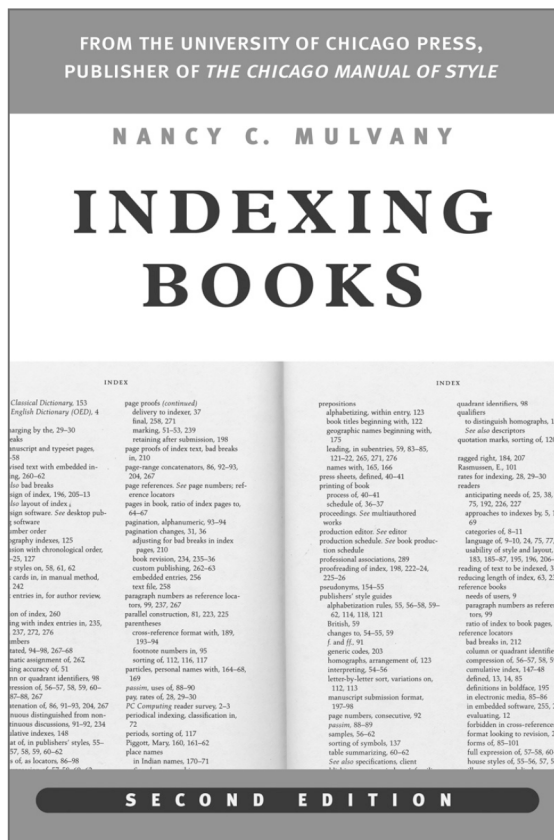
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Clue: His work should have a contented outcome  
 Solution: Indexer  
 (The Times cryptic crossword, 6 September 2005)

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