

Compiling an Index

Please read these notes and follow the instructions carefully as additional work done on the index at the typesetter may be charged to you.

The index to your book is an important component and should not be simply an afterthought. Remember, reviewers are often only too quick to expose a poorly compiled or inadequate index! Before you start preparing your index, look in books on your own shelves to get an idea of what constitutes a good index. How detailed does it need to be?

The proofs of your book cannot be provided in Microsoft Word (which in any case has a fairly crude indexing facility) or any other word processing program. The index therefore has to be done manually. Your files are imported into the typesetting program, pages are laid out, and the proofs output as PDFs. The page numbers, which of course you need to complete the index, can only be determined once the design is complete.

The PDF will be searchable by word/phrase. It is possible to compile a basic index using this although to incorporate concepts, ideas and relationships – rather than just terms, names and words – it may be better to print the PDF and compile an index by reading through and typing up a list.

If a topic is discussed continually over two or more pages, record the reference as a range: '34–5'. If it merely receives isolated refs, record individual pages: '34, 35'.

Think about meanings, not just words. Don't record every mention, only substantial ones. Don't index casual and irrelevant mentions. Always record doubtful entries for later consideration. It is easier to take them out at the end than it is adding more in.

Think about how a reader unfamiliar with the book may want to use it: what kinds of words and ideas would be looked up in an index. Sub-entries are often necessary. Be consistent in how detailed you are though.

Why can't I use an indexing program to index my book?

Some computer programs and word processors, claim to produce indexes but, in fact, produce, 'concordances' – lists showing where specific words or phrases appear in the text. Language is complex and concordances have serious shortcomings when compared to an index produced by a professional human indexer. For more on this see www.indexers.org.uk/about-indexing/authors-indexes/

Rather than following the 'analytic' system: e.g.

Ali, Muhammad, 45–6, 77
archery, 56–7
Arsenal, 101

boxing, 45–6
croquet, 62
George, Charlie, 33, 210
sports, 11–19, *see under individual entries*
Wade, Virginia, 44, 56

an index is easier to use if you follow the ‘synthetic’ system with subentries:

Ali, Muhammad, 45–6, 77
George, Charlie, 33, 210
 see also Arsenal
sports, 11–19;
 archery, 56–7; boxing, 45–6; croquet, 62
Wade, Virginia, 44, 56

Include a short description if necessary: e.g. Morocco’s King Hassan should be indexed as ‘Hassan, King of Morocco’. Be careful to distinguish between similar or identical names. If you are unable to use the ‘en dash’ or ‘en rule’ – in number and date elisions, please use two hyphens as this is used by the typesetter to search for and replace.

Note also the elision of page spans: include the tens only in teens, so for example: 3–4, 13–14, 23–4, 102–3, 110–11, 123–4, 1001–8. Note however that date spans should include the decades, e.g. 1945–46.

BE CONSISTENT

Follow exactly the same style and spelling that has been used in the text. Remember to include any accents and italics where necessary (be careful not to italicise commas used to separate entries or page numbers though). Note the use of capital letters and hyphens: e.g. if it is ‘Second World War’ in the text then it must also be in the index, and not ‘World War II’. Similarly ‘postwar’/‘post-war’; ‘Romania’/‘Rumania’; etc.

Always index a concrete heading: e.g. ‘inflation rate, rise in’, rather than ‘rise in inflation rate’; but ‘diamond mines’, not ‘mines, diamond’; ignore ‘the’ and ‘a’, even if in a name, *Shining, The*, not *The Shining*.

For the prefix ‘Mc’ and ‘Mac’, follow the alphabetical style used in your bibliography. Please don’t use ‘passim’, ‘ibid’, ‘op cit’ etc.

Transliteration, e.g. of Arabic names/words, is always a problem. There is no hard and fast rule – please be consistent in whichever style you choose.

When you’ve finished, carefully type up the entries as a list, keeping to the style used in the text, use the Word sort feature to ensure they are in alphabetical order and email this to us as a Word attachment.

Some additional conventions apply if you are indexing a law book.