

thinking
of
becoming
an
indexer?

If you think indexing may be for you, have a go at the questionnaire and simple indexing exercises on the next pages . . .

First, try this questionnaire to check whether you might be suited to becoming an indexer

I enjoy words and texts.	YES	NO
I can quickly read a text and say what each section is about.	YES	NO
I use indexes regularly.	YES	NO
I can be organized and meticulous.	YES	NO
My general knowledge is good.	YES	NO
I have up-to-date specialist knowledge.	YES	NO
I can copy accurately.	YES	NO
I can spell correctly without relying on a spellchecker.	YES	NO
I can easily spot errors in texts.	YES	NO
I am aware of the rules and conventions of grammar.	YES	NO
I am good at finding and correcting my own mistakes.	YES	NO
I can work impartially and objectively on material with which I may not agree.	YES	NO
I am familiar with a good range of reference sources and can use them easily.	YES	NO
I am sufficiently motivated to cope with working alone to tight deadlines, while still producing high-quality results.	YES	NO
I'd like to be a freelance indexer and have the necessary business skills (or could acquire them).	YES	NO
I can communicate effectively by phone, email and letter.	YES	NO
I am prepared to spend time and money on training.	YES	NO
I am prepared, financially, to allow time for building up an indexing business and a client base.	YES	NO
I use computers regularly.	YES	NO
I am generally at ease with electronic technology (e.g. email).	YES	NO

If you have answered 'YES' to all (or most) questions so far, read on . . .

... Here are a few exercises in which you can test some of the abilities mentioned on the previous page and get an idea of what indexing involves.

1

Read this extract from a booklet on old English crafts, and then answer the questions

In the 18th century, following the influence of France and Italy, straw hats became fashionable in England and many were imported from Livorno in Tuscany. The Napoleonic wars put an end to these imports and the straw hat industry here began to grow. For two hundred years, up to the start of the 20th century, it prospered in parts of Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Essex, with production centring on Luton. (The football team there is still nicknamed 'The Hatters'.)

To make the hats required straw, workers to plait it and sew it, and workshops to form and finish the hats. The types of long-stemmed wheat that grew in the area were particularly suited for making hats and other items such as baskets, boxes and toys. Special tools were developed to split the wheat stems into fine strands, and dyes were produced to colour the straw.

The plaiting and sewing was done by home-workers, mainly women and children, who preferred it to stone-picking in the fields. The money earned was important to families, but the children's health and education were largely ignored.

The industry began to decline towards the end of the 19th century, because of imports from other Western European countries and, later, from the Far East.

- (a) What is the principal topic of this piece, and what terms could be used to describe the topic in an index to this booklet?
- (b) Which other index terms do you think might be included?

Remember that the purpose of an index to a book is to enable readers to find information relevant to particular topics, by referring from the index headings to the specific pages or paragraphs where the information can be found.

2

This is an extract from a supposed biography of a TV celebrity...

After returning to Britain from Venezuela, Nat worked for a short time as a security guard at Bleachford Bowman's flour mill (close to the old family home at Holden), but did not find the company perk of free Sweetibisks a sufficient attraction, so left to become a driver for one of the new millionaires created by the National Lottery. 'The whole direction of my life changed as a result of working for Chris Laddson at The Manor. Chris just didn't know how to handle money, and was eager for advice from someone who lived "in the real world and could talk basic, not jargon like those so-called financial advisers"'. Chris called me "the Chief of the Treasury"! I could have exploited it to my own advantage, but I didn't. I earned a salary as a driver, but Chris introduced me to the entertainment industry, so when I decided to try to get the D-Group together again, and later, when Kit Wanstone and I needed backing for our new label, I knew who to approach for financial support. The entertainment industry has been very good to me. It's given me a good living, and many friends; you could say it's my home.' Nat left Chris's employ after five years, but they remain good friends, and Nat visited Chris regularly while he was serving his sentence (for fraud) in Oddsville Prison during the 1990s.

... and here are some index terms that an overenthusiastic novice might have chosen for this extract. Select **six** that you think would be important for this kind of book:

Bleachford Bowman	imprisonment
Britain	label, new
'Chief of the Treasury'	Laddson, Chris
D-Group	Manor, The
driver	millionaires, new
employment	National Lottery
entertainment industry	Oddsville Prison
financial advisers	security guard
flour mill	Sweetibisks
fraud	Venezuela
friends	Wanstone, Kit
Holden	

3

There is something wrong with many of these index entries. See how many errors and inconsistencies you can find.

Florence Nightingale 140
 forensic science 34, 32, 47
 gambling 134
 housing estates 94095
 hypermarkets 211
 institute of british geographers 357–358
 imagination 19
 International Monetary fund (IMF) 332–333
 literary festivals 89
 music hall songs 27
 nightclub 93, 133
 oral history 267, 293 301
 Puccini, Giacomo, 123
 racehorses 69
 science fiction 245–6, 248–249
 urban renewal 96–97

4

Sort the following terms into alphabetical order, *without* using your word processor's 'sort' function, and check your result against the answers on page 8.

sovereignty	scientology
salariat	schnapps
saltpetre	symmetry
sabres	sienna
syllogisation	scissors
scholasticism	sabotage
spectra	sceptres
somnambulism	sanatoria
samovars	ymbiosis
seismology	shamaniana

Indexers need a good understanding of alphabetization because computer software does not always sort complex terms in the most suitable way.

ANSWERS

1

- (a) The **major topic** of the piece is 'straw hats', so the most obviously suitable index term is:

straw hats
or
 straw hat industry

But readers may look up either 'straw' or 'hats' in the index, so it is also useful to include the inverted form as an index term:

hats, straw

- (b) Readers may also want to look up:

place names: Luton, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, and possibly Livorno, Tuscany

topics: Napoleonic Wars, child labour, female labour.

Other terms that you may have chosen (e.g. baskets, fashion, Far East, football, stone-picking) refer only to **minor mentions** (i.e. they give very little information), and so would not normally be indexed for such a piece.

2

Among your six items you should have included the following:

Bleachford Bowman
 D-group
 Laddson, Chris
 Wanstone, Kit

Other **names**, e.g. 'Oddsville Prison' and 'Manor, The', could also be relevant.

Useful **subject entries** would be 'entertainment industry' (though as the book is a biography of a TV celebrity this might prove to be too broad to be useful), and 'employment', which may eventually need **subheadings** ('security guard', 'driver', etc.) to refer to a number of different jobs undertaken by the person who is the subject of the book.

*Indexing is not just a matter of spotting names or 'significant' words, and (as indicated in the previous answer) index entries are made **only if they lead to worthwhile information**. The text is an extract; the final index entries can only be decided in the light of the content and context of the book as a whole.*

3

Florence Nightingale 140	<i>Should be</i> Nightingale, Florence (<i>under N</i>)
forensic science 34, 32, 47	<i>Numbers out of order: should be</i> 32, 34, 47
gambling 134	
housing estates 94095	<i>Typing error: should be</i> 94–95
hyphermarkets 211	<i>Typing/spelling error: should be</i> hypermarkets
institute of british geographers 357–358	<i>Should have initial capitals:</i> Institute of British Geographers
imagination 19	<i>Misfiled: should come before</i> Institute...
International Monetary fund (IMF) 332–333	<i>Capital letter needed for Fund</i>
literary festivals 89	
musichall songs 27	<i>Should be</i> music-hall ...
nightclub 93, 133	<i>Plural should be used for</i> 'countable' nouns
oral history 267, 293 301	<i>Comma missing between the last</i> <i>two numbers</i>
Puccini, Giacomo, 123	<i>Use of comma and one space before</i> <i>page number is inconsistent with</i> <i>rest of index</i>
racehorses 69	
science fiction 245–6, 248–249	<i>Inconsistent style for page ranges</i>
urban renewall 96–97	<i>Spelling or typing error: should be</i> renewal

sabotage
sabres
salarial
saltpetre
samovars
sanatoria
sceptres
schnapps
scholasticism
scientology
scissors
seismology
shamaniana
sienna
somnambulism
sovereignty
spectra
syllogisation
symbiosis
symmetry

Getting a full set of correct answers does not guarantee that you will be a successful indexer; nor does getting a few answers 'wrong' mean that you could not become a good indexer. Many vital indexing activities cannot be adequately tested in a short exercise; this has just given you a taste of what is involved. But you should have gained some idea of your suitability and so be able to decide whether it is likely to be worth while embarking on a course of training.

GOOD LUCK!

For more information on training and a career in indexing go to the Society of Indexers' website:

www.indexers.org.uk

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