WRITING & EDITING

Editors and Indexes

by Daniel A. Connolly

It is not unusual for publishers and editors who have not come from a scholarly background, or who have worked mainly with fiction, to have an incomplete understanding of what an index is and how to work with indexers.

An index is simply a key to locating information contained in a print or online publication. Ideally, an index provides references to the location of important information, and deliberately excludes references to irrelevant information. This distinction is vital. The functionality of an index can affect sales of the book if prospective buyers thumb through the index prior to purchase.

Functionality and style

Be prepared to inform the indexer of what your style guide is when you send the proofs to him or her. Have a style guide for your indexes. Consult reference works such as *The Chicago Manual of Style* to review accepted standards for indexes. Peruse books that have indexes you like, and copy their style. Develop a written "indexing guidelines" document in which you specify whether illustrations and captions will be indexed, for example, and whether these references should be identified typographically. Determine whether the format will be run-in or indented.

Let your indexer know what your style preferences are. Send your guidelines with the proofs. If written guidelines are unavailable, provide the indexer with a sample index and ask him or her to follow its style.

Provide the indexer with some idea of the depth of indexing required, or an index length to shoot for. Many publishers ask their typesetters how much space is available for an index. A typesetter might say, for instance, that the index must fit within "four pages with two columns each, with 48 characters per line and 40 lines per column," which would result in 320 lines at 48 characters/line. These guidelines can help an indexer to edit the index to your specifications.

You might decide not to specify an index length limit, and later realize that it is necessary to cut material from the index. In such cases, discuss the cuts with the indexer. He or she will provide you with insight into the structure of the index, and will indicate where

the index can be cut or how it can be reworked to fit into the available space.

Contract concerns

Unlike copyeditors and proofreaders, indexers usually work for project rates. That is, they charge by the project, not by the hour. This usually takes the form of page rates (although there are other methods available, such as per entry, per line, or per book). Lead time needed for the creation of an index will vary according to the size and complexity of the project.

Editors and publishers should note that in some countries they may not be legally able to publish an index unless they have received an assignment of rights or have explicitly contracted the creation of the index as a "work-made-for-hire." A "work-made-for-hire" involves two criteria: the index is specially ordered or commissioned and this arrangement is also documented in a specific, written contract. Unless both of these conditions are met, the work is not considered a work-made-for-hire and the indexer may retain all rights to his or her work.

To find an indexer in a special field, contact the American Society of Indexers (www.asindexing.org) or the society of indexers in your country, if one exists. If the original work is very complex, then it is even more important to work with a professional who understands how to create and enhance an index for your particular type of book. •

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