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Indexing Pointers for Scholars

Beyond the fact that indexes are now a standard part of scholarly volumes, an index is really your reader's way into your book. Your writing is full of interesting things, but if they can't be found fewer people will buy your book, use it as a teaching tool, and cite it in their own work. So it is worth spending a bit of time figuring out how to get the best index you can. Here are some tips that will help.

When do I need to start thinking about my index?
~ Indexing doesn't usually start until you have typeset proofs with final pagination. Some publishers ask that indexes be prepared before these final proofs are ready, but beware: if you (or your indexer) create an index with page numbers from proofs without final pagination, it will be very time consuming and/or expensive to redo the page numbering!

What kind of index do I need?
~ Most humanities scholars we know want a subject index. This kind of index includes names and places (entries for searchable terms, like Thomas More; *La vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel*; the Pantheon; Shanghai) as well as topics important to your book's subject area and your field overall that may not be automatically searchable and that therefore require careful reading of the text—things like book collecting; happiness; music performances; vaccinations; wages.

What part of the indexing work do I have to do?
~ It depends on your publisher. Some handle (and pay for) the whole process; you have only to approve the final proofs. Most require that you shoulder the cost (either in time, if you do it yourself; or in money, if you hire a professional). If you have time and an interest, you can index your own book, but don't underestimate how long it takes. If you don't have time, consider hiring a professional. We specialize in scholarly indexes; you can also ask colleagues for recommendations or look online—just be sure to get a field expert rather than a generic indexer, if possible.

How long does it take and how much does it cost?
~ This also depends. When we do an index for a 200-typeset-page book we like to have three weeks from receipt of final proofs to complete draft, but projects vary. Professional indexers charge by the typeset page (some standard rates are here; specialist books like yours will often be at the higher end of this spectrum) and should identify 7–10 indexable terms per page. Because we're scholars with field-specific expertise in the humanities, we tend to find more (12–20 per page) because we tailor to your readership. Brace yourself: a scholarly subject index usually costs over 1000 USD/1350 CAD/900 EUR, but research or publishing grants from your university will often cover this. Ask for funding early!

What do I need to know before getting started?
~ Your publisher will want your index prepared to a specific style (e.g., Chicago Manual of Style or a "house" style): a certain number of columns, a specific layout for indentation, a particular type of alphabetization, and a precise format for page runs, references to notes, etc. You'll want to know what that style is before indexing starts and also any other requirements of the publisher (such as length maxima).

How do I get started?
~ We recommend creating an "index primer" by spending half an hour jotting down: 1. What <u>you</u> consider the most important themes of your book, and 2. What you think <u>readers</u> will want to be able to find. You might consider hot topics in your field, new contributions your book makes, and subjects that might make the volume more appealing and useful to libraries, instructors, students, etc. This is a great way to start figuring out for yourself what the major entries of your subject list will be, and is a helpful guide for a professional indexer when you use one.

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What is a subject list?

~ We call a "subject list" the complete list of terms that will be indexed in a given book. Listed as nouns, these terms include names of people, places, and institutions; titles of works/documents discussed (e.g., your primary sources); and themes, ideas, subjects, and topics—all (eventually) organized alphabetically. If a given term—an "entry" in the index—appears more than 6 to 10 times in the book, it probably needs to be broken down into parts—"subentries." You will want to think carefully about which terms to use, and also about helpful cross-references. Simpler is usually better, but it is also wise to start by overindexing, since underindexing means going back and starting the process from the beginning.

Who should create the subject list, and how?

~ The subject list is a tool for the reader, so the best way to build a subject list is to read the book with care from beginning to end, tracking indexable terms. Some authors choose to build their own subject list and then have a professional indexer insert the page numbers against the relevant entries/sub-entries and format the index. This saves on cost but takes up your time. Professional indexers often automate much of the process, but we find that for field-specific subject indexes careful reading and knowledge of the field are vital. If you hire a professional, ask what tools they use to index (we index by hand as well as by search) and whether they—at minimum—have experience indexing scholarly books. (We sometimes get asked to redo indexes that have been done poorly—this is frustrating and expensive, and it delays publication. It's also why we recommend finding a good indexer the first time around!)

What parts of my book should be indexed?

~ Substantive elements only. Include critical introductions, the text itself, substantive notes, supplementary material that is relevant to the subject, and images. Exclude prefatory material, references in notes (other scholars are usually only indexed if they are discussed analytically), bibliographies, and non-substantive supplementary material. Chronologies, genealogies, appendices, tables, etc. should be decided on a case-by-case basis with your publisher or indexer.

What happens after I have a subject list that includes page references (a draft index)?

~ Once you have a complete draft index it needs to be formatted according to the publisher's style sheet, alphabetized by entry and sub-entry, and cross-referenced. These aspects can be quite complex, so plan to spend lots of time on clean-up. Unnecessary entries need to be deleted and the index copyedited. Once you have a clean copy of the formatted index, you'll send it to the publisher, who will typeset it. You (or your indexer) will proof the typeset index and provide corrections until no more errors can be found and you approve the typeset proofs for printing. Finally, be sure to toast your success and the new publication!

~ Useful Indexing Resources ~

~ You can find out more about indexing rates from the [Indexing Society of Canada](), [Editorial Freelancers Association]() (US), and [Society of Indexers]() (UK).

~ The Chicago Manual of Style has an [entire chapter on indexing]() (note that the 17th edition is out as of fall 2017).

~ [Waidner-Spahr Library]() has useful guidelines for capitalizing and alphabetizing some European and multi-part names; CMS and MLA describe how to index a more global range of names (e.g., Arabic, Chinese, Japanese).

More questions about publishing your book? Need some additional resources? We're happy to advise! Email Lisa Regan or Amyrose McCue Gill at [info@textformations.com]().

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