
British Standard Recommendations for

Preparing indexes to books, periodicals and other documents

Récommandations pour la préparation des indexes des livres, périodiques et d'autres documents

Empfehlungen für die Anfertigung von Registern für Bücher, Zeitschriften und anderer Dokumente

Foreword

This British Standard has been prepared under the direction of the Documentation Standards Committee. It supersedes BS 3700 : 1976, which is withdrawn.

This standard is concerned with basic indexing principles and practice rather than with the detailed procedure of indexing, which varies according to the type of matter indexed and the users for whom the index is intended.

This new edition updates, clarifies and exemplifies the basic indexing methods recommended in the previous edition, from which it differs in the following respects:

- (a) it takes into account changes made in the revision of BS 1749 published in 1985;
- (b) it emphasizes the necessity for quality and user requirement considerations;
- (c) it takes into account non-book media;
- (d) it gives fuller guidance on the practices of printers and publishers as these affect the presentation of an index;
- (e) it appends recommendations on assigned keywords in an indexing context.

Although this British Standard does not give any guidance on computer-generated systems as such, it offers advice for any indexing task regardless of whether the method used is manual or computer-assisted.

Some examples from the *Current Technology Index* have been included with the kind permission of Library Association Publishing Ltd.

The examples given are illustrative, not prescriptive, as the nature of any document indexed determines the choice and form of entries.

This British Standard is related to ISO 999-1975 'Documentation — Index of a publication', but is not equivalent in technical content. ISO 999 is currently under extensive revision by Technical Committee 46, Documentation, of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), in which the United Kingdom participates.

Compliance with a British Standard does not of itself confer immunity from legal obligations.

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Recommendations

1 Scope

This British Standard makes recommendations on the content, organization and presentation of indexes. It applies to indexes of books, periodicals, reports and other documents in any medium, such as films, sound recordings, diagrams, maps and three-dimensional objects. It is relevant to all such indexes, whether manually produced or computer-assisted, and whether compiled by one indexer or several indexers.

It covers the choice, form and arrangement of headings and subheadings used in index entries, and assigned keywords, once the subjects to be indexed have been determined. (For the examination of documents and the selection of subjects for indexing see BS 6529. For the compilation of a monolingual thesaurus that may assist in the selection of index terms see BS 5723.)

The standard does not make recommendations for the compilation of catalogues for libraries, museums and other collections, or for bibliographic references. (For bibliographic references see BS 1629.) It does not cover the mechanized sorting of text words to generate indexes, nor does it cover individual systems of indexing such as PRECIS, chain indexing or the techniques of post-coordinate indexing, although its recommendations may be relevant to any of these systems.

NOTE. The publications referred to in this standard are listed on the inside back cover.

2 Definitions

For the purposes of this British Standard, the definitions given in BS 5408 apply together with the following.

- 2.1 cross-reference.** A direction from one heading or subheading to another.
- 2.2 document.** Any item that presents information.
- 2.3 entry.** A single record in an index, consisting of a heading followed by a location reference or by a 'see' cross-reference.
- 2.4 heading.** A term chosen to represent in the index an item or concept in a document.
- 2.5 index.** A systematic arrangement of entries designed to enable users to locate information in a document.
- 2.6 keyword.** A significant term selected from a document or from a controlled list of terms to denote a major concept that appears in the document.
- 2.7 location reference.** An indication, following the heading or subheading, of that part of a document or collection of documents to which the heading or subheading refers.
- 2.8 main heading.** A heading used alone or under which related or modifying terms are subsumed to form a hierarchy.

2.9 'see also' cross-reference. A direction from a heading or subheading that is followed by a location reference to another heading, or headings, under which related information will be found.

2.10 'see' cross-reference. A direction from a heading or subheading not followed by a location reference, to another heading that is followed by a location reference.

2.11 subheading. A heading that is subsumed under a main heading to indicate a subordinate or qualifying relationship.

2.12 term. A word, phrase or symbol used to denote a concept.

2.13 thesaurus. A list of preferred terms for indexing and locating documents and concepts within documents.

NOTE. Most thesauri also contain cross-references from non-preferred terms to preferred terms and indicate relationships between terms.

3 Function of an index

The function of an index is to provide the user with an efficient means of tracing information. The indexer should therefore carry out the following.

- (a) *Identify* and *locate* relevant information within the material being indexed.
- (b) *Discriminate* between information on a subject and passing mention of a subject.
- (c) *Exclude* passing mention of subjects that offers nothing significant to the potential user.
- (d) *Analyse* concepts treated in the document so as to produce a series of headings based on its terminology.
- (e) *Indicate* relationships between concepts.
- (f) *Group together* information on subjects that is scattered by the arrangement of the document.
- (g) *Synthesize* headings and subheadings into entries.
- (h) *Direct* the user seeking information under terms not chosen for the index headings to the headings that have been chosen, by means of cross-references.
- (i) *Arrange* entries into a systematic and helpful order.

4 Types and features of indexes

4.1 General

An index may be produced with the document that has been indexed, or separately (see 7.2). Indexes may include entries for a range of categories including names (personal, corporate, geographical), technical terms, subjects, titles of works, first lines (of poems, etc.), quotations, abbreviations, acronyms, numbers and dates. Different types of index entry may be combined in one sequence.

4.2 Quality

An efficient index meets the needs of those seeking information contained in the document indexed (see 5.1).

Entries should allow for the different approaches likely to be made by the user (e.g. a cited novel or a play should be entered under both author and title).

The indexer should be impartial and objective both in selecting subject matter and in choosing terminology.

The terms used in the index should be appropriate to the users of the index, ensuring that they will:

- (a) quickly establish the presence or absence of information on a specific subject in an unfamiliar work;
- (b) quickly retrieve information on a remembered item in a known or partially known work.

The indexer's knowledge of the subject matter and language of the document indexed will clearly affect the quality of the index, as will the quality of the indexing tools used, e.g. thesauri and other guides.

There may be some conflict between the proper objectives of the parties concerned with producing an index, i.e. the publisher, printer, indexer and author. The interests of each may not coincide on matters of cost, timescale, layout, length, professional reputation, etc., any of which may affect depth and specificity of indexing. In case of conflict, it is recommended that the expected need of the user for an effective guide to subjects in the text should be the deciding factor (see also 4.5).

4.3 Length and detail

The index should be sufficiently detailed to meet the expected needs of the user, given the amount of detail provided in the document indexed. Factors affecting the length of an index include the character and purpose of the document indexed: a technical or academic treatise is likely to require a more detailed index than a popular biography; an abstract may need more index entries than a popular journal article.

4.4 Consistency

The depth or brevity of an index, its style and layout should be consistent (see clause 7).

Terms should be used consistently. Consistency is more likely to be achieved if:

- (a) a reliable thesaurus is used;
- (b) indexing decisions are systematically recorded;
- (c) work on the same index done by two or more indexers is carefully coordinated.

The index should be constructed according to a logical, balanced and consistent pattern, easily recognizable by its potential users. This consistency applies to the use of subdivisions and inversion, cross-references, location references and the arrangement of the index, as well as to choice of terms.

Careful editing of the index is essential to ensure consistent use of headings and subheadings, accurate cross-references,

the replacement of cross-references by additional entries where appropriate, consistent punctuation and spacing and correct alphabetical or other arrangement.

4.5 Relations between the indexer and author/publisher/user (see also 7.2.4)

The quality and consistency of an index will be enhanced if the indexer can discuss the document with the author and publisher, and is fully briefed as to the likely requirements of the potential users of the index. This will help indexers to make correct decisions on the choice of terms, inclusions in or exclusions from the index, and the need for special indexes (see also 4.2).

The indexer should check the proofs of the index before publication.

5 Content and general organization

5.1 General content and construction

5.1.1 Coverage

5.1.1.1 Indexes should normally cover all matter in the document, including, for example, introductory matter, notes, addenda, illustrations and appendices, except when a special purpose is defined for a particular index.

5.1.1.2 The title page, dedication, table of contents and synopsis at the head of each chapter and similar items are not normally indexed, though they should be examined for indexable material. Other exclusions should be brought to the user's attention in a note (see 7.1.2).

5.1.2 *Implicit and additional information indexed.* An index may supply information implicit (but not given) in the document, e.g. full names, identifying dates, names of chemicals.

5.1.3 *Design and construction.* Notes explaining its design and construction should where necessary be supplied at the beginning of the index, or series of indexes, and/or at lengthy headings (see 7.1.2).

5.1.4 *Single and multiple indexes.* A single index to the contents of a document is generally to be preferred to a series of indexes. The following considerations should contribute to the decision on whether to provide more than one index:

- (a) a particular interest in specific parts of the document, e.g. advertisements or reviews;
- (b) aspects of the material indexed, e.g. authors or legal cases cited;
- (c) the difficulty of assimilating non-verbal headings, e.g. patent numbers or chemical formulae, into a primarily verbal list.

The titles of each index should clearly indicate its contents and function(s) (see 7.2.2).

5.1.5 *Cross-references.* An index should include appropriate cross-references from synonymous, alternative and related terms (see 5.5).

5.2 Concepts: representation in headings and subheadings

5.2.1 Choice of headings

5.2.1.1 Choice of concepts. The choice of concepts to be named in the index depends on the expected needs of the user and the nature of the document indexed (see clause 3(b) and (c) and 4.3). Headings should be specific. The purpose of the item to be indexed will influence the expression of the heading. In a general work a reference to Holbein's portrait of Erasmus would be inadequately indexed simply under 'Erasmus' and 'Holbein'. 'Erasmus, portrait by Holbein' and 'Holbein, portrait of Erasmus' would be better. In a biography of Erasmus 'portrait by Holbein' and 'Holbein, portrait by' might be suitable headings.

5.2.1.2 Terminology. Headings should be chosen from the terminology employed in the document.

5.2.1.3 Synonyms, antonyms and homographs. One term should be used consistently to represent the same concept. If synonyms occur in the text, one term should be chosen for the heading and 'see' cross-references should be made from the alternative terms (see 5.5.1). When indexing documents of multiple authorship, particular care is needed to collect under one heading all references to a concept for which different authors have used different terms, e.g. *either philately or stamp-collecting*.

Variant spellings and abbreviations should be treated in the same way as synonyms.

Examples

either aesthetics or esthetics

either DNA or deoxyribonucleic acid

Non-current or idiosyncratic terminology used in the document should be qualified by the addition of the term in current use, with a cross-reference from that term (see 5.5).

Examples

Auld Reekie (Edinburgh)

consumption (tuberculosis)

Edinburgh *see* Auld Reekie

ethanedioic acid *see* oxalic acid

oxalic acid (ethanedioic acid)

tuberculosis *see* consumption

Antonyms that cannot be treated without reference to each other should be entered as a single heading containing both terms, as may also other linked terms used together in the text.

Examples

good and evil

science and religion

Homographs should be distinguished by the addition of an identifying qualifier.

Examples

races (ethnology)

races (sport)

5.2.2 Form of headings and subheadings

5.2.2.1 Main headings. Main headings should represent concepts found in the document. They should consist of nouns, modified, if required, by adjectives or by other nouns or verbs used attributively.

Examples

artificial flowers

cutting tools

education

school governors

sport

trade unions

5.2.2.2 Singular and plural forms. If a term chosen as a heading appears in the document in both the singular and the plural form, one form only should be used in the index, except when the two forms have different meanings.

Generally the plural form is used for terms denoting discrete objects (countable), the singular for abstract and collective terms and verbal nouns (non-countable). The plural should be preferred when the question as to quantity asks 'How many?' and the singular when the question asks 'How much?'.

Examples

plural

buildings

newspapers

} terms denoting discrete objects (countable)

singular

loyalty

memory

} abstract terms

food

weather

} collective terms

understanding verbal noun (non-countable)

In some specialities, e.g. anatomy, botany, cookery, zoology, certain conventions are observed in the use of singular and plural terms. They should be respected by the indexer.

Examples

bears (plural — zoological term embracing more than one species)

grizzly bear (singular — zoological term denoting a single species)

lamb (singular — cookery term, generic collective — non-countable)

lambs (plural — agricultural term, specific collective — countable)

5.2.2.3 Terms consisting of more than one word. Terms consisting of more than one word, that exist in common usage, should be used as headings without inverting or subsuming.

Examples

balance sheet

trade balance

not

balance

sheet

trade