

Guide to creating an index for McFarland

1. Introduction

An index is a vital component of your book—for some readers, especially in a library setting, it will be the first point of entry, and many others will rely on it as they read or consult your book.

The purpose of an index is to enable your readers to find specific information quickly. It is not intended to inform, educate, or tell a story. No one *reads* an index, and readers won't take the time to puzzle through a complex structure. They want instant, direct access, and for this reason, the simplest indexes are often the most user-friendly.

We strongly recommend that you compose your own index rather than hiring a professional indexer. You are the authority on your book and your subject; no one else knows equally well how its topics relate to one another, which are important or how best to phrase them. In addition, the indexing process often turns up small discrepancies in the text that need the author's judgment to resolve.

Do not worry overmuch about the length of your index. It needs to be thorough. If that makes it somewhat lengthy, this is acceptable. The goal is to serve the user. When trying to decide what should be included, put yourself in the mind of the user. If he would expect to find a certain reference in the index, make sure it is there.

We prefer that you submit your index in Microsoft Word, but most other word processing programs are fine as well. You may submit your index by email or on disk. If we have no problem opening the file, there is no need for you to send a hard copy.

2. What to index

Generally, proper nouns should be indexed. Place names, people's names, major events, titles of movies, books and magazines, etc., are good examples of entries you will want to include. However, if the term is tangential to the subject or mentioned only in passing, it does not need to be indexed. You will also want to include subjects or concepts that appear in your book. Try to limit yourself to nouns. Many an index has been rendered unusable by the overuse of adjectives and adverbs:

- amazing talent
- greatest baseball player
- interesting book
- tall buildings

We do not generally recommend indexing automatically by computer; this task requires judgment, which a computer does not have. It can pull out main words, but with no sense if each one is really needed. For example, the computer has no way of knowing if the word "Washington" refers to the city, the state or America's first president.

The main subject of your book should generally not be an index entry. For example, if your book is about the *Titanic*, there should not be a *Titanic* entry, as it would reference every page. Instead, create independent entries on narrow topics—for example, design flaws; flooding; iceberg; SOS transmission; steerage passengers.

Parenthetical clarifications. If you have one or more terms that might be confusing, it is acceptable to clarify them parenthetically. For example: *Gone with the Wind* (film); *Gone with the Wind* (book). Limit this use to what is strictly necessary, though. You do not need to clarify everything. Refrain from putting long parenthetical identifiers in the index. For example: “Reagan, Ronald (actor in 1940s, later governor of California, then president of United States)” is not needed. “Reagan, Ronald” followed by simple page references is ideal.

3. Style

Please type your main entry, followed by two spaces (or a tab if that is easier for you to work with), then page numbers. Subentries, if any (see below), directly follow the general page references, separated by semicolons. For subentries, only one space is needed following the subentry and before the page number. “See also” should be italicized.

Entries that are not proper names should not be capitalized. This is correct:

cardamom 14
China 96
Chinese food 103
Cincinnati, Ohio 56, 78
cinnamon 79

When using page ranges, please be consistent in how you do them. Pick one style and stick with it: 137-8 or 137-38 or 137-138.

If your book has entry numbers, please use those, rather than page numbers, for the index. This points the reader exactly where she needs to go. We will add a headnote to the index explaining that references are to entry numbers.

Here’s how name suffixes are treated (II, III, Jr., Sr.):

Young, Curt, Sr.

Please keep your formatting plain; do not try to emulate the final, typeset appearance it will have in the book. For example, don’t use multiple columns, narrow page margins, or a return after every line. You only need a return or enter after every entry. We will take care of formatting the index here.

4. Subentries

Subentries are appropriate for major subjects that appear on many pages of the book. Use them sparingly and only for specific information that someone might purposely be looking for. It is not desirable to have a subentry for every page number. This is an example of overkill:

Smith, John: birth 5; children 120; death 189; leisure activities 167; letters of 136, 140, 178; travel to Freeport 155

Much better would be this:

Smith, John 5, 120, 155, 167, 189; letters of 136, 140, 178

When you do deem subentries necessary, put them in alphabetical order by the first key word (not conjunctions or prepositions such as “and” or “on”). Separate them with semicolons and place them after the general-reference page numbers. Cross-references (*see also*) should follow

any subentries. If there is more than one *see also* reference, alphabetize them and separate each one with a semicolon. The cross-references should exactly match the main entry it refers to. For example: *see also* Smith, John (not John Smith). Do not put two spaces or a comma after the subentry and before the page numbers. Here is an example:

Dickens, Charles 10-15, 50, 52, 98-105; on acting 104-106; and debtor's prison 70; on poverty 33, 51; writing habits 95; *see also* Collins, Wilkie; *David Copperfield*; London; Society in Literature; theatre, nineteenth century

If you find that an entry has a number of subentries, consider giving the subentries their own main entry to improve access. Example:

Hemingway, Ernest: *A Farewell to Arms* 19, 21; *For Whom the Bell Tolls* 102, 123; "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" 14; *The Sun Also Rises* 5, 17, 98

It would be fine to leave this entry as is, but it would also be a good idea to make sure each of these novels had an entry of its own as well.

5. Cross-references

When you use a cross-reference, make sure it is not a circular one. In other words, if a *see also* reference points to another main entry, that second entry should not have the exact same page numbers as the first one. This is incorrect:

design flaws 78, 84, 90; *see also* flooding
flooding 78, 84, 90; *see also* design flaws

This is correct:

design flaws 12, 36, 78, 84, 90, 120; *see also* flooding
flooding 23, 78, 84, 90, 113, 201; *see also* design flaws

You see there is some overlap here, but there are also additional page references for each.

You can also use cross references when a name or term can be looked up in different ways.

Queen of England *see* Elizabeth I; Elizabeth II; Victoria

Note that *see* is separated by two spaces on both sides.

6. Alphabetization

Most word processing systems can do this task for you, but there are special cases where the computer usually goes wrong. So a primer on our conventions may be useful to you.

We use the word-by-word system of alphabetizing. This means that a space (and sometimes a hyphen) ends the term when alphabetizing. Here's an example:

East of Eden
Easter
Easter-Smith, Louisa
Eastern Airlines

Note that Easter-Smith is treated like Easter Smith. In this case, ignore the hyphen.

Here's another example:

Wonder Years
The Wonderful World of Disney
Wonders of the World

It's tempting to put "wonders" after "wonder," but "f" comes before "s"! Also, ignore articles at the beginnings of entries (a, an, the).

Observe the principle of "nothing before something." Items like last names and city names (which is a complete entity of itself) should come before a multiword phrase:

Martin, Gen. Arnold 123
Martin, Dick 125, ***126***, 131
Martin, Steve 152, 154, 172
Martin and Lewis 227
Marx, Harpo 22
Marx, Karl 112-3, 115
Marx Brothers 4-5, ***21***, 22, 24, 30-1, 118
Ocala, Florida 41, 56
Ocala Beekeeping Club 57, 66

Note that some page references are bold and italic. This indicates that there is an illustration on that page and would be indicated in a headnote.

Use the proper names of colleges and universities for the purposes of alphabetizing. Do not invert them. University of Nebraska (in the U's) is correct; Nebraska, University of, is not.

Mr. and St. (Saint) are treated as if they were spelled out, but Mrs. and Ms. are alphabetized just as they appear:

minister
Mr. and Mrs. Smith
Mr. Deeds
mistreatment
mistresses
Mrs. Doubtfire
Saint Augustine
St. Louis
Saint Thomas

Numbers are also treated as if spelled out: *3:10 to Yuma* is alphabetized as if it were *Three Ten to Yuma*.

Ignore articles at the beginnings of entries, including foreign ones: A, An, The, Der, Le, La, El, etc. There is no need to invert these. You would, however, take these into account when they appear after the first word:

"The Aragon Region"
Around Again
Around the World in 80 Days
"Around Women"
"An Arrogant Fool"

Also ignore HMS, SS and USS before ship names, which are italicized (note that HMS, SS and USS remain unitalicized):

HMS *Bounty*
USS *Enterprise*
HMS *Reliant*

Mac and Mc. Alphabetize these as they appear:

Maas, Bill
MacDonald, Nathaniel
mace
McGuire, Tim
Mellencamp, John

de, del, O', van, von. Alphabetize these as if they did not have an apostrophe or space.

deed of trust
DeLauro, Victoria
Delgado, Paul
Del Pesco, Arturo
de Macias, Denise
Denish, Susan
de Passe, Molly
object of desire
O'Brien, Kieran
Ocala, Florida
Ocala Beekeeping Club
O'Callaghan, Ian
Van Buren, Martin
Vanburgh, John
Vance, Courtney B.
Van Cleve, Edith
Vandergrift, J. Montague
van der Schyff, Melissa

Ignore apostrophes:

America
American
America's Cup

Index (of this guide)

Note: references are to section number.

- apostrophe 6
- article (a, an, the) 6

- bold 6
- books 2

- capitalization 3
- clarification 2
- colleges and universities 6
- computer 2, 6
- concepts 2
- cross-reference 4, 5

- de (as part of name) 6
- del 6

- entry numbers 3
- event 2

- formatting 3; *see also* bold; italic

- headnote 3, 6
- HMS 6
- hyphen 6

- illustrations 6
- indexer, professional 1
- italic 6

- length 1

- Mac 6
- magazine 2
- Mc 6

- Mr. 6
- movie 2
- Mrs. 6
- Ms. 6

- names 2, 3, 6
- numbers 6

- O' 6

- page ranges 3
- parentheses 2
- photographs *see* illustrations
- proper noun 2, 3

- St. (Saint) 6
- see also see* cross-reference
- semicolon 3, 4
- ships 6
- space 3, 5, 6
- SS 6
- subentry 3
- subheading *see* subentry
- subjects 2, 3
- submitting an index 1
- suffix 3

- universities and colleges 6
- USS 6

- van (as part of name) 6
- von 6
- word-by-word alphabetizing 6

Please understand that though we would like to be able to answer all queries that come our way, the volume of correspondence that we deal with precludes us from giving each author specific guidance. Please limit your questions to ones you cannot answer on your own by consulting this and other guides.

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