

# Edit Your Index: A Checklist for Efficient Editing

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*This session presents a checklist for editing an index.*

*Discussion will focus on the most efficient means of repairing straightforward index problems as identified in the checklist, such repairs being made either by the compiler of the index or by a project editor.*

*In cases where an index cannot be fixed (so that the editor must make the decision to start over), the checklist is an objective reference for making that difficult decision.*

## INDEX CHECKLIST FOR EFFICIENT EDITING

Criteria for a good index are assembled in the form of a checklist, which indexers, tech writers, authors, and editors can use as a guide in the evaluation of an index. The list of criteria is weighted, moving from simple problems with simple solutions to difficult problems that defy correction.

### 1. Mechanical and technical errors

- a. inconsistent style/format
- b. blind (empty) entries
- c. circular entries
- d. poor sort order
- e. poor heading/subheading relationships
- f. punctuation errors
- g. capitalization errors
- h. coding errors (for typefaces, indentation, and special characters)
- i. length inappropriate to length of text and type of document
- j. failure to include an introductory note to explain special typography or content of the index
- k. typographical errors (in entries and locators)
- l. double-posted entries lack identical strings of locators
- m. long strings of undifferentiated locators
- n. abbreviations, acronyms, symbols, and other abridgment of words or phrases are not explained

### 2. Scattered information

- too rigid adherence to vocabulary on each page
- failure to collect information and provide cross-references
- insufficient number of cross-references to connect related entries

### 3. Multiple points of access

- failure to make best use of synonym terms in double-postings and cross-references

### 4. Exhaustivity

- failure to capture all text (*see* Mulvany, pp. 48-50; Wellisch, pp. 121-124)

### 5. Specificity

- failure to capture terminology of the author
- failure to discriminate between elements of a topic (*see* Wellisch, pp. 355-358)

### 6. Recall and precision errors

- “If an indexer fails to assign X when it should be assigned, *recall* failures will occur. If Y is assigned when X should be, both *recall* and *precision* failures will occur.” (*see* Lancaster, p. 76)
- *Recall* is the ability to retrieve useful information; *precision* is the ability to avoid useless information (*see* Lancaster p. 4)

### 7. Poor conceptual/content structure

- failure to digest topics in the book
- failure to integrate parts to the whole

### 8. Inappropriate authorial voice

- The index is a vehicle for the indexer’s own views and interests.

## REFERENCES

- (1) American Society of Indexers Criteria for the Wilson Award for Excellence in Book Indexing, published in *KeyWords* (newsletter of the American Society of Indexers), vol. 6, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 1998), p. 29.
- (2) Lancaster, F. W., *Indexing and Abstracting in Theory and Practice*. University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Champaign, IL, 1991.
- (3) Mulvany, Nancy C., *Indexing Books*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994.
- (4) Wellisch, Hans H., *Indexing from A to Z*. H. W. Wilson Co., Bronx, NY, 1991.

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