

## ***Indexing from the Production Editor's Viewpoint, presented by Penny Stratton***

Penny Stratton, a production editor who has edited and produced a wide range of educational, scholarly, and trade books over a thirty-plus-year career in Boston-area publishing, discussed how indexers and indexes fit into the book production process, and how she works with indexers and evaluates their indexes.

How indexing fits into the editorial process:

- How an indexer works with an editor varies, depending on the type of book/type of publisher, and also on the size of the publisher.
- Sometimes individual project editors hire indexers directly, relying on a “pool” of subject-matter experts; sometimes hiring of freelancers is “centralized,” through a managing editor or project editor.
- Because indexing is one of the last tasks in the book-production process, the project editor is sometimes working with a budget that has been depleted, a book that is already running long, and a tight schedule. Further, the indexer may find that the editor is so eager to be done with the project that he or she has to prod the editor to answer some key questions about scope, style, and parameters.
- Ideally, editors will send an indexer second proofs to work from, so that the indexer is reading copy that has already been corrected.
- Some publishers ask authors to review the index; others don't. Some publishers will ask an indexer to revise an index based on the author's comments (or on other problems that arise); some editors prefer to handle problems themselves. Some editors might not even review the index.

The indexer should expect the editor to do the following:

- Provide **deadline** information, and give prompt updates about any changes to that deadline.
- Provide **information about the focus** of the book: does the focus require special indexing of any kind? For example, should illustrations be indexed? Should the indexer mention special themes that are emphasized in marketing? Is there anything in particular the indexer should know about the book's audience and how the reader is likely to use the index?
- Send an **editorial style sheet**, if one exists.
- Anticipate **questions** that might arise about details in the manuscript (for example, alternate spellings of names).
- Give clear **specifications** (maximum line count, format, style, separate indexes for, say, subjects and names).
- Be very clear about the **budget**: either a per-book-page cost or an hourly rate, possibly coupled with a “not-to-exceed” figure.

From an editor's point of view, an indexer should:

- Promptly notify the editor of **problems** (e.g., missing pages; anticipated deadline problems; recurring inconsistencies).
- **Proof** the index: check for alphabetization, typos, consistency of style for inclusive numbers, cross-references, etc.

- Ensure that the coverage is **consistent** and balanced: are parallel concepts indexed similarly? are all key topics in the index? have you avoided overindexing trivial concepts?
- Give thought to **cross-references**, and double-check them for usefulness.
- Deliver the index **on schedule**, to specifications.
- Supply notes on **typos or discrepancies** found during indexing.

**Penny Stratton** is director of book production at the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston. Her previous employers have included Commonwealth Editions, Editorial Services of New England (now nSight), Houghton Mifflin, OG&H Publishers, and D. C. Heath.