

Mentoring — Indexers point the way

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Until two years ago, the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers (ANZSI) had no official mentoring scheme, although a few individuals offered mentoring privately on a one-to-one basis. Although the topic of mentoring had been discussed at various branch meetings within ANZSI, the problems of such a scheme always seemed too difficult, and the topic was initially consigned to the 'too hard' basket.

By 'mentoring' I have in mind a training mechanism whereby novice, trainee or less experienced individuals are provided with professional guidance and advice by a well qualified practitioner in the appropriate field of endeavour, in this case indexing. Through mentoring the novice can gain his or her first professional experience. Within ANZSI we have established eligibility criteria for inclusion in the mentoring scheme, as well as developing guidelines for mentors. I shall return to these later.

How did the mentoring scheme come into being?

Training within ANZSI was and still is offered at two levels:

- introductory back-of-book indexing — a one-day training course, which covers basic indexing theory with some short indexing exercises
- intermediate back-of-book indexing — a one-day practical indexing course in which the participants, during the course of the day, use one of the dedicated indexing packages on the market to index a small 50–60 page non-fiction work.

That was the extent of the training offered by the society, and trainees were then, in effect, left on their own. With the exception of a couple of the legal publishers, there is virtually no in-house indexing training in Australia.

Now to become registered, through the only peer-reviewed indexing scheme available within ANZSI, an indexer must supply to the panel of assessors one index that they have compiled, and nominate two others. This means they must have completed a minimum of three indexes before they can begin to consider applying for registration.

But how are the indexers going to gain the necessary indexing experience? Many of our new or less-experienced indexers have difficulty in obtaining worthwhile materials to index, yet they need quality materials to build up their level of expertise. No publisher is going to let an inexperienced indexer loose on its publications.

This is where the mentoring scheme, developed initially by the Victorian branch of ANZSI, comes in.

Mentoring scheme proposal

There are a large number of books and journals held in state, academic and public libraries, particularly from the nineteenth century but also from the twentieth century, that have been published without indexes. Many of them are significant works, but because of the lack of indexes their usefulness is less than it should be.

To overcome the difficulties experienced by new or trainee indexers it was proposed that they be given the opportunity to index some of these unindexed books under the supervision of an experienced indexer (mentor). To ensure the best outcome for each mentoring project every effort is made to match the mentee's (although we prefer to call them minties) subject background and knowledge to the books to be indexed.

Mentors ideally have an initial consultation with their mentee to discuss their particular project, and to consider approaches or strategies that might need to be considered in the indexing of a given work. The mentor is not to do any of the indexing work, but of course can provide suggestions on how something could be done, for example how to deal with Asian names. After the initial consultation, mentors usually ask the mentee to send an electronic file of the index after they have completed some 40 or 50 pages of the text. In this way, feedback can be provided at an early stage and any serious errors rectified before too much damage is done.

Based on our experience of the scheme so far, most mentors and mentees interact five or six times (either by phone or email) during the course of a project (usually over a period of two to three months, though sometimes longer), equating to about four to six hours of interaction. The final task of the mentor (if they haven't been doing this all along) is to check the mentee's index against the original work for accuracy. Once the mentor has signed off the indexing project as being up to an acceptable standard, the indexes are eligible for publication by ANZSI under the title of Australian and New Zealand Indexing Society Index Series.

ANZSI checks the library holdings through the Libraries Australia network (which acts like a national union catalogue). Indexes published in the ANZSI Index Series are direct-marketed to those libraries and institutions holding the title. In this way the society gets a small return to defray the publishing costs of its Index Series.

The beauty of this proposal is that it benefits everybody involved. The trainees gain some important indexing experience; they end up with a published index that they may decide to submit as part of the application for registration, and the society gets a valuable new indexer within its ranks. The library providing the original text of what was a valuable but under-utilised work gains a new tool for rendering that work accessible. How the libraries handle the cataloguing and linking of the separate original work and the new index is up to them.

Selection of texts for the mentoring scheme

Initially, ANZSI's Victorian branch approached the State Library of Victoria for titles suitable for inclusion in the scheme. Our specification was for worthwhile nineteenth-century titles without indexes. The State Library came back to us with a list of titles, some quite useful, but others completely unsuitable.

For example, a few of the titles were held in the rare book collection, which made access for the mentee difficult, and would yield an index that would be hard to sell. Some titles had had subsequent editions or reprints. Some of the reprints had different pagination, which made the task of marrying titles together almost impossible, and in a final group it was found that later editions had been indexed, even though the first editions had not been. As a result of these setbacks, we decided to let the mentees themselves choose a suitable title for indexing. We suggested they ask their local historical society, church group, genealogical society, sports club or public library if it had any title suitable for indexing. Once the mentee had chosen a title they felt comfortable with, it was vetted by the mentor for suitability and saleability before the start of the mentoring project.

We have taken a mercenary approach to the selection of titles. If there are two suitable titles, one held in six libraries and the other in 100, we will take the one with 100 every time. This is not to say the one in six libraries is unsuitable in indexing terms, but there are better pickings!

As a result of this approach we have had a range of books and newsletters indexed under the scheme.

In more recent times the Victorian branch, through the efforts of John Simkin, has begun compiling a list of nineteenth-century titles suitable for indexing in the mentoring scheme. John has ensured the titles are well represented in public libraries (for ease of access), do not have several editions or reprints, and have not been indexed previously.

Our ACT branch has also begun mentoring, and is working closely with the ACT Heritage Council to identify material suitable for indexing. It had originally approached the National Library of Australia in Canberra for material. The National Library came up with a list of titles it would like to have indexed through the mentoring scheme. Unfortunately, many of them were 'one-off' titles, the National Library holding the only copy in existence.

Worthwhile to the National Library, yes, but not of benefit to any other organisation.

Our New Zealand branch has also joined the mentoring scheme. Being aware of the problems the ACT branch had with the National Library of Australia, it has stipulated that materials for use in the mentoring scheme be readily accessible through a range of institutions.

Difficulties with the scheme

Finding enough people who were prepared to be mentors has been the major problem. A typical comment has been, 'I can't afford to give up between five and six hours of my work time to train a mentee.' We have partly overcome this difficulty by paying the mentors. Mentees now pay a flat fee of A\$200 per title to ANZSI (through a mentoring coordinator) to participate in the scheme. On completion of their mentoring project, the mentor is paid the A\$200 minus a small administration fee. The A\$200 figure was based on the equivalent cost of attending an ANZSI training course.

Training course participants pay A\$200 for around six hours (or one day) of instruction, so it has been decided to charge those receiving the same number of hours of tuition through the mentoring scheme a similar rate.

Some mentees are not prepared (or able) to put in the necessary effort, and drop out of the scheme. Some find they are not cut out for indexing, others find they don't have the motivation, and others find the time commitment is too great, when they are trying to balance family, work and social activities.

Finally, with mentees choosing their own titles, mentors have had to spend time chasing up the work chosen, and evaluating its suitability. Some titles have been quite unsuitable. The publication may not be worthwhile in terms of subsequent usefulness of the index; it may be too short; or the material may be too simple.

Requirements for inclusion in the ANZSI mentoring scheme

To be eligible, candidates must

- be a financial member of ANZSI
- have completed the introductory and intermediate indexing training courses run by ANZSI, or demonstrate an equivalent level of understanding
- have read the chapter on indexing in the 6th edition of the *Style Manual* (2002), and be familiar with one of the standard indexing manuals — Booth (2001), Mulvany (1994) or Wellisch (1996)
- have access to the *Australian and New Zealand Standard for Indexing*, AS/NZS 999: 1999
- provide a written proposal for the indexing project and register on the appropriate application form
- pay a fee per indexing project.

The mentee can index up to three items under the scheme, each with a minimum of 200 pages, and requiring an index of at least four double-column pages. This may be a book or the equivalent in a newspaper or journal index. Mentees can choose their own books or journals to index,

subject to approval by their mentor, or they may select a title from an ANZSI compiled list.

Mentees will receive four to six hours' individual contact with their mentor over each project they work on within an expected two- to three-month period, to be negotiated between the mentor and the mentee. Selected indexes may be eligible for inclusion in the ANZSI Index Series.

Requirements for mentors

Mentors must be very experienced back-of-book indexers who are registered indexers. Mentors of journal indexes should be either experienced database indexers or registered indexers. Their role is to provide guidance and professional advice. They are concerned with the structure and consistency of the index, and advise on particular problems. They do not get involved in the intellectual content of the index, or index the work in any way, but provide feedback to mentees during the course of the project, and make a final assessment of the index against the original work, before signing it off as acceptable.

References

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