



# Indexing

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## ***Initial Considerations***

1. A good index is an essential element of your book, but indexing is a time-consuming task. It takes about 40 to 50 hours to create an index for a 250-page book. Hiring a professional indexer is a reasonable approach for busy authors.
2. Indexing software is not capable of generating an acceptable index on its own.
3. Although the Press will edit the index for style and format, we cannot reindex or check page references. An inadequate index will be returned to the author, which could delay publication.

## ***Overview***

1. These guidelines outline specifics of formatting in Harvard University Press style. For further guidance and details on the mechanics of indexing, see the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th ed., [chapter 16](#). A pdf of this chapter from a previous edition is [here](#).
2. A general index includes both proper nouns (names and other capitalized terms) and broad terms and concepts. For a very few books, other kinds of indexes may be appropriate. Check with your editor before compiling anything other than a single, general index.
3. The length of the index should be about one double-spaced manuscript page for each 12–15 pages of the printed book: a 300-page book would have an index of 20–25 manuscript pages.
4. Prepare the index as a Microsoft Word or rich text document, formatted as regular text.
5. The index is a tool for the reader who wishes to locate substantive discussion of a topic. It is not a concordance, and it should not reproduce the organization of the book.

## ***What to Index and What Not to Index***

1. Index all chapters of the book, including the introduction or prologue and conclusion or epilogue.
2. Index only substantive information in a preface or appendix.



3. Do not index a foreword, acknowledgments, glossary, reference list, bibliography, or epigraphs.
4. Substantive information in notes, tables, and figures may be indexed if the reader would not find it otherwise.
5. Do not index scholars' names unless there is significant discussion of the author or their work in the text itself. A citation is not a substantive reference.
6. Index only material that will be worth the reader's time. It is not necessary to index every proper noun.
7. The overall topic of your manuscript is usually too broad to serve as a useful main index entry.

## Structure and Format

### General Format

1. A comma separates the main entry from the first page number, and semicolons are used between subentries. Use a colon if the subentry follows the main entry. Do not indent subentries on separate lines under the main entry.

infrastructure spending, 138, 157; for bridge repair, 173,  
181–184; on railroads, 197–199  
Mukhina, Elena: diary of, 73–82; reaction to invasion, 21,  
23–24

2. Cross-references are preceded by a period. *See* and *See also* are italicized.

Burma. *See* Myanmar  
Sembène, Ousmane, 235–238. *See also* Senegalese film

3. Entries have no final punctuation.

### Main Entries

1. Main entries consist of proper nouns (Acropolis; Modi, Narendra; *Washington Post*) and general topics or concepts (banjos; colonialism; string theory). They must be styled as nouns or noun phrases, not as adjectives. They may be inverted to put the most important word first.

Buddhism or Buddhists [*not* Buddhist]  
religion or religious freedom [*not* religious]  
imperialism, French



2. Capitalize proper nouns; lowercase other main entries.
3. Spelling, hyphenation, and capitalization of entries and subentries should match the style used in the book. Refer to the copyeditor's style sheet, available from your project manager.
4. For titles that begin with an article, place the article at the end. For books, films, and other authored material, the author's name can be supplied in parentheses following the title.

*House on Mango Street, The* (Cisneros)

5. Do not include birth and death dates, definitions of terms, or other identifiers unless necessary to disambiguate entries.

Brown, Ilsa (mother)	Delaware (river)
Brown, Ilsa (sister)	Delaware (state)

6. Supply first names for all people indexed, even if their first names are not given in the text.
7. Antonyms can be joined in a single main entry, using a cross-reference at one of the entries.

certainty and uncertainty  
uncertainty. See certainty and uncertainty

## Subentries

1. Create subentries when the number of pages or page spans exceeds six to eight. An index containing long strings of page numbers is not useful to the reader and will be returned to be further divided.

refugees, 22, 28, 30–32, 60; in Asia, 44–48, 52, 65; in  
Europe, 34–36, 39

[not refugees, 22, 28, 30–32, 34–36, 39, 44–48, 52, 60,  
65]

2. Make subentries succinct.

Deng Xiaoping, 6, 17; criticism of, 178; death of, 45–46;  
statue of, 251; trip to United States, 50–51

[not Deng Xiaoping, 6, 17; discussion of statue of, 251;  
fatal illness and death of, 45–46; successful trip to  
United States, 50–51; vocal criticism of by rivals, 178]



3. If an entry contains only a few pages, do not create subentries.

snakes, 14–15

[*not* snakes: cryptic, 14; nonvenomous, 15; venomous, 14]

4. Indexes may not contain more than one level of subentry (that is, no sub-subentries). If further subdivision of a subentry would be useful, restructure the index by making the subentry into a main entry.
5. Order subentries alphabetically by the first significant word. (If you prefer to order the subentries in numerical order by page number, please consult with your project manager.) Disregard articles, conjunctions, and prepositions. Alphabetize people by last name.

Malcolm X: **a**ssassination of, 28; as a **B**lack Muslim, 20–27; in **B**oston, 21; and the **F**BI, 25, 45; in **M**ecca, 23; and Elijah **M**uhammad, 24–27

6. Subentries should either refer back grammatically to the main entry or constitute divisions of the main topic.

testing, 4–5, 19; anxiety about, 91–92; benefits of, 42–43, 125; as a learning tool, 201–205

[*not* testing, 4–5, 19; anxiety, 91–92; benefits, 42–43, 125; learning tool, 201–205]

cat breeds: Burmese, 45; Maine coon, 36–42; Siamese, 50

## Page numbers

1. Use full numbers for page spans (136–139 *not* 136–39).
2. Page spans should include no more than 15 pages. No page span should encompass an entire chapter.
3. Do not use *ff.* or *passim*.
4. Notes are typically not indexed. Substantive notes may be indexed, thus:

Appalachian fiddle, 315n6, 316nn8–9

For footnotes, provide note numbers only when indexing more than one note on the page (e.g., 115n, 116nn8–9).

6. If tables and/or illustrations are indexed, their location may be indicated by setting the page number in italics or bold or by placing a letter after the page



number (e.g., 135t for table). Insert an explanatory note at the beginning of the index (e.g., “Page numbers in italics refer to illustrations”; “The letter *t* following a page number denotes a table”).

## Cross-References

1. *See also* and *See* cross-references follow a period. Arrange cross-references in alphabetical order, separated by semicolons. Use a *See also* entry only when additional page numbers are to be found in the other entry. Do not list all conceptually related terms. The wording of the cross-reference must be identical to the main entry being referred to.

butterflies. *See* Lepidoptera  
Mexican literature. *See* literature, Mexican  
NAFTA. *See* North American Free Trade Agreement  
(NAFTA)  
political parties, 2–8. *See also* Democratic Party;  
gerrymandering; Republican Party

2. If an entry contains only a few pages, repeat the pages under the alternative entry.

devil, 3–5, 12  
Satan, 3–5, 12

3. Use a generic cross-reference rather than listing many individual entries.

South America. *See individual countries*

## Alphabetization

1. Alphabetize entries letter by letter up to the first comma or colon (ignoring spaces, hyphens, periods, and apostrophes).

fir, white  
fire, prescribed  
firefighters  
fire-resistant clothing  
fire trucks  
fir trees

2. Alphabetize all names exactly as they are spelled, including those beginning with Mac and Mc. Alphabetize St. after Ss, before Su.



3. Alphabetize numerals as if they were spelled out.

71st Infantry Division [alphabetize as seventy-first]

T4 cells [alphabetize as t four]

Order numerically, however, when many similar entries occur sequentially.

Apollo 1

Apollo 2

Apollo 11