



ten Common Mistakes in Indexing

Are you making any of these common indexing mistakes?

1. Creating entries that begin with the same word

Combine entries that begin with the same word to make the index easy for users to scan. If several entries begin with the same word, users may only see the first entry. This is especially true when the first entry contains subentries.

When second-level entries begin with the same word, create one second-level entry for that repeated word and create a third-level entry for each unique word.

Incorrect: page elements footers headers margins numbers titles page layout, checking at production edit page sizes, international pages, creating pages, printing	Correct: pages creating elements footers headers margins numbers titles layout, checking at production edit printing sizes, international
Incorrect: topic keywords topic titles, changing topic titles, creating topics creating text, changing text, copying text, deleting	Correct: topics creating keywords text changing copying deleting titles changing creating

2. Not creating both general and specific entries

Create entries for both beginning and advanced users. Beginning users know only the task they want to perform. Advanced users know the system's terminology for the task they want to perform.

Create both implicit and explicit entries. Sometimes when a page discusses a general concept but does not mention more detailed items, you can create specific entries. (See the first example in the next column.) Create general entries to summarize the concepts on pages that mention only specific terms. (See the second example in the next column.)

2. Not creating both general and specific entries (continued)

Incorrect: applications, testing <i>(An application contains algorithms, context matching rules, plans, scripts, and strategies.)</i>	Correct: algorithms, testing applications, testing context matching rules, testing plans, testing scripts, testing strategies, testing
Incorrect: em dashes en dashes	Correct: dashes em dashes en dashes

3. Not including synonyms

For each entry you add to the index, think of synonyms. Users will find your index more usable if you anticipate any word or phrase they might type to find a topic.

One way to identify synonyms is to ask the marketing department, customers, technical support staff, and product developers for synonyms of words in your index. Another way to create synonyms is to rearrange the order of words in your index. (See the third example below.)

Incorrect: interfaces, designing	Correct: graphical user interfaces (GUIs), designing interfaces, designing screens, designing software screens, designing user interfaces, designing windows, designing
Incorrect: <i>(You may not need to create entries for the recipe titles below. Few people will look up recipes by title. Most people will look up "cakes" or the type of cake.)</i> Carrie's Favorite Carrot Cake Heavenly Chocolate Cake Ripe Apple Cake	Correct: apple cake cakes apple carrot chocolate carrot cake chocolate cake
Incorrect: context matching rules	Correct: context matching rules matching rules rules, context matching

4. Placing unimportant words first

Place concepts (often nouns) first in entries and subentries to stress their importance. This allows users to quickly scan entries and subentries for important concepts instead of first wading through a lot of verbs.

Incorrect: text applying styles changing colors formatting as expanding hotspots	Correct: text colors, changing expanding hotspots, formatting as styles, applying to
Incorrect: how to add folders	Correct: folders, creating

5. Using general verbs or gerunds as main entries

Limit the number of verbs and gerunds that you include as main entries. Users typically look up concepts instead of actions. In addition, when you use verbs as main entries, the list of subentries can become very long.

When you use mostly nouns in the index, users can see related information grouped. Also, this reduces the scrolling that users must do through long lists of subentries.

Incorrect: changing books text editing books text modifying books text	Correct: cutting books text deleting books text removing books text	Incorrect: creating aliases bookmarks books browse sequences build tags context-sensitive help folders forms framesets indents JavaHelp projects keywords map files marquees projects styles tables of contents topics windows	Correct: books changing deleting text changing deleting aliases, creating bookmarks, creating books, creating browse sequences, creating build tags, creating context-sensitive help, creating folders, creating forms, creating framesets, creating indents, creating JavaHelp projects, creating keywords, creating map files, creating marquees, creating projects, creating styles, creating tables of contents, creating topics, creating windows, creating
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(Notice how long an entry can get when you use a gerund as the main entry.)

6. Using adjectives as main entries

Do not use adjectives as main entries. They are too general. Users usually look up concepts (nouns) instead of adjectives. In addition, when you use adjectives as main entries, the list of subentries can become very long.

Incorrect: automatic browse sequence creation indexing numbering selection of HTML editors table of contents creation	Correct: browse sequences, creating automatically HTML editors, selecting automatically indexing, automatically pages, numbering automatically table of contents, creating automatically
Incorrect: blue boxes tape yellow boxes tape	Correct: boxes blue yellow tape blue yellow

7. Using variations of the same word

Be consistent in the way you use a word in the index. When several indexers work on an index, you sometimes find entries for the same word in both singular and plural forms, lowercased and capitalized, as both a single and two words, and hyphenated and not hyphenated. This is a problem because users will probably only look up one version of the word, which means they might miss any topics that you associate with another version of the word.

Incorrect: pattern High Cohesion Polymorphism Singleton State patterns Law of Demeter Low Coupling	Correct: patterns High Cohesion Law of Demeter Low Coupling Polymorphism Singleton State
Incorrect: subsystems Subsystems sub-systems	Correct: subsystems

8. Using only one subentry

When an entry contains only one subentry, place the subentry on the same line as the main entry. Using two lines for each entry that has only one subentry makes the index unnecessarily long.

Incorrect: glossaries creating	Correct: glossaries, creating
Incorrect: objects persistent	Correct: objects, persistent
Incorrect: locking definition	Correct: locking

9. Indexing passing references

Only index significant references to a word. Index a page only if users will find on that page information they need to understand a concept or perform a task. If you index every reference of a word, your index will resemble a full-text search.

Incorrect: <i>(Creating the following entry for a page that mentions Notepad as one example of a text editor that you can use to open a file:)</i> Notepad, opening files in
Incorrect: <i>(Creating the following entry for a page that says you can add background images to HTML pages but that does not state how to do that:)</i> background images, adding

10. Creating similar subentries

To make your index more concise, combine similar subentries. Indexers sometimes create separate subentries that vary slightly in wording. This makes the index long and may cause users to miss some information.

Incorrect: topics changing modifying previewing viewing	Correct: topics changing viewing
Incorrect: build tags builds, creating custom projects, customizing topics, removing from topics, unassigning from	Correct: build tags about topics, removing from

(The “builds, creating custom” and “projects, customizing” subentries point to the “About build tags” page. The “topics, removing from” and “topics, unassigning from” subentries point to the “Unassigning build tags from topics” page.)

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