A Paren's Worth of Information

There are times when you can enhance your entries by adding a bit more information in a parenthetical. For example, when I teach basic indexing, I explain to students that they should differentiate homographs, words with the same spelling but that have different meanings, by the use of parentheticals as qualifiers. For example:

> Parties (holiday)
> Parties (litigation)

The mix of such disparate information under one heading "Parties" is jarring to the user. It reminds of a cookbook index where one heading encompassed "Truffles" and under it had sublevels of "chocolate" and "pigs locating." When you are thinking of making chocolate truffles, you are certainly thrown to see that pigs may be involved! Just the separation of the two types and the addition of the parenthetical removes the ambiguity and settles the stomach.

I find that parentheticals can annotate and increase the value of the index to users. For example, in biographical works or books that focus on an individual and include his family members, I add after the names the relationship to the main person. For example, in an artbook on William Powell Frith, I noted:

> Alford, Agnes (daughter), 23
> Alford, Guy (son), 23, 26
> Alford, Mary (second wife), 16, 17, 22, 23, 138
> Frith, Alice (daughter), 123, *125,* 138
> Frith, Isabelle (daughter), 123, *124*
> Frith, Isabelle (first wife), 5–16, 115, 137, 138
> Frith, Jane Ellen "Cissie" (daughter), 2, *2,* 7–8, 12

This information not only aids the reader but it also helps the indexer. You need to know if you are looking for Isabelle the daughter or Isabelle the first wife when adding page numbers. Also if the book refers to Frith's wife, you want to be clear whether you should add the page reference to his first or second wife. The parenthetical makes your job easier and prevents mistakes.

For certain types of legal references in a subject index I add the year in a parenthetical. I do this for court cases, acts, bills, and treaties. Sometimes the text does not provide this information so I scan footnotes or the references section at the end of the chapter or the end of the book to get it. But if the author has not included it, I will even look online to see if I can find it. Only if it appears ambiguous (for example, two acts with the same name) or if the author has used a popular form of the act name and not the full title and I cannot determine what he means, then I will not guess and add the year. It has to fall

into the category of something that I can recognize instantly as the correct document for me to pick up the year from an online search. The clients for whom I work routinely tell me that they appreciate this type of enhancement in the index. Remember that case names should be in italics in the subject index, but when you add the parenthetical year, that appears in regular typeface.

> *Adkins v. Children's Hospital* (1923)

In books that involve multiple countries, I will also insert the country after entries that may raise a question for the user. For example, I recently worked on a book covering international airport regulation so after the names of regulatory agencies or the airlines, I added the country if the country name did not appear as part of the agency name. In the examples below, you will see that I have both the acronym for the agency and the country designation in the same parenthetical. Some clients use a style that separates the two items with a semi-colon and others prefer a comma. In either instance, though, the style prefers to have the two elements set off by a defining element of punctuation.

> Civil Aviation Authority (CAA, U.K.)
> National Airport System (NAS, Canada)

In this same book there were also the names of cities and airports that I used parentheticals to indicate their location or status:

> Belfast International (airport)
> Darwin (Australia)
> Newcastle (Australia)
> Newcastle (U.K.)
> Southend (airport, U.K.)

This location clarification I use very often for developments like

> The Willows (Kansas City, Mo.)

It is equally valid to write

> The Willows, Kansas City, Mo.

but I prefer the first approach as it parses more easily for the reader to see the elements set off by the parenthetical. The comma is already incorporated to separate the city and state so another comma adds possible confusion to the scan of the line by a fast reader. The Willows stands out more prominently as its own proper name when it is followed by the parenthetical for the location and reduces the likelihood of a reader thinking Kansas City belongs in the formal name of the real estate development.

For works that discuss concepts, documents, paintings, etc., in foreign languages, I recommend including the English translation in parens. In a book on Russian post-Soviet life, the author used many Russian phrases to embody common cultural concepts. The first time the author used the term, he translated it but after that he employed just the Russian so the index can help by including the translation:

> *blat* (personal connections), 67-68, 125, 129, 133

For the reader on page 133, when the term appears without its translation, it is handy to flip to the index and see what the term means. The only translation of it appears on page 67 so the index fills this additional function especially in a book without a glossary of foreign terms.

It is well accepted indexing practice to put an author's name in a parenthetical after a book title.

> *The Achilles Syndrome: Turning Your Weaknesses into Strengths* (Bloomfield & Felder)

If I have a title in italics and I don't think the average reader will know why or what type of material is meant here, I will add an explanation:

> *Ekstra* (newspaper)

I would not do this for the *Wall Street Journal* which I expect the audience to recognize as a newspaper or for *Good Housekeeping*, a well-known American magazine. For reports that do not have individual authors but that are published by an agency or organization, I will add that information in a parenthetical:

> *World Health Report* (WHO 2000)
> *World Health Report* (WHO 2006)

In the above instance I included a year to distinguish the two reports as well as the publishing agency. The index included a cross-reference from WHO to see World Health Organization so I was able to put the acronym instead of the spelled-out form and save space.

While parentheticals are viewed as containing lesser important information in text, sort of an after-thought that the author sometimes adds to illustrate a point or an aside, in the index they improve the content, its clarity, and usefulness. So go ahead and add a paren's worth of information!

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