Running On

"Develop your sentence-building muscles by writing a two-hundred word sentence" (from *Sentence Sense* online). Not only does this sound outrageous to someone learning to write, but to an indexer who specializes in honing her writing skills to the fewest number of words possible, this is an anathema. We work to fashion our keenly phrased entries just so, to ensure that they make sense, and yet not use one extra word. Once we have completed the index, we face a prospect just as unpleasing as a two-hundred word sentence. We are forced to join our entries into run-in paragraphs.

Publishers say that the run-in format of indexes saves space. If a typical book index has 1,000-1,500 entries, and if a majority of the entries are names or places or events, then the difference between run-in and indented formats is minimal. It may be 3 pages or less, and may not even require more pages depending on the size folio the printer uses (e.g., 4-page or 16-page folios). I looked at 4 indexes I did in the past few months to compute the difference, and for all of them it would amount to less than 2 pages. When an index contains many names and each name has just a couple of page numbers, then each name takes up a line no matter which format is used. For example,

Bailey, Douglas, 13
Bailey, John, 212, 214
Barkley, Dean, 133
Baucus, Max, 18, 48, 65

require the use of 4 lines in run-in format, just the same as in indented.

The Chicago Manual (18.24, 15th ed.) states that it prefers run-in style as do many scholarly publishers. However, it acknowledges that this style works best with two-level indexes. This restriction on the level of detail proves difficult in many books. When a book contains the work of multiple authors for different chapters, they may cover the same territory over and over. In the two-level index, the indexer ends up with long strings of undifferentiated page numbers attached to a topic. There is little that can be done to distinguish them. Scholarly books frequently take this multi-author approach so they diminish the usefulness of the index by forcing users to wade through these number jamborees. This problem can occur easily in any two-level index.

Democratic Party
and soft money, 13, 36, 39, 57, 81, 83, 111, 259, 272–73, 276

In the indent format the user gets much more help:

Democratic Party
and soft money
reporting of, 111, 259, 272-273
soliciting of, 13, 36
use of, 39, 57, 81, 83, 276

Although it is possible to add sub-subheadings in run-in indexes, they make them even more difficult to use. As Hans Wellisch points out in *Indexing from A to Z* (p. 101, Wilson 1991), the user is not "likely to pay attention to typographical niceties such as the difference between a colon and semi-colon" when looking something up in an index. Adding another level that has some special punctuation or parenthetical to distinguish it only increases user confusion and dissatisfaction.

The lack of a second level can also result in some redundancy that likewise befuddles users.

> Japan:* * *;foreign direct investment in, 9, 34–36, 92, 98–101, 113; foreign direct investment in Canada, 108; foreign direct investment in other East Asian countries, 93–101, 103–04, 113, 154, 252; foreign direct investment in U.S., 93–95, 98, 112; ***

The repetition of "foreign direct investment in" takes up more space than it would in an indent index where the phrase would be used once. The burden falls on users to construct the outline in their own heads to really understand the entries.

There are times, however, when a run-in does make sense. For example, The Bureau of National Affairs (BNA) uses that style to update news events that it tracks in its publications such as following court cases. The example below is from a recent index to the *Patent, Trademark, Copyright Journal*:

> FILE SHARING
> Music
>> Geographic limitation of subpoenas against Boston colleges exceeded (D. Mass.), 66:458; universities to comply with subpoenas, 66:549

Since the two entries relate to each other and the second one updates the earlier one, then the run-in reads logically. This differs from the run-ins of book indexing which are disjointed ideas strung together in the hopes of saving a page or two of printing.

Indexers have a commitment to making information easy to find. When we are able to convince a publisher to forsake the run-in format, then we are fulfilling our commitment. We often have no choice but to follow the style mandated by the customer, but when we are asked for advice or have an opportunity to voice our opinion, let's speak up and have our ammunition ready.