



[www.IndexingPartners.com](http://www.IndexingPartners.com)

## Would you read that back to me, please?

If you're my age, you will remember well Perry Mason (as played by Raymond Burr) and in a typical scene on the TV show, he will want to test the recollection of the witness by asking him questions and later he will use that evidence to show the inconsistency of the answers and the facts. He will reveal the witness's evil ways by saying to the court reporter, "Would you read that back to me, please?" And there in the bright light of justice the truth will be revealed to all by that readback!

Likewise in indexing, being able to read back the entry will show the user what is truly meant by the entry. But frequently indexers (especially newer ones) forget to take the time to write lines that read back for sense. When you write a sublevel, you need to add that preposition or conjunction or even another little phrase that allows the user to connect it with the main heading. The addition of the word "of" gives the line more polish and provides the fluency of the index.

Employment issues  
of women, 45

While it is not wrong to have:

Employment issues  
women, 45

It does not read as well, especially in the run-in style of indexing that so many publishers insist on using. Look at how this will read in the run-in for the full heading:

Employment issues: and anti-labor reform demonstrations of 2006, 270; "*bleu-blanc-rouge*" requirement for, 62; and cultural integration, 31–35; and guest worker programs, 113–14; of immigrants, 27, 60, 143; of Muslim population, 7; and urban riots of 2005, 32; of women, 45; of youth, 62, 181

All of these sublevels have some connection to the main heading whether it is the word "and" or the word "of" or in one instance the use of the preposition "for" at the end of line. In the run-in style these connectors give users a bit more to hang onto as they scan through the dense paragraph of entries.

And the word you pick can make a big difference. Look at this example that came from a book on Islam religion in France:

Catholicism  
converts from, 249–50

This is quite different from:

Catholicism  
converts to, 249–50

An entry that has simply:

Catholicism  
converts, 249–50

does not tell the user a vital piece of information. It may have been obvious to you when you wrote it which the author meant, but the reader will not know without that important preposition.

When you have a quote or opinion from someone, the connector for the readback is “on” and it makes it clear that the person cited as the main heading gave his view by using this simple methodology:

Chirac, Jacques  
on multinational French soccer team, 72

This is quite different from the entry:

Chirac, Jacques  
and multinational French soccer team, 72

By the inexact use of “and” here, you create the impression that Chirac was maybe on the team, or bet on the team, or did something with the team. The mere change of “and” to “on” gives the user much better information by showing that Chirac had a viewpoint about the team.

Not every line needs a connector, however. Sometimes the sublevel is clearly a subset of the main topic and that relationship should be well-known to readers. You have to consider your audience here (and you follow that overriding rule on every project – consider the intended audience and their level of sophistication and likelihood of knowledge in the subject area). So the relationship of a narrower term to a broader term does not require any additional wording, as shown in this example:

Media  
TV documentaries, 188

Sometimes I see people add “and” to every single sublevel entry they make and that lack of elegance and thought appalls me. It provides so much more context to vary the readback connectors. Consider the difference of:

Media  
diversification of, 72, 180  
on headscarf ban, 170  
and Islamophobia, 65–66  
lawsuits against, 65–66  
regular reports on Islam in, 73  
TV documentaries, 188

Media  
and diversification, 72, 180  
and headscarf ban, 170  
and Islamophobia, 65–66  
and lawsuits, 65–66  
and regular reports on Islam, 73  
and TV documentaries, 188

Legal indexing has had a long tradition of expunging connectors in indexing. Two terms were given in an entry and no connection was made between them. In fact, you still rarely see “classic” legal indexing of case law, statutes, or practice manuals include the conjunction “and” to link terms.

Exhaustion of remedies

exceptions, 12.02

standard of review, 12.03[A]

waiver, 13.03[B][2]

However, even in legal indexing there are times when the addition of a preposition makes a big difference to the meaning. Is the appeal *to* or *from* a court? One major legal publisher has started to drop that distinction from its entries so it can standardize the use of catchphrases. This philosophy of efficiency over quality is most unfortunate as it decreases the usefulness of the index. The user is forced to go into the material potentially wasting time.

Connectors may seem like small words but they wield significant power in the final product. Don't forget to give them their due and then you will be able to read back your entries.

© Enid L. Zafran 2007