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And what about "and"?

I recently got together with a group of long-time indexers and in the midst of talking about many items ranging from the personal to business to politics, we fell into talking about the use of the word "and" in our indexes. It surprised all of us how differently we had devised rules for ourselves on when and where to plug in this conjunction.

Here is my rule for the placement of "and" in the sublevel. If the index is limited to two levels because the style is run-in, then I put "and" at the beginning of the sublevel phrase.

For example:

Health care costs, xi, 39–53; and decisionmaking models, 52–53; and lack of care coordination, 47–48; and life span increase, 45; and lobbying, 45–46

My rationale is that I want the index to read in as natural way as possible, especially in the run-in format. Since that style challenges the user to find an applicable piece of data in a jumble of words, I think the connectors need to be there. If there are instances where I can provide more help but still be concise by supplying a preposition, I prefer that to the "and" formulation. For instance when an organization or person expresses an opinion or writes a report on a certain topic:

Amnesty International: on Guatemala, 162, 166, 167; on Latin American use of torture in 1990s, 100; on Panama, 26, 184; on SOA training, 205; on Uruguay, 72–73, 98, 128

This saves space from writing phrases like "report on," "views on," "opinion of," etc. It clearly shows how the main topic relates to the subtopic so it provides more information than just linking with "and" would give.

Another time I might use "of" to make clear how the subtopic relates as the next illustration shows"

Price-performance: of ADSL, 77–80; of broadband services, 34; of CATV services, 149, 155; of ILEC digital data services, 57–58, 62, 65–68, 131; of ILECs, 62–80; of ISDN, 71; of T-1 lines, 67–68, 72–73, 86

It is not that using "and" here would be *wrong*, it is just that "of" makes the line scan more easily for the reader and conveys a stronger connection.

Earlier in my indexing career I was very parsimonious with prepositions and would have phrased the last example this way:

Price-performance: ADSL, 77–80; broadband services, 34; CATV services, 149, 155; ILEC digital data services, 57–58, 62, 65–68, 131; ILECs, 62–80; ISDN, 71; IT sector, 34; T-1 lines, 67–68, 72–73, 86

I would not have even considered using "and" as my philosophy was the fewer words the better. I wanted tight entries and would have defended this style by saying the relationship was clear to the user. However, as I gained more clients from nonlegal publishing, they wrote to ask if I would insert connectors, and over the years my style has evolved to do so naturally. Most the time the preposition or conjunction contains so few characters that it does not add another line to the index length. I now tell new indexers when I train to think of the line and how best to use it – to give as much information as possible without using another line but make full use of the line you have to help the user. These connections make reading the index more friendly, a positive benefit for most index searchers.

And let's get back to the main point here which is the discussion of "and." I've now explained where in a run-in index I would place it, but in an indent index I do just the opposite and put "and" at the end of the sublevel, like this:

Child mortality rates
 diarrheal disease and, 79
 malaria and, 74

I picture the user taking his/her finger and going down the column of subheads one-by-one. I don't want the line to start with a *weak* word in this approach so I move the connector to the end of the phrase.

I like these rules that I have evolved on placement of "and" for their clarity. How many times do you get to have a justifiable black-and-white rule to apply when indexing? So often the answer is, as Fred Leise is fond of saying, "It depends." And Fred says so very rightly. That is what makes indexing difficult to learn and requires so much experience. But here I have this nice rule and quite enjoy applying it and training others to apply it time after time based on the format.

After the other indexers and I discussed how we differed on this point (and I am not going to try and explain why they use "and" sometimes at the front and sometimes at the back of the line in the same index), we next tried to articulate why some subentries need no conjunction at all and why others make you uncomfortable unless they have it.

The first situation where no "and" is necessary is when the sublevel is a subset of the main topic.

Here, for example, the array includes narrower aspects:

Buildings
 commercial buildings, 13-34
 residential buildings, 45-52
 skyscrapers, 231-238

I don't add any sort of connector as the hierarchy of these terms should be clear to any reader.

I tend to reserve the use of "and" for when I am connecting two concepts of equal weight and there is no kinship between them. Look at the array below and where I have used "and." "Visitation" raises a strong unrelated concept; it is not synonymous or a subset of child support enforcement. The same applies to "paternity establishment," "state budgets," and the wordier "fathers who cohabit with mothers of their children." On the other hand, a term like "modifications" does not get a double post and its relationship is subservient to the main head so I don't include "and" there. "Amnesty programs," "arrearages," "cost of programs," and "size of order" do not need any further link to the main head. They are related to the effort of "child support" in an informative subjugated role and are not parallel to the main term.

- child support enforcement, 211–48, 255–57, 302
 - amnesty programs, 238
 - arrearages, 215–16, 238–39, 247, 270
 - costs of programs, 256, 271–72
 - fathers who cohabit with mothers of their children and, 272–73
 - modifications, 217
 - paternity establishment and, 219, 273, 302
 - size of order, 214–15
 - state budgets and, 272
 - visitation and, 217

The explanation here was basically agreed to by all the indexers participating in the discussion, and we also agreed it was difficult to articulate. So I have given it my best go here. It has some subjective and some cut-and-dried aspects to it. Each of us said we knew when to use it and did so in a most automatic fashion that rarely required changing in a later edit. Which brings me to another rule in indexing: once you pick a style for writing entries, stick with it throughout the index. If you can find a broader style that works for you and your clients, then stick with that consistently through all your indexes. It will allow you to work more quickly and give clients confidence in your work when they see a uniform style. Enjoy the rules you have, and make one for yourself on the placement and use of "and."