

# German indexing: some observations on typographical practice

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*This article investigates what German books on typography, book design and similar topics have to say about indexing. Some sample indexes are examined in order to illustrate the way in which indexes are currently presented by German publishers.*

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## Introduction

Indexing in Germany is still plagued by the notion, widespread among many people in the publishing industry, that it is merely a clerical task that involves extracting 'important' words from the text and putting them in alphabetical order. In addition to this failure to understand the indexing process itself, obsolete views also prevail on how indexes should be presented, even though Germany has a long tradition of good typography.

To prepare this article, I visited the library of the local college of arts, as well as the local university library, and examined dozens of books on typography and book design covering a time span stretching back more than 60 years. None of the books I examined had an index capable of comparison with the superb index to *The complete manual of typography* (Felici, 2003). I also carried out a detailed study of the German indexing standard for printed indexes, DIN 31630, published in 1988. Although some of it is now out of date, the standard covers the important aspects of indexing, including typographic ones.

## Books on typography, style, etc.

German books on typography and book design deal with almost every imaginable aspect in great detail, but rarely touch on the topic of indexing. Many books on the subject, despite clearly being reference works, either have no index at all or merely a skimpy one about the same length as the table of contents. Some of the books mention in a sentence or two that indexes are important, and one states that indexes can easily lead to 'typographic tragedies' (Gorbach, 2002: 215). Very true, but the authors do not provide any examples.

An exception to some extent is the recent title *Lese-typografie*, published by Hermann Schmidt Verlag, a leading publisher of books on typography, which suggests various ways of presenting index entries (Willberg and Forssman, 2005: 226–9). However, the examples given are not particularly convincing, the best suggestion being a conglomerate of roman, italic, bold and spaced-out headings and locators. The book contains a hybrid index/glossary ('gindex'), strangely located within the front matter.

There is only one major German style guide, *Duden – Satz und Korrektur* by Duden Verlag, the latest edition of which was published after a gap of no less than 17 years

(Witzer, 2003). Although not nearly as comprehensive as *The Chicago manual of style* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003) or *The Oxford style manual* (Ritter, 2003), it does contain a great deal of information; however, the coverage of indexing (Witzer, 2003: 134–43, 276–8) omits many aspects that professional indexers have to deal with. Moreover, the index to the book itself is so incomplete and of such poor quality that the usefulness of the style guide is severely compromised (see Fassbender, 2003).

Some publishers follow the *Duden* style guide, while others may or may not have their own views on indexing. As a result, German indexes look very different from one another, and in many cases publishers can be seen reinventing the wheel time and again when it comes to the typography and layout of indexes.

Unfortunately, neither the manuals of typography and book design nor the *Duden* style guide take any account of the literature on indexing, not to mention what has been published about indexing in the context of typography (e.g. Mulvany, 2005: 189–217; Wellisch, 1996: 485–500; Ridehalgh, 1985).

Incidentally, there are two basic terms for 'index' in German: *Index* and *Register*. In addition, various qualifying terms are also used as in:

- *Sachregister* (subject index)
- *Schlagwortregister* (controlled keyword index)
- *Stichwortregister* (index of keywords from text only)
- *Themenindex* (topic index)
- *Sachweiser* (subject index; now obsolete)
- *Schlagwortverzeichnis* (controlled keyword directory)

In practice, all the above have the same meaning as 'subject index' except for *Schlagwortverzeichnis*. This, although used in a book on scholarly publishing (Theisen, 2005), is a misnomer; there is no reason to use the broader term 'directory' for an index.

In the examples below, although fonts and font sizes may differ, the line length, line breaks, and indents follow the originals as closely as technically possible.

## Columns

When space is at a premium, it is surprising to see books appearing with lengthy bibliographic references and

endnotes, while the index is treated as a Cinderella. Even some small-format books (e.g. A5) try to save space by squeezing in an extra index column. Given the increase in the number of turnover lines this brings no significant benefit.

According to *Lesetypografie* (Willberg and Forssman, 2005: 226), there are still a number of indexes being published with justified columns (i.e. justified right and left). The authors warn against this sin. Setting indexes flush left is of course second nature to Anglo-American readers, so that pointing this out will surely sound rather odd to them.

‘(Continued)’, as used in English-language indexes is rarely seen in German ones, although DIN 31630 (p. 3) explicitly stipulates the German equivalent, *Fortsetzung*, in its section on typography, at least in the context of verso pages. The authors of *Lesetypografie* suggest elsewhere (Willberg and Forssman, 2000: 89) that a repeated main heading should be indicated in square brackets:

[Ackerbaugesellschaften] 770, 775,  
778, 781, 828, 829, 831–833, 964

Of course, this is a poor example because of the many locators, with several more in the preceding column not shown here.

## Subheadings

German publishers are fond of en dashes in front of subheadings. These seem to come in two flavours: in most cases there are just single en dashes used instead of an indent at the start of a new subheading. But what Michael Robertson (1995) termed the ‘Mannheim en dash’ is also still alive and well.

The ‘Mannheim en dash’ is an allusion to the Duden Verlag, based in Mannheim. It is not clear whether Duden Verlag actually invented this typographic device. Nevertheless, it still recommends it in the examples in its latest style guide (Witzer, 2003), although the international indexing community generally regards it as typographically obsolete. At least one book on typography agrees (Bergner, 1990: 177), while DIN 31630 allows both indents and en dashes (p. 4). It is interesting that, despite the guide’s recommendation, the index to the *Duden* style guide itself makes no use of en dashes in subheadings at all.

The following (invented) example shows single en dashes:

Bibliographien  
– allgemeine  
– spezielle  
– für Zeitschriften

This example is somewhat artificial, as (1) main headings in German indexes are usually not given in plural (although the English convention of putting countable nouns in the plural would make perfect sense in German as well), and (2) a German index would be unlikely to ignore prepositions in the alphabetization of subheadings.

As for the ‘Mannheim en dash’, more than one dash may be used to indicate each word in a main heading. In German, this technique is called *Unterführen*. The *Duden*

style guide states that the number of en dashes must not exceed three, and advocates that the full wording be used at the beginning of a continuation column. Surprisingly, en dashes are not allowed in indexes of names, in which all words have to be spelt out (Witzer, 2003: 277).

Below are two example entries from a recent biography (Knopp, 2006):

Erster Weltkrieg 8, 11, 20–25,  
22f., 142  
– –, Westfront 21

Note the comma after the two en dashes. The use of a single subheading would be another debatable topic, of course.

Auszeichnungen, militärische 11,  
21, 22, 25, 29, 38, 135f., 196,  
220  
– –, »Großkreuz des Eisernen  
Kreuzes« 11, 135f.  
– –, »Pour le Mérite« 11, 22, 25,  
29, 38, 196  
– –, Eisernes Kreuz I. Klasse 21

Here, the elements of the main heading are indicated by a comma between the two dashes. It goes without saying that the repetition of almost all page numbers from the main heading under its subheadings shows another poor indexing technique.

The following example, from a history reference book (Kinder and Hilgemann, 2005), shows the ‘Mannheim en dash’ in action in an index with run-in style, which is not very common in German indexing:

Jakob, Aragon: – I. 187; Eng-  
land: – I. 267, 280; – II. 267,  
269, 280; Schottland: – IV.  
247; – VI. 241

The roman numbers indicate kings called Jakob (the German equivalent of James), rather than volumes. (The indexer has probably overlooked the fact that Jakob I and Jakob VI are the same person, James VI of Scotland and James I of England and Scotland.)

German makes much use of compound terms, written as one word. This can make the language seem somewhat clumsy, and might have been the reason for the following use of subheadings in an index to a book on typography (Bollwage, 2005):

Schrift  
–anatomie 90  
–grad 90  
–größe 88  
–gruppen 64, 72  
–höhe 90  
–klassifikation 66  
–kombination 92  
etc.

Here, the hyphens look like ‘Mannheim en dashes’, but in

fact are being used to indicate German compounds beginning with 'Schrift': 'Schriftanatomie', 'Schriftgrad', etc. There is no doubt that the indexer was intending to avoid lengthy-looking index entries. Even so, using subheadings in this way is odd. What would happen, for example, if '-gruppen' had had more than five locators and had qualified as a separate main heading? This type of arrangement would then easily collapse. It becomes even more bizarre when one looks at the following entry:

Zeitungs  
 -beilage 14  
 -druck 16  
 -formate 15

The main heading 'Zeitungs' is neither singular nor plural; instead, the 's' in 'Zeitungs' indicates the genitive case – but this only makes sense if the compound terms are not torn apart. Changing the above example to:

Zeitungen  
 Beilagen 14  
 Druck 16  
 Formate 15

would be one way of keeping index entries neat and tidy.

## Locators

One of the basic mistakes in indexing, long strings of undifferentiated page numbers, is very common in indexes to German books, so common indeed as to qualify as the number one failing of German indexes. Unfortunately, books on typography and book design are no exception, including the 'glinde' to the book on typography mentioned above (Willberg and Forssman, 2005).

Many publishers overlook the typographic convention of having an extra space between heading and first locator, as recommended by Wellisch (1996: 286). As for punctuation between page numbers, commas are the rule, although the Hermann Schmidt Verlag uses single spaces in one of its major publications (Forssman and de Jong, 2004).

Use of the abbreviations 'f.' and 'ff.' instead of page ranges is still widespread in German indexes despite the fact that the international indexing community, as well as the leading style guides and standards, strongly discourages their use. There are also inconsistencies in the use of 'f.' and 'ff.'. Some indexes use 'f.' when it is a matter of just two pages, giving ranges for more than two pages. Other indexes show both 'f.' and 'ff.' as well as ranges, with 'ff.' representing just two pages, a practice followed by some German publishers. In fact, 'ff.', as defined in the field of library and information science (e.g. DIN 31630: 4), means 'two or more pages'. The German standard is outdated in allowing 'f.' and 'ff.', but at least it defines them correctly.

German books on typography give no guidance on whether to include a half-space, a whole space or no space at all between page numbers and 'f.' or 'ff.' All of these variations are therefore encountered in actual indexes.

'Squashed' or elided page number ranges, such as 159–64, appear to be unheard of in German indexes, and sometimes hyphens are used within page ranges instead of the typographically correct en dashes. But then, many indexes lack page ranges altogether. It is equally uncommon for page numbers to be annotated to show that they refer to notes or tables, though italic or bold are sometimes used to indicate illustrations or particularly important passages.

A rather strange style is featured in one of the examples in *Lesetypografie* (Willberg and Forssman, 2005: 227). If there are just two or three locators following a main heading and they will not all fit into the same line as the main heading, all of them are carried over to the next line:

Adelsgerichtsbarkeit  
 539–541 623 645  
 Administrator, Schleswig-  
 Holstein 773  
 Agrikulturbotanische Anstalt  
 506 726

The last two entries are included to show the approximate column width in this example. The locator '539–541' for 'Adelsgerichtsbarkeit' would in fact fit on the same line, but the style precludes this. It should also be noted that there is an indent after the line break in the 'Administrator' entry, but no indentation for locators, as in the next entry. This goes against common indexing wisdom as it certainly irritates the scanning eye. DIN 31630 (p. 4) also calls for indents after line breaks, so that this example is inexcusable. (The missing commas may have something to do with the fact that the locators originally appeared as non-lining numerals (i.e. numerals with variable height and sometimes falling partly below the baseline). Other examples in *Lesetypografie* do, however, show commas and indents.)

Another idiosyncrasy, recommended by the *Duden* style guide and intended as an emergency measure (Witzer, 2003: 278), is known as *Unterschließen* (down-hook –  $\lfloor$ ) and *Überschließen* (up-hook –  $\lceil$ ). *Unterschließen* makes use of the empty space in the line below to save a turnover line:

Haupteinsätze bei Erdbeben 208, 215  
 Hebel 40  $\lfloor$  241, 250

In this example, the last two locators do not fit on the same line as the heading, so most of the next entry line's empty space ('Hebel') is used to carry over these locators, preceded by  $\lfloor$ . Note that there is no comma after '215', for whatever reason.

*Überschließen* uses the same technique, but above the respective line, using  $\lceil$ . Again, there is no comma after '218'.

Isoklinen 209  $\lceil$  233  
 Isostatische Schwereanomalie 17, 218

## Cross-references

German cross-references are introduced with *siehe* (see) and *siehe auch* (see also). Very few indexes offer both forms (not

to mention references such as ‘cities, *see also specific cities*’), and publishers rarely care about the typographic convention of italicizing *siehe* and *siehe auch*. More often than not, both cross-references are in roman type along with the entries they refer to. Sometimes they are abbreviated as ‘s.’ and ‘s.a.’ respectively (as in a book on scholarly publishing: Theisen, 2005) or replaced by an arrow (→) (as in a book on typography: Forssman and de Jong, 2004). According to DIN 31630 (p. 4), these abbreviations, as well as arrows (→ for *siehe* and ↔ for *siehe auch*), are permissible.

*Siehe* and *siehe auch* are sometimes repeated before each reference as, for example, (Theisen, 2005):

Formatierung: s. Layout, s.  
Typoskript

or in a history book aimed at middle-school students (Kleber, 2006):

Kunst 100, 109, 135f., 164, 257,  
310, *siehe auch* Architektur /  
*siehe auch* Dichtung / *siehe auch*  
auch Malerei / *siehe auch*  
Musik

Note the extra space before the first page reference! This index, at about 7 per cent of the text, is unusually long for a German trade book. But there are no subheadings.

*Siehe* references are often encountered when double-posting might be better, as in an example from the same book:

Sozialdemokratische Partei  
Deutschlands, *siehe* SPD

SPD 271f.

In German indexes, it is more usual to come across unnecessary cross-references of this type or no cross-references at all, rather than correctly applied ones.

## Conclusions

It is disappointing that German books on typography and book design deal only marginally with indexing considerations. German typographers and publishers of such books seem not to follow international recommendations on the presentation of indexes, and ignore the literature on professional indexing altogether. Typesetters and publishers should surely at least be familiar with DIN 31630. It is no surprise that indexes currently being published usually fall short of best modern practice on index typography and layout.

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