Indexing and Abstracting Services in Libraries: A Legal Perspective

Olayinka Silas Akinwumi, Pnm

Taslim Elias Law Library, Nigerian Law School, Abuja
olayinkasilas2000@yahoo.com

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this work is to run through the whole gamut of what indexing and abstracting is all about; and to particularly enlighten librarians working in law libraries the dire need to keep abreast of current developments in all fields of law so that researchers in the field of law would know which work or materials can meet their research needs without time consuming and to avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts on the part of such researchers.

Design/Methodology: In the course of the research, some notable works were consulted and different opinions of such writers were assessed based on the experiences gained over the years as law librarian.

Findings: Most law librarians do not have any passion for indexing and abstracting because it was considered as too cumbersome to do. As a result, they neither index nor abstract the materials in their libraries. What they are concerned about is only to catalogue the legal materials acquired by the library. The few law librarians that have passion for indexing and abstracting are not well trained on how to index and abstract legal materials so the passion seems to have died with them. Such does not augur well for a developing country like Nigeria where readership promotion is very low. There is, therefore, the need for our librarians working in legal environment to ensure that indexing and abstracting is all part of what make them professionals so as to make our law library services indeed centres of retrieval and dissemination of legal information.

Practical Implications: The study stressed the importance timely dissemination of information through adequate use of indexing and abstracting to the readers .Since the essence of indexing and abstracting is to give the concise picture of what a particular document is all about; and to being able to make a quick reference of such document, it, therefore, become obvious that the pride of any law library is not just to give quality information but timely information to its readers. Law librarians must then see indexing and abstracting as part of their professional duties. The study also afforded the law librarians and other legal researchers to know the dos, dons and other methods/skills required when indexing and abstracting legal materials vis-à-vis books, case laws or statutes and periodicals which facilitate legal researches.

Originality/Value: Many law librarians see indexing and abstracting as too technical and cumbersome to embark upon. They see it as an area meant for the genius or at worst for very brilliant ones. Hence, little or no research works are often carried out in this all important area of librarianship. Where you find one, it is on libraries generally and no distinct one on legal aspect. This work is, therefore, one of such seldom areas of librarianship that analyses how legal materials can be indexed and abstracted and of immense value to legal researchers.

Keywords: Index, abstract, legal materials.

Paper Type: Conceptual

Introduction

Abstracting and Indexing started in the early part of the 19th century to assist the researcher keep abreast of increasing current developments in his field of interest which may be difficult to achieve as a result of information explosion. The need to be updated in all fields and kept abreast

of any development has, therefore, become of efforts on the part of the research mind.

Besides, the ocean flows of on-line information are al streaming together, and the access tools are becoming absolutely critical. If it is not indexed, it does not exist.

This paper, therefore, x-rays what indexing is all about, the types of indexes and abstracting, the indexing processes in law, abstracts and abstracting services from legal frame mind. It concludes by encouraging law librarians and other legal information professionals on how they can improve the task of indexing and abstracting the large volumes of legal publications to avoid being lost to users.

Indexing Services

What is Indexing?

According to the British indexing standard (BS 3700:1988), an index is a systematic arrangement of entries designed to enable users locate information in a document.

A document in this instance can be book, journal, audiotape, computer film and so on. However, a clear distinction between indexes to a book and indexes to a volume of journals is that while indexes to a book is an alphabetical list with page reference to a subject, persons and places dealt with within a particular book, indexes to journals or other periodicals indicate what articles have been written on subject, commentaries on a case, statutes, official reports or any other document. However, indexes to legislation cover the laws of a particular jurisdiction that are either in force, repealed or spent.

Who should then Index?

Ordinarily indexing of a book is the responsibility of the author. Most authors do not actually do it. While a few publishers have – in – house indexers (those who index), most indexing is done by freelancers, often working from home, hired by authors, publishers or any independent business which manages the production of a book to accomplish the various tasks involved including copy-editing, proofreading and indexing called "packagers".

Therefore, indexing work is not for those who lack an orderly mind and a capacity for taking pains. A good index is a minor work of art but it is also the product of clear thought and meticulous care.

necessary in order to avoid any duplication

Principles of Indexing Legal Materials:

Some principles of indexing include:

i. Correctness or accuracy: This has to do with correct spelling and correct presentation of information in the index:
ii. Uniformity or consistency: Since indexing systems vary, indexer must adopt informing in indexing;
iii. Completeness: This simply complete bibliographic data
iv. Clarity: There should be specific and concise subject heading
v. Consideration: This must use the language the user can easily understand.

Some Requisites of a Good Indexer:

i. Subject knowledge
ii. Experience
iii. Concentration or orderly mind
iv. Reading ability
v. Comprehension
vi. Passion for Accuracy
vii. Legible hand writing.
viii. Knowledge of user needs

Procedure for Indexing Legal Materials:

i. Bibliographic description – follow given template/worksheet or software used
ii. Analysis of contents:

This includes:

- Examine title abstract, table of contents, text and reference section of the book.
- Relate the content to the user
- Subject determination: subject represented in the work should be identified in the work, making up a list of possible descriptors.

Rules of Indexing Legal Materials:

According to Small, Kenneth there are twenty rules in indexing. These are:

1. Index everything useful in the source materials
2. Include all index entries in one alphabetical sequence
3. Choose popular heading, with references from their specific equivalents except where specialist audience is addressed.

4. Be consistent in choosing one form of spelling. Use a standard dictionary.
5. Choose the most specific headings which describe the items indexed.
6. Be consistent in the use of singular form or plural terms
7. Combine the word and the action which describes it where it is useful and possible.
8. Invert headings, when necessary to bring significant word to the fore.
9. Check for synonyms and make suitable references
10. Check for antonyms and combine where suitable
11. Where words of the same spelling represent different meanings. Include identifying phrase in brackets.
12. Where possible, give full name of persons quoted
13. Omit the name of the country of a government or department
14. Use capitals for all proper name
15. Make references from main subdivisions of these subjects
16. Subdivide alphabetically by aspects wherever possible.
17. In the case of historical or biographical works, substitute chronological for alphabetical subdivisions
18. Spell out symbols and abbreviations
19. Avoid the use of bold type wherever possible
20. If references are made to paragraph numbers and to page numbers, include a note to this effect at the foot of every page of the index.

Tips to Indexing a Book:

A book index is expected to reflect the character of the document being indexed. Generally, in the law library, indexing of a legal text is seen as the technical aspect of a law library and it emanates from traditional cataloguing and subject analyses.

Legal texts also have indexes to the cases and statutes cited which include both foreign and Nigerian cases and legislation. These are referred to as Table of Cases and Statutes.

Apart from books, lists of abbreviations of journals and law reports and their full citations are also part of the indexing process which

appear at the beginning of the book. The subject index, however, appears at the back of the book.

Therefore, since indexes assist users to find specific information within a document, whether in print or on-line, the following guidelines are necessary when indexing a book.

Use of Semantics:

This is categorized into:

i. Equivalent Relationship: Here it is possible to have more than one term for the same concept, hence synonyms may be used. For instance, "audience" and "readers". You may also use acronyms.
ii. Hierarchical Relationship: This is a genius specie relationship which indicated class inclusion. For example, "paintings" and "water colours".
iii. Affinitive/Associative Relationship: This indicates through related terms such as "land" and "sea", "birds" and "sky", "gold and money".

An indexer may read through the document before starting to index it. However, some opinions argued whether a computer can automatically create an index. The short answer is No. Computers can easily construct a concordance (a list of words or phrases and where they appear) but this is not an index, and is not very useful to someone looking for information. The so-called automatic indexing software programs now appearing on the market are simply not up to the task of indexing a book. Book indexing involves a little bit of manipulating words appearing in a text which computers can do, and a lot of understanding and organizing the ideas and information in the text, which computers cannot do and will not do for many years to come. An example of the difference is that a book on "Medical Law and Ethics: Protective Gloves for Occupational Use" might have a chapter discussing surgical gloves, how they get punctured and how they are tested for integrity, but might never use the word "holes". Yet a user of the book would expect to find this word in the index and be directed to the appropriate chapter. The indexer handles dozens or hundreds of such issues in every book.

Where the text is already on computer disk, the indexing features of word processing programs can ease the handling of page numbers and sorting, but the real indexing work is still done by the human.

Terms to use in Indexing:

The indexer can pick out relevant words and phrases used in the document on a first reading. Knowledge of the subject matter is helpful in this regard as this will help in the recognition of general topics, implied, wider or allied concepts, and also in finding appropriate wording that may not be obvious from the text. If, however, there are minor topics, a 'see' reference to the indexed term can be included. Besides, terms should be broken down into subheadings, so that different aspects of the topic within an entry can be selected. This is to avoid long page numbers in an index.

(a)   Main Headings:

The rule is that main headings should be clear and concise, reflecting depth access of what the user would be interested to know. For instance:

Recognition, 303 – 330.

- Self defence, **right of**
- anticipatory, 789 – 90
- charter right, 787 – 88
- collective, 794 – 95
- customary law, 788 – 89, 791
- definition, 787 – 91
- general, 8,727, 787 – 91

In the above example, the heading for "Recognition" has to be expanded to match the level of depth in the "self – defence, right of" heading. The use of sub-headings will enable users to quickly find specific information about recognition.

Recognition

collective, 313

conditional, 310 – 11

de facto, 301, 307, 320, 327

de jure, 308, 320, 321

government, of: see recognition of governments

implied, 301

(b)   Synonyms:

They allow users to use their own words when searching for information. A synonym may be entered as

"See" cross-reference. For example

Cloning
- reproductive cloning 10
- ethics of 11
- law on 12
- science of 14

Cloning see medical tourism

Another example:

Russia
- angola 551
- peaceful co-existence 133

Soviet Union, See Russia

The use of a 'see' cross – reference also informs the user about the standard terminology used in the document. In the examples above, 'see' reference is used to refer the user from a synonym not used in order to minimize space, where there are more than three sub-headings after the main heading, make use of 'see' reference.

(c)   Number of Undifferentiated Page References:

The general rule is that if a main heading has too many undifferentiated page references, the indexer is advised to create a number of sub-headings to avoid users being frustrated.

CHANGE

- counsel 502, 511, 519, 526, 604

see also Access to Legal Advice

TO
- counsel see also access to legal advice
- court of appeal 518
- errors 525
- legal representation 583 – 584, 602
- sentencing 604

If there are too many undifferentiated page references in a sub-heading, in a two level index, the sub-heading can be divided into sub-headings. The indexer can also raise the subheading to a main heading with its own sub-headings and make a 'see also' reference from the original main heading. For example:

CHANGE

Police
- assisting 502 – 503
- bail 504, 507, 509
- helping with inquiries, 16 – 17
- mitigation 20-21

TO

Bail
- absconding 10 -12
- bench warrant under 98 – 100
- breach 505, 515
- conditions 152

Police, see also Bail

assisting, 591

helping with inquiries, 8 – 10

mitigation, 591 – 592

(d)   Large Number of Sub-headings following a Main Heading:

The general rule is that where there are more than 15 sub-headings following a main heading, there would be problem. This is because the main heading may be too broad. Therefore, it is advised to delete the main heading and raise the sub-headings to main headings.

(e)   Question of Parallel Structure in Sub-headings:

A consistent grammatical structure in sub-headings should be followed as we can see in the following instances:

Image List
creating
editing
loading
saving

AND NOT

Image list
creation of
editing
loading in
saving

(f)   Double – Posted Heading:

Here the page – reference must be the same.

For instance:

Women's Rights 20 – 2000 – 20 – 202 see also Beijing Conference
- amendments to Act of 1995, 20 – 200,
- background, 21 – 103

Beijing Conference 20 – 200 – 20 -202
- amendments to Act of 1995, 20 – 200
- background 21 – 103

It is in order to repeat main headings as sub-headings under other main headings.

This increases the access points available to the user. For example, "fines" appears as a sub-heading under "costs" while "costs" appears as a sub-heading under "fines".

Costs, 565 – 77

acquivals, 566

appeals, 570

fines, 568, 722

guilty pleas, 569 – 70

Fines, 717 – 723, 730 – 739

action plan orders, 774

adjournments, 722

aggregate, 601

costs, 568, 722

default, 721 – 23

If subheadings are missing from a heading, a user is likely to conclude that the topic is not covered in the document, whereas it is there.

(g).   Cross – References

The indexer should be sure that each cross – reference ("see" and "see also") refers and that they match exactly. Cross references should go directly to a heading and not to another cross – reference. For example:

(i).   Legal Representation, see Access to justice

and not

Access to Justice, 560 – 650

See also Legal Representation

(ii).   "See also" reference under "weight control" should be changed to go directly to "fitness"

Exercise, see fitness

and not

Weight control, 16, 45 – 49 see also exercise.

(h).   Capitalization, Pluralization and Spelling:

(i).   Capitalization:

Indexers should create a style for capitalization. Thus, it is wise to follow capitalization used in

the text so that it does not affect the meaning of specific term.

For example:

- Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries

- African Union

- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

- European Union

(ii). Pluralization:

Any noun having to do with more than one, for instance, "how many", "who are" are expressed in plural form. Examples:

- State laws

- Statutes

- Lawyers

- Law librarians

You must, therefore, be consistent once you pluralize.

But nouns that have to do with "how much" is expressed in singular form. For example:
- water
- salt
- energy

(iii). Spelling:

The indexer is advised to maintain the spelling used in the document. For example:

- Capitalisation not for Capitalization

- Encyclopaedia not for Encyclopedia

- Honour not for Honor

(i).   Alphabetization of Sub-headings:

The general rule is that leading articles and prepositions in sub-headings should not be alphabetized. For example:

Academic Law Libraries
administration of
evaluation of
geographical location
historical background
in Britain
Rather it should be:

Academic Law Libraries
administration of
in Britain

evaluation of
historical background
geographical location

(j).   Personal and Geographic Names:

There are also different rules just like as we have in capitalization. The commonest one is to enter the surname followed by the forename or initials.

For instance:
Tuyo, O.
Akpata, Joyce
El-Rufai, Ahmed
Tinubu, Bola
Fashola, Babatunde

However, names of geographic features that begin with the type of feature such as mountain for Mt. should be followed. For example:
Chad, Lake
Kilimanjaro, Mt.
Benue, River
Niger, River

Indexes to Periodicals

Legal periodicals contain reports and commentaries on recent cases, statutes, statutory instruments and official or government publications. The index could be part of the volume or printed separately.

Examples of periodical indexes include:

i.   Subject heading
ii.   Title of article
iii.   Author(s)
iv.   Title of periodical for instance: Journal of Library and Information Science; and other bibliographic details (imprint)
v.   Jurisdiction or geographical location.

The indexer should also note that there must be a decision on the list of subject headings to be used before he starts indexing.

Therefore, any of the following subject headings may be used:

i.   The Sears' List of Subject Headings
ii.   Library of Congress Subject Heading.
iii.   Adeyemi and Adeniji's Subject Headings for Indexing Nigerian Newspapers: a Preliminary List.

Besides, the indexer should also know that a standard language should be chosen to avoid

inconsistency of meaning and the length of the subject descriptor.

Moreover, the terms used should reflect the current terminology of the literature being indexed and their relevance and logicality to the users being served.

However, an article in the periodical may deal with several subjects hence it is not always possible to assign only one subject heading to it. Several subjects headings may be assigned so that it can be completely indexed.

(a).   Index to Law Reports:

There are many methods to cite law reports depending on the jurisdiction. In Nigeria, for a law report like Nigeria Weekly Law Report, it can be cited as follows: Ogunleye v Aina (2011) 3 NWLR (Pt. 1235) 479 CA

(i).   the names, in this instance, surname of the parties, with 'v' being the latin for 'and' or 'against'

(ii).   the year the case was reported; in this case 2011

(iii).   the volume of the law report; in this case 3

(iv).   the title of the law reporting journal: in this instance, the Nigerian Weekly Law Report, in this case, NWLR

(v).   the number or part of the law reporting journal; in this instance, Pt. 1235

(vi).   the page where it begins; in this case, 479

(vii).   the court where the case was decided, for example, CA for Court of Appeal, SC for Supreme Court. In this particular example, the case was decided at the Court of Appeal.

These citations are usually arranged in alphabetical and chronological order. Also, the list of cases, statutes (both local and foreign) refereed to in the judgment should be indexed.

(b).   Index to Statutes:

Just like law reports, index to statutes will be both alphabetical and chronological list of statutes in force, statutory instrument or subsidiary legislation, list of repealed and spent statutes.

Abstracting Services

What are Abstracts?

Abstracts are formal summaries writers prepare for their completed work.

However, Encyclopedia Britannica defines an abstract as a complete citation, condensation and summary of essential facts of theories and opinions presented in an article or book.

Purpose of an Abstract:

An Abstract majorly serves five main goals:

1. It helps readers decide if they should read an entire article. In this case, readers are able to see if a piece of writing interests them or relate to a topic they are working on instead of tracking down hundreds of articles. Therefore, readers rely on abstracts to decide quickly if an article is pertinent.

2. It helps readers and researchers remember key findings on a topic.

3. Even after reading an article, readers often keep abstracts to remind them of which sources support conclusions. This is simply because abstracts include complete bibliographic citations which help readers when they begin writing up their research and citing sources.

4. It helps readers understand a text by acting as a pre-reading outline of key points. In this respect, it helps readers anticipate what is coming in the text itself; and makes reading of the text easier and more efficient.

5. It also index articles for quick recovery and cross-referencing. This has helped librarians particularly law librarians and legal researchers find information more easily. The beauty of this is that with so many indexes now available electronically, abstracts with their keywords are even more important because readers can now reviewed hundreds of abstracts quickly to find the ones most useful for their research.

6. Abstracts allow to review technical work without becoming monotonous. Little time is spent looking at large volume of work and only the summary or abstract of such work is required which make the

work sift the major things that will become useful to readers.

Abstract usually occur in journals, conferences and meetings, books, thesis/dissertation, research reports. However, documents usually selected for abstracting include:

i. Those that are novel contributions;
ii. Those that are inaccessible e.g. foreign documents
iii. Those that are contained in reputable sources;
iv. Those that are published in sources which the abstracting service has undertaken to cover;
v. Those that are pertinent to the interest of clients or readers of an abstracting service;
vi. Those that are theoretical papers or reviews reporting significant advances or new concepts
vii. Those that are reports and are convincingly supported with empirical evidence.

Types of Abstracts:

The following are the major types of abstracts:

(1). Descriptive/Indicative Abstract:

A descriptive abstract outlines the topics covered in a piece of writing so the reader can decide whether or not to read the entire document. The descriptive abstract is like a table of contents in paragraph form; therefore reading a descriptive abstract cannot substitute for reading the document because it does not capture the content of the piece. The descriptive abstract is useful as alerting and selection aids. It is quicker to write, suitable for reviews and more economical to produce.

(2). Information Abstract:

An information abstract provides detail about the substance of a piece of writing. This is because readers will sometimes rely on the abstract alone for information. It summarizes the principal argument and gives the principal data. The following are the typical format of an informative abstract:

a. Identifying information (bibliographic citation or other identification of the document)

b. Concise statement of the main point, including the initial problem or other background
c. Methodology (for experimental work) and key findings
d. Major conclusions.

Nonetheless, the difference between descriptive and information abstracts is simply that the descriptive abstract is like a table of contents whereas the informative abstract lays out the content of the document.

(3) Descriptive – Informative Abstract:

This type of abstract has both descriptive and informative components. The more important parts of the abstract may be treated fully as informative, the les important parts may be treated descriptively.

Other Types of Abstracts include:

(4). Slanted abstract, Mini Abstract, Highlight Abstract:

a. Slanted Abstract: This is prepared for a select audience
b. Mini – Abstract: This gives a broader view of the title of the work
c. Highlight Abstract: This appears in or adjacent to the table of contents of some primary journals.

(5). Critical Abstract:

This is also known as evaluative abstract. It assesses and comments on the document and its presentation. It also indicates the audience level (whether beginner or expert), the treatment of the work (whether complex, accurate, deep, shallow) and if the experiments performed are adequate or not.

Steps for Writing Effective Abstracts:

1. The abstractor must read or listen to the entire paper long enough for it to percolate and brew up a clear vision of what the paper is all about.
2. He must also re-read the article, paper, or report with the goal of abstracting in mind.
3. After he has finished re-reading the article, paper or report, he should write a rough draft without looking back at what you are abstracting. You should just

summarize the information in a new way.

4. The abstractor should revise the rough draft to:
   a. Correct weaknesses in organization;
   b. Drop unnecessary information;
   c. Add important information you left out;
   d. Fix errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation;
   e. Flavour with style (avoid verbosity, use of active voice than passive voice, condense parts if possible);
5. Print the final copy and read it again to catch any glitches that you find.

Some Requisites of Abstracting:

(1). Writing and reading skills
(2). Rapid reading
(3). Ability to summarize a material

The Do's and Don's for Abstractors:

(A). **Do's:**
1. Scan the document purposefully for key facts
2. Tell the readers the purpose of the work (what the author did)
3. Tell why the work was done (reason(s))
4. Tell how the work was done (methods)
5. Tell what was found (results)
6. Tell what it means (discussions and conclusions)
7. Be informative but brief
8. Be extract, concise and unambiguous
9. Use short, complete sentences
10. Avoid unnecessary words
11. Describe conclusions in the present tense
12. Use abbreviation sparingly
13. Cite bibliographic date completely.

(B). **Don's**
1. Repeat words of the title
2. Change the meaning of the original
3. Mention earlier work
4. Include detailed experimental work
5. Mention future work
6. Waste words by stating the obvious
7. Comment on or interpret the document
8. Begin abstract with stock phrases
9. Be a mere recital of subjects covered.
10. Use questionable jargon

Therefore, a typical abstract entry consists of the following:
1. Name of author(s)
2. Address of author
3. Title of the document (including sub-titles if any)
4. Indication of the language of the document
5. Bibliographical specification of the document
6. This is what we call imprints in librarianship.
7. Abstract proper
8. Information about the bibliography included in the original document.

Conclusion

The importance of writing indexes and abstracts cannot be over-emphasized. This is because they help in the timely dissemination of information especially in a developing country like Nigeria and most other developing countries where readership promotion is low. Therefore the indexer and abstractors in our various law libraries should always ensure that for every document we classify and catalogued (whether electronically or manually) there is need for indexing and abstracting of such documents.

This may be a Herculean task for the law librarian performing both the work of classification and cataloguing. Therefore, there is need to employ the services or at best train some staff of the library as indexers and abstractors who will in turn be better equipped for ability to sort and classify, better equipped to have passion for accuracy, ability to read rapidly, ability to have a good memory and wide general knowledge. This, no doubt, will improve our library services as centres for retrieval and dissemination of legal information.

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