

INDEXING, ABSTRACTING, AND THESAURUS CONSTRUCTION

“If it isn’t indexed, it might as well not be there.” Barbara Quinn, a pioneer in electronic research, told me that as far back as 1994, and even in today’s world of full-text search, the art and science of indexing and other means of constructing finding aids not only persists but flourishes. This course won’t teach you how to index, any more than law school teaches you how to be a lawyer; but it will show you what these finding aids really are, how they work, the basics of their construction, and the place and value of indexes, abstracts, thesauri, and taxonomies in modern information technology. You will also find out whether you want to be an indexer, or whether you would rather just appreciate them properly and use them well.

Students will undertake in-class exercises, two small projects, and one term project.

The course syllabus may be subject to some variation to accommodate guest speakers.

May 14 – Introduction to indexing: history of finding aids; indexes defined; related forms of finding aids; full-text search vs. indexing; types of materials indexed; the process of indexing.

May 21 – The parts of an index; topic and subject analysis: headings, subheadings, and special features (names, places, acronyms, non-text items, etc.).

May 28 – **Memorial Day**. Have a pleasant vacation!

June 4 - Cross references and double-posting; subject specialties; indexing non-text items.

June 11 - Introduction to non-book indexing and things like indexes: open-ended vs. close-ended indexing; databases; journals; websites; metadata; abstracts; thesauri; taxonomies; tabling.

June 18 – Thesauri (guest speaker).

June 25 – Format, layout, structure, style; embedding indexes.

July 2 – Editing and evaluating indexes.

July 8 – Abstracting; taxonomies.

July 15 – The business of indexing; indexing software.

Course instructor: Kate Mertes

Kate Mertes is sole proprietor of Mertes Editorial Services, providing indexing, information retrieval, and editorial expertise for complex, challenging projects in law and the humanities. Kate took her B.A. in medieval studies, a Ph.D. in medieval history, and a post-doctoral degree in theology, and after teaching at university level for several years moved into publishing with a stint at Oxford English Dictionaries. After nine years as a managing editor of indexing with Research Institute of America, a legal publishing company, Kate started her own business in 1998. She has lived in Alexandria, VA, since 1992. Kate served on the Board of the American Society of Indexers (ASI) from 1998 to 2004, and was president of ASI in 2002-2003. She was president of the Washington, D.C. chapter of ASI, 2005-2006. She is also a founding fellow of the Consortium of Indexing Professionals. Some of her recent projects include indexing the Oxford Jewish Study Bible, a 1600 page edition of the works of Sir Edward Cook, and Corbin's 12-volume text on contract law; developmental editing of texts in law, history, theology, and neurobiology, and taxonomic construction and classification for the website of the Healthcare Financial Management Association (HFMA). Kate is the author of *Good Governance and Politic Rule: The English Noble Household, 1250-1550*, and chapters in many of ASI's publications on the indexing of legal, historical, and theological materials. She is currently composing a chapter on classical and medieval nomenclature for ASI's new book on names and naming, and is a co-author of the upcoming *Guide to Indexing for Editors and Authors*.