

Do Children Use Indexes Differently Than Adults? Summary of an Informal Survey of Index Users

by Janice Flatoff

[Editor's Note: I would like to thank Janice Flatoff for providing us with this in depth survey of index users.]

Introduction

I followed with interest the discussion on Index-L in August of 2006 about indexing a biography written for children with instructions from the publisher not to have any entries under the biographee's name. Ann Truesdale was preparing the index to this biography. When she asked for reviewers to see how the index read without an entry for the biographee, I volunteered.

While reviewing the index, I wondered if children would look up items (names, places, other terms) in the index differently than adults would. So, I asked two adults and two children how they would look up specific terms from this book's index. I shared the results with Ann, who encouraged me to post them on the Internet so others could see them. I thought if I was going to do that, I should have data from more people. So, I asked more children and adults, including two children's librarians, how they would look up these terms.

Participants

Children (or representing children)

- **V** (12 years old, entering 7th grade), **Y** (13, 8th grade), **M** (13, 9th grade), and **J** (15, 10th grade)
- **Lg** (has been an elementary school librarian for over 30 years)
- **Lw** (has been an elementary school librarian for 20 years and 4th grade classroom teacher for three)

Lg and **Lw** based their responses on what they thought children up through grade 6 (age 11 or 12) would look up in an index based on their many years of observation of and working with children. The children use indexes as needed for schoolwork.

Adults

- Young adults: **C** (18 years old), **K** (20), and **A** (20). (**T** (24) did not participate in the survey, but I included some comments he made in the next section.)
- Not-so-young adults: **S**, **B**, and **E** (in their 40's or 50's).

Note: **C** and **K** are Lutheran, as are the two librarians; **S** was raised Lutheran but is now Catholic; the rest are Catholic. Since this book has to do with a Catholic Pope, familiarity with the Catholic religion could be a factor in some of the answers.

The adults are either in or have had post-secondary education.

Janice Grace Flatoff, (Flatoff Indexing, Graceful Indexes for Written Words, www.flatoffindexing.com) became interested in book indexing about seven years ago and has gradually been working toward a career in indexing.

Except for **A**, their current use of indexes ranges from never/seldom to occasional. **A**, who is currently in college, uses indexes as needed for schoolwork plus personal use. He probably uses indexes more than anyone else in this survey. He doesn't recall ever having problems using one.

What participants teach, or remember being taught, about using indexes

Most of the participants do not remember any instruction in school about how to use indexes. The few who do remember something remember very little. What they remember:

- **C** commented that she knows she has to look under the last name; not sure how she knows this.
- **T** said, "I was taught somewhere in grade school that only nouns will be in indexes. We had a few exercises. In response to your survey, every noun that would be in the [survey] list [of terms/phrases] would be in the index. But as you know, categorized under main titles and down." He gave two examples of the types of entries he would expect to see pertaining to the survey:

Pope
Benedict XVI
Gregory the Great
etc.

Ratzinger
birth
childhood
education

- **M** remembers that the librarian introduced indexes in 5th or 6th grades.
- **Y** remembers learning about indexes in 2nd grade: "It's [the word they would find in the index] usually not the first word, often the second, if not then the third or fourth." The example he gave was that for "types of tapes" (pertaining to building tips) one

Feature Article

would try “tapes” first, then “type,” then “adhesive.”

Note: All of the youth and adults attend(ed) schools in the same public school district that the librarians work in. **E** and **B**, however, attended Catholic parochial schools in this district. Due to budget cuts, there was a reduction in the number of school librarians three years ago and those remaining were reshuffled; instead of being at one school, they are now assigned to two schools. For the last three years, **Lg** has been the librarian at the school that **Y** and **V** attend; **Lg** was **Y**'s librarian for his 5th and 6th grades and **V**'s librarian for her 4th, 5th, and 6th grades.

What **Lg** has to say about teaching students how to use indexes:

We all teach basic index and Table of Contents at grade 3 and/or grade 4. We teach the difference between the two, how their information is arranged and presented, and where they are typically found in a book. For an index, we then try to teach the concept of a main word or broad category, and having subtopics listed under it. Example: Birds (subtopics: Bluejay, Robin, Sparrow). We teach the difference between pages given like this: 7, 8, 11 and 13-16.

Indexes are also reviewed in grades 5 and 6 in the reference unit when we teach using the almanac, encyclopedia index, and other references. They don't retain much because they don't use these skills very often.

What **Lw** has to say about teaching students how to use indexes

In a separate e-mail to **Lw**, I explained:

We have certain rules to follow when indexing. We would put 'Curran, Father Charles' not 'Father Charles Curran' and 'Augustine, Saint' not 'Saint Augustine,' for example. I was wondering if we should relax those rules for children, especially young ones.

She responded:

Do not “relax” the rules for indexing. If the student is old enough to read and understand a book with terms like this, they are old enough to use an index. As far as knowing if a child will give up if they can't find something right away — that depends on the child and their reason for using

the index. Some would give up, and some would realize that they need to look in another place.

Don't use first names, since you never look names up that way. As a librarian I taught this in early grades on up (children need a lot of reminding). In the early grades (even 1st) we talk about fiction books by last name of author. In 3rd grade indexes are used for short reports. (Sometimes even in 2nd grade by the request of the teacher.) Indexes are stressed in 4th grade and up. As a 4th grade teacher [the last three years], I teach that also, especially when we do our biography unit. I always emphasize looking up last names and never first names, whether looking in indexes, encyclopedias, directories, phone books, fiction books (last name of the author), etc.

About the book and survey procedures

The book is a biography of Joseph Ratzinger, who is now Pope Benedict XVI. My impression upon reading the index entries was that it is a book for older children.

I chose a variety of names and phrases for the survey, some simple and some more complicated. They were taken from the index entries written by Ann, but uninverted for the survey (e.g., I read “Augustine, Saint” as “Saint Augustine.”) I read them in the order they were in the index, except after the first few times when I began the survey with the two questions about Ratzinger's personal life.

I introduced the survey to the participants by telling them the purpose of it and who the book was about. I made sure no one else in the family who might be in the survey was able to hear them talking.

I introduced the first question about Ratzinger by asking the participants what they would look under if they wanted to find out about his birth, childhood, etc. Immediately after they answered that question, I asked what they would look under to find out about his education.

I then told the participants to tell me where they would look to find the following names, etc., and read them without any further comments, except for a few phrases about more general things. I also said they could choose one of the words I gave them or a different one.

Several of **A**'s answers were in the form of “heading, subheading.” I put his responses down under the heading he chose.

Since this was a very informal survey and the participants all know me, they felt free to think out loud or make comments. I sometimes asked questions to clarify their comments. Their comments are included under the appropriate term. **A**, **T**, **Lw**, and **Lg** responded to e-mails. I talked to the rest of the participants in person or on the telephone.

The Survey

Introduction

I categorized the names/phrases into four groups for this summary. Each group begins with a question pertaining to the kind of index entries in the group and ends with an answer to that question. Each name/phrase that was read to the participants is above the table indicating the responses to that name/phrase.

The first row of each table consists of the words they would look up in the index. The second row consists of the initials of the participants, which are below the choice(s) they made. If they had more than one answer, their second or third choices are indicated by a “2” or “3” after their initial response.

The initials are coded to more easily see any differences among children's responses as compared to adults' responses. The initials of children are in bold; those of young adults are in underlined italics; and those of not-so-young adults are underlined. Any comments by participants or notes by me are included below the table.

Note: Results are entered in the following sequences with the groups separated by spaces: children (**JMVY**); young adults (*ACK*); older adults (*BES*); librarians (**LgLw**). Second and third term choices are indicated with a superscript 2 or 3.

Biographies

Question: Will people look for personal information about the subject under the biographee's name or the subject matter?

I asked the participants what they would look under in an index if they wanted to find out information about Pope Benedict/Ratzinger, such as his birth or childhood.

Ratzinger	birth or..	birthdate	past	Pope	Benedict	personal ...	life	early days...
<u>J</u> <u>V</u> <u>C</u> <u>K</u> <u>E</u> <u>Lg</u>	<u>M</u> ² <u>A</u>	<u>J</u> ²	<u>M</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>Y</u> ²	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u> ³	<u>B</u> *

*B remembers other biographies having "early days" and "life" in the index.

I then asked as a separate question what word they would look under to find out about Ratzinger's education.

Ratzinger	education	Pope	Benedict	personal life	early days/life
<u>J</u> <u>M</u> <u>C</u> <u>E</u> <u>Lg</u>	<u>V</u> <u>A</u> <u>K</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>Y</u> ²	<u>Y</u>	<u>B</u>

Lw responded, "Any of the above would not normally be used in an index. If the book is about Ratzinger, then his birth, childhood, etc. would be obvious in the table of contents and not needed in the index. Students would not look in the index for birth, education, etc."

Answer: Both children and adults were likely to look under the name or the subject.

Approximately one-half to two-thirds of the participants would look under the biographee's name as their first choice. There was some confusion in this instance, though, about the proper name to look under. While most chose "Ratzinger," "Pope" and "Benedict" were also seen as possible choices.

Note that two of the participants who chose to look under "Ratzinger" for his birth or childhood chose to look under "education" for his education. Likewise, one person who looked under "Ratzinger" for his education did not look under "Ratzinger" for his birth or childhood.

Names vs. Titles and Categories

Question: Will people look up names of people under their name or their title or a category?

Saint Augustine:

Saint	Augustine	saints
<u>J</u> <u>C</u> ² <u>K</u> <u>B</u> <u>S</u> <u>Lg</u>	<u>M</u> <u>A</u> <u>C</u> <u>E</u> <u>Lg</u> ² <u>Lw</u>	<u>V</u> <u>Y</u> <u>S</u> ²

Lw responded, "You could also include "Saint Augustine" as some indexes include both to be more complete. I have seen indexes use "Pope," "Saint," "Chief," etc. as an entry also, especially if there really isn't a last name."

Father Charles Curran:

Father	Curran	Priest	priests	religion	people
<u>C</u> <u>K</u> <u>BES</u>	<u>J</u> <u>M</u> ² <u>A</u> <u>Lg</u> <u>Lw</u>	<u>M</u> <u>Y</u>	<u>V</u>	<u>Y</u> ³	<u>Y</u> ²

M and Y responded, "Is he a priest? I would look under priest."

Cardinal Michael Faulhaber:

Cardinal	Faulhaber	cardinals	priests
<u>J</u>	<u>M</u> <u>A</u> <u>C</u> <u>B</u> <u>E</u> <u>Lg</u> <u>Lw</u>	<u>V</u> <u>K</u> <u>S</u>	<u>Y</u>

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Note: **Y** is correct. Cardinals (and archbishops, bishops, and popes) are high-ranking priests.

Pope Gregory the Great:

Pope	Gregory	popes	priests
J C BS Lg²Lw	M A E Lg	V K	Y

C was stumped. She knew she had to look under the last name, not the first name, but there isn't a last name to look under, so she chose "Pope."

B chose "Pope" because he is a historical figure. She looked at how people relate to Pope Benedict XVI. She would put people he's met under their names but since Pope Gregory the Great is a historical figure (Benedict hasn't met him; apparently less important to this book), she would put him under "Pope" and look for him there.

Lg responded, "They [students] would like them [popes] all listed under the main heading 'Popes' and subheading by individual names. But depending on how complicated your index is going to be, some students might try the individual name first."

Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen:

Archbishop	Hunthausen	archbishops	priests
M S	ACK BE LgLw	JV	Y

B would look under the name here, instead of "archbishops" since he is a "current" person.

Bishop Ernst Tewes:

Bishop	Tewes	bishops	priests
S	M ACK BE LgLw	JV	Y

Answer: When there is a last name, half or more of the participants chose the last name. "Father Charles Curran" is the exception to this. In this case, all of the adults except **A**, who uses indexes more than the others, chose "Father."

For these names, a category was chosen more often than the title, and the older children (junior/senior high) were more likely than adults or young children (grade school) to choose a category.

When there is not a last name, the category is chosen about as often as it is when there is a last name, but the title is chosen more often, about as often as the first name is. In other words, when there is no last name, almost half the participants chose the first name, almost half chose the title, and the remaining few chose a category. Children and adults were approximately equal in their choices of first name or title.

Question: Will people look up names of things under their name or a descriptive word (type of thing, e.g., palace) or a category?

Apostolic Palace:

Apostolic	Palace	housing	Vatican, the
J K² ES LgLw	MV ACK Lg²	Y	B

Lg responded, "'Apostolic' is the first choice; younger students will try 'Palace' because it is an easier word."

B responded, "It's in the Vatican, isn't it?"

Catholic Church:

Catholic	Church	churches	Catholicism	religion	religions
JM C² BS² LgLw	ACK E	Y	S	Y²	V

See comments under "Eastern Orthodox Church" in the next section.

Ulm Cathedral:

Ulm	Cathedral	cathedrals	churches	religion
A BE LgLw	JM K	V C S Lg²	Y	Y²

Lg responded, "Ulm" and "Cathedrals" if there are several listed.

University of Tubingen:

University	Tubingen	universities	buildings	education
C B LgLw	JM AK E	S	Y	V

Note: Participants were given this term immediately after "University of Munich Theological Institute" (see the next section), so some of the answers to this term may have been influenced by the answer they chose for the first term (especially for **Y** and **V**).

Answer: For buildings, a little less than half of the participants looked under the name of the building (e.g., Ulm); about one-fourth looked under the descriptive word (e.g., Church); and about one-fourth looked under a more general category, which could include the plural of the type of building, etc. (e.g., churches).

Some individuals had a tendency to choose the category or descriptive word, but both children and adults chose the name and descriptive word and category for all of the terms except for "church," which was only chosen by adults. However, "cathedral" was only chosen by one adult (and two children), and "church" in the following section was only chosen by two adults (and one child).

Simple Names Compared to Complicated Names

Question: Will people look under the same element (name, title/type of thing, or category) for a name with a complicated structure as they will for a name with a simple structure?

Archbishop of Munich-Freising:

Archbishop	Munich-Freising	archbishops	priests
<u>MV</u> <u>E</u> <u>Lg</u> <u>Lw</u>	<u>J</u> <u>ACK</u> <u>Lg</u> ²	<u>BS</u>	<u>Y</u>

Note: I explained to the younger participants, who sounded confused by the name, that Munich and Freising were cities and that this was the district for the archbishop.

S picked “archbishops” because then “they would all be under there.” This was the first term with a “title” that I read to the participants. S apparently kept her reasoning for this term in mind for the other ones I read, since she consistently picked the category when she had that choice. The few times she picked the singular title instead of the plural category were probably unintentional; she may have been thinking the category (or not differentiating between singular and plural) but I didn’t hear the “s” so I put it under the title. (I didn’t want to call her attention to this, and potentially influence her answers, by asking her about it.)

Eastern Orthodox Church:

Eastern	Orthodox	Church	churches	religion
<u>K</u> <u>B</u> <u>Lg</u> <u>Lw</u>	<u>JM</u> <u>ES</u> <u>V</u> ²	<u>YAC</u>	<u>V</u> <u>B</u> ²	<u>Y</u> ² <u>B</u> ³

B responded that if there are a lot of churches she would look for a “churches” entry.

Lg responded that some kids will try just “church” for this and hope to see a list of choices.

Note: It was having a second “church” entry that prompted these two comments about churches.

University of Munich Theological Institute:

University	Munich	Theological	Institute	universities	buildings	education
<u>CK</u> <u>B</u> <u>Lg</u> <u>Lw</u>	<u>JA</u>	<u>K</u> ² <u>E</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>V</u>

V, thinking out loud, asked, “It’s a school?”

Y, thinking out loud, decided it was a building.

Note: The first four people I asked (E, C, J, and M) each picked a different word!

Answer: Complicated structure (more words and/or harder to pick out the name) does make a difference in the words the participants would look up. Apparently, when confronted with so many “important” words, there is confusion about which is the most important or which would be the appropriate category.

Instead of a simple choice between the name of something (e.g., Tubingen) or the kind of thing it is (e.g., University), one must decide what the most important word or best word to look up is. In other words, when there are more words to choose from, all of those words can be chosen as the best word to look up in the index.

People who picked one kind of word for the simple entry didn’t necessarily pick the same kind of word for a more complicated entry. They were somewhat more likely to pick the kind of thing it was if they did it for the other entry. However, if they picked the name in the simple entry, more nouns in the longer entry can cause confusion as to which noun should be picked. I found that each noun in a longer entry was the first choice of at least one person.

Both children and adults chose the name, descriptive word, and category for each of these terms, although only adults chose “Theological.” Perhaps the children avoided it because they were unsure of its meaning. I explained the meaning of theology to some of the children during this survey. I also noticed a trend in the next section to avoid giving a word they didn’t understand as the answer.

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Feature Article

Phrases

Question: What word(s) will readers pick from phrases to look up in the index?

anti-establishment movement of the 1960s:

Anti-establishment establishment 1960s movements history politics

K² BE Lg K A S J Y Lg²

M, **V**, and **C** weren't sure what it meant and didn't answer. (I did explain it briefly to them and some of the others.) **Y** picked "history" since it happened "back then." **Lg** responded that a few might understand and use "politics," that most would try "anti-establishment."

Lw responded, "No, too long of a term for an index. Students wouldn't look under "anti" for this topic."

anti-Semitism:

anti-Semitism Semitism Jews/Judaism Jews Jews/Jewish persecution religion


J CK BE LgLw AK² S V Lg² Y

M and **J** weren't sure what "anti-Semitism" meant (I explained it briefly to them and some others.)

Lg responded, "Most will try "anti-Semitism"; possibly some might know enough to try "Jews" or "Jewish persecution."

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interreligious gathering in Assisi, Italy:

gathering	Assai, Italy	Italy	religious (gatherings)	annual gatherings	gatherings
M²V K²	BE Lg²	AK Lg	JM C S	Y	Y²

A would look for "Italy, Assisi".

Lw responded, "No, too long of a term for an index."

Lg responded, "Sad to say many kids would look at Italy first even though they are taught to go to the city Assisi first."

conclave of cardinals:

conclave	cardinals	gatherings, annual	annual	gatherings
J BE Lg	M ACK S	Y	Y²	V

Y said that he knew what it was. He was half right. It is a gathering, but not an annual one, to elect the next pope. It seemed to me he remembered his previous answer (which he assumed was an annual gathering) when he answered this one.

Lw responded, "No, I don't think students would look this up."

European decline of Christianity:

European	Christianity	history	religion	church
M BE	JV ACK S Lg	Y	Y²	C²

Lw responded, "No [not an appropriate entry for children]."

Y said that he would look under "religion," not "Christianity," because looking under "Christianity" would mean it is a separate group from religion, and Christianity is a religion. (In other words, Christianity is a religion so it should be under religion.)

teaching of evolution:

teaching	evolution	teachings
M²	JMVY² ACK BES LgLw	Y

Note: The only term everyone agreed on a key word for!

Benedict XVI talking (generally) about faith:

Benedict XVI	faith	Pope Benedict	teachings
MY² LgLw	JV ACK BE	S	Y

Lg comment: Benedict for main heading, faith as subheading.

Christian relations with Muslims:

Christians	religions	Muslims	religious relations	religion	relationships
C BS	VY E	MY AC² K S LgLW	J	Y³	Lg²

Lg noted that "Muslims" was the first choice. "Some students may make the connection to relationships for a second choice. Children have a hard time making the connection when the word is not exactly the same (relations to relationships)."

relationships with politicians:

relationships	politicians	religions	politics
K² Lg²	JMY² ACK ES Lg	VY	B

Lw commented, "No, too long of a term."

Note: This term was read to the participants right after the preceding one, so their answers for this phrase could have been influenced by their answers for the previous term (as apparently is the case for Y and V).

Introduction to Christianity (described as a book by Ratzinger):

introduction	Christianity	Ratzinger	books	authors	religions
JY² C BE Lg	M AK	S Lg²	V²	V	Y

Lg responded, "I think most kids would pick "Introduction" as their first choice. Some might try "Ratzinger" as an author. Both would be used if it was an important book."

Answer: Any noun, or any other important looking word, may be chosen as the word to look up in the index. No patterns of differences were noticed between adults and children.

In the above phrases, almost every noun was at least one person's first choice. In several of the phrases, one word was chosen more than any of the other words as the word to look up in the index. At least one person, usually an older child, looked for a broader category as the word to look up in the index for each phrase. But most people chose a word, or form of a word, in the phrase to look up.

In the phrase "teaching of evolution" all of the adults chose "evolution" as the word they would look up, while all of the children also chose "evolution" as a first or second choice, two children also considered other words.

Children avoided choosing words they did not understand. If they did not understand the phrase they might not look up anything because they didn't know what to look under.

continued on page 30

for special subjects such as music, linking authority files of disparate types, and metadata projects.

Authority Control in Organizing and Accessing Information will be useful chiefly for indexers who are also librarians (or vice versa), or database indexers who work with thesauri that have an authority component. Other indexers will find it useful for increasing their knowledge of the larger context of information retrieval.

— Roberta Engleman 

Do Children Use Indexes Differently Than Adults? (continued from page 23)

Do children look things up differently than adults?

The age of the participant does not seem to be a significant factor in what word will be chosen to look up in the index.

I only noticed a few instances in which adults or children chose a word that the other group didn't. Only adults chose "Father" in "Father Charles Curran" or "Church" in "Catholic Church." Only children chose "Benedict" in "Benedict XVI talking about faith." Only children considered something other than "evolution" in "teaching about evolution."

However, I found that if children don't understand the word, they won't look it up in the index. And, if they won't look up a word in a phrase they are given to look up, I doubt they will turn to the page in a book for a word or phrase they see in the index that they don't understand or know the meaning of. (The same may hold true for adults, but their vocabulary is larger.)

Summary

This survey looked at index users as people who are given a list of names and other information to find in the index. They have not read the book, but they know what they are looking for. It does not address how people who have not read the book, and are not familiar with the vocabulary in it, would approach the index. The survey also does not address how people who have read the book would approach the index.

The twelve people in this survey represent a wide range of ages (elementary school

through 50s). They were all (except the librarians) born and raised in the same locale, so they have the same environmental influences. They do not use indexes on a regular basis so are not conditioned to look up topics in the index based on how they found them in many previous indexes.

While there was agreement on a phrase with only one noun that was the only significant agreement found in what word would be chosen to look up in the index. Any noun or important word in a phrase/term/name could be chosen by at least one person as that person's first choice to look for in the index.

Participants were not always consistent in their choices. A person who chose the last name one time might choose the title or category another time, etc.

I did not find that age made a significant difference in the choices of words to look up in the index. However, I did find that children tend to avoid looking up words/terms they don't understand.

Do any other factors influence the words they look up in the index? When I gave the survey to Y, he took great care to come up with just the right category. So I wondered if he was a big picture/global thinker and if those kinds of thinkers would choose different words than detail-oriented/analytical thinkers. I then wondered if gender or family relationships would make a difference, since there were both sibling and parent/child combinations among the participants. So I analyzed the answers with these differences in mind. While Y, and to a lesser extent, V, tended to choose broad categories,

overall I did not find any significant differences among the kinds of thinkers or different genders. Likewise, I did not find any significant agreement in answers of family members.

Perhaps someone else would like to explore these questions (especially potential differences in the choices of different kinds of thinkers/personality types) with a larger population sample. It may also be interesting to ask what the reader would do if their first choice was not in the index.

I also wondered, after looking at these results, if people who are frequent index users will look up words in the index differently than those who are infrequent index users. I'm conditioned to look up words in the yellow pages under categories, for example. I know to look under "automobiles" not "cars," and under "physicians" not "doctors." Are frequent index users conditioned to look "Saint Augustine" up under "Augustine" not "Saint" or "saints," etc.?

In summary, any word an indexer can think of to put in an index, a reader can think of to look under!

Readers who are not frequent index users will look for entries under the "correct" terms *and* the "incorrect" terms as well as under categories/lists. They are not necessarily consistent in how they look for terms in the index. Adults as well as children are inconsistent. While there were a couple of times children made different choices than the adults, no patterns of difference based on age were noted. 