

# Charging for Indexing Services

## “How much?”

It's one of the first questions from clients and new indexers. But as with almost any fee for service, there is no hard and fast answer.

In a survey done by ISC/SCI in spring 2008, members were asked what they charge, and how, and the answers varied widely (see *Bulletin*, Vol. 30, No 3 [Summer 2008] at [www.indexers.ca/bulletin.html](http://www.indexers.ca/bulletin.html)), with hourly rates ranging from \$20 to \$65, typeset page rates ranging from \$1.85 to \$10 and manuscript page rates ranging from \$3 to \$8.

That broad range reflects the wonderful variety of work that indexers do in a full array of media (books, journals, websites, databases, etc.) and the breadth of clients (trade publishers, university presses, national organizations, governments, legal services, web-based services, etc.). It also reflects the immense variety of document, database and website designs and the varying levels of experience among indexers. Per-entry charges, which seem to be common elsewhere, do not seem to be common in Canada.

All that said, one is still left with the question: “How much?”

## For clients

In Canada, editors, project managers and publishers seem very willing to share this type of information. The best thing to do is to contact colleagues and ask what they paid for similar projects: 300-page trade autobiographies, 400-page scholarly works, 100-page technical manuals, 10 000-entry databases, etc.

## For indexers

Again, the best thing to do is to contact colleagues. Also, think realistically about what you want to earn and what level of quality you can provide.

- What do you want to earn annually?
- What do you want to earn per hour?
- How many hours a day can you effectively index?
- What is your level of experience?
- What depth of indexing does the client want?
- How many pages per hour can you index at that depth?

For example, if you can index 15 pages per hour of this type of book and you want to earn \$60/hour, then you need to charge \$4/page at a minimum (remember that you spend other hours on your business that are not directly reimbursed). If you can index 10 pages per hour in this type of book, then you need to charge \$6 per page. That said, if you know that you are a bit slower than others (perhaps because you're new to the field, or you're just getting used to the software, etc.), then you may need to recognize that you will earn less per hour until you are up to speed. For example, if both you and the client know that the normal rate for a 300-indexable-page trade non-fiction is about

\$1 350, or \$4.50 per page, then you charge the \$4.50 per-page rate and recognize that you will be earning less per hour until you get up to speed.

### ***Books***

For back-of-the-book indexes, a per-page rate is probably the most common. It enables both the indexer and the client to know at the outset how much will be paid. Generally, one doesn't "sweat the small stuff". In other words, if the indexer is expected to begin indexing with page 1 and finish indexing on page 312, then the indexer charges \$x/pg for 312 pages—there is no fussing over half pages and blank pages and so on. You may also find some indexers who charge by the hour, particularly for scholarly or niche-market books.

### ***Periodicals***

For periodical indexes, some people charge by the hour and some by the journal. Similar questions to those above also apply here: How fast can you index (which may depend on how well you understand the subject)? What is the normal size of the journal? Are you expected to use a thesaurus/controlled vocabulary (as this will slow you down)? Are you going to be expected to turn the final journal around in a few days because of the publishing schedule?

### ***Other factors***

Your personal rate will depend not just on how fast you can think through the entries, but on how fast you can type accurately and on how well you can use the shortcuts offered by your indexing software. These two seemingly minor things are critically important to your earnings. If you have never learned to type properly, then do so now—it can make the difference between your earning \$60 000 or \$80 000 per year by working 35 hours/week or earning that only if you work 50–60 hours/week. And learn your software—the same concept applies.

Language considerations can make a big difference:

- Is this a stand-alone English document? French document?
- Are you indexing a document in one language and expected to correlate with an index for the same document in another language?
- Are you adapting an index from one language to another?

## **Conclusions and resources**

So the questions are many: What do you want to earn? What is your indexing speed for the particular document or item? How does the design affect your indexing speed: how much white space is there, what size is the type, are you expected to index endnotes, how many pictures or tables are included, are you indexing the pictures and tables? How well do you understand the subject? Are you using a controlled vocabulary? How fast can you type accurately? How knowledgeable are you about your software? What depth of indexing is required?

The website of the American Society of Indexers (ASI) offers other considerations and other ways to think about how to translate your desired annual earnings into per-page indexing rates. See <http://www.asindexing.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3304#FAQ1010>.

Ultimately, your best resources, whether you are a client or an indexer, are each other.