

CONTENTS PAGE OF A CURRENT ISSUE OF A PERIODICAL

Dear Sir,

I may be allowed to comment on the issues and suggestions contained in the paper "Contents page of a periodical: What it contains and what it should contain" by B Guha and J S Ghosh (Ann Lib Sc 1971, 18, 66-67).

The paper gives a comprehensive treatment about the pros and cons of the various items of information to be included in the contents page of a current issue of a periodical.

1 FUNCTIONS OF CONTENTS PAGE

The paper has correctly identified that the primary function of the contents page is "to satisfy the initial curiosity of the reader" about the contents of the text of an issue of a periodical. In short, its function is analogous to that of menu-list of a restaurant.

The paper has also brought into focus a "derivative function" of the contents page of an issue of a periodical -- that is, the use of the items of information given in the contents page, for the quick production of current awareness documentation lists. These are denoted by the term 'Contents-page-Derivative Periodicals'. Examples of this type of secondary periodicals are Current contents and Inodoc list. Besides these, several institutional documentation centres use contents page for current awareness services. This use of items of information given on a contents page is gaining popularity among documentalists and scientists in recent times.

However, it must be noted that the denotation of an item of information given in a contents page can be helpfully understood only when we take it along with the contents of the issue of the periodical concerned. But in a 'Contents Page Derivative Periodical', these items of information are separated from the immediate context of the contents they describe. Therefore, mere reproduction of these items of information may sometimes give incomplete and inadequate information. Therefore, in order to facilitate the needs of

the "derivative function" of the contents page, the items of information provided in the contents page are to be made more detailed and expressive of the contributions published in an issue of the periodical.

2 STANDARD FOR ITEMS OF INFORMATION ON A CONTENTS PAGE

The authors have almost at providing a standard for the items of information that are to be included in a contents page of an issue of a periodical, which not only meet the primary function of the contents page, but also its derivative function.

3 ADVANTAGE OF BREVITY IN EXPRESSION

As I look at the suggested items of information for a standard contents page and also the illustrative example (In P 78), I am of the opinion that the efficiency of the primary function of the contents page is hampered by too many details. The contents page becomes lengthy and unwieldy. The reader may not be inclined to scan through it fully. However, the items of information suggested for standard contents page meet the requirement of the derivative function satisfactorily. It must be noted that the reproduction of a long contents page would have a telling effect on the cost of production of "Contents page-Derivative Periodicals".

As such I am of the opinion that the two functions should not be put into one basket -- namely, the contents page. The contents page should be left to do its primary function efficiently -- namely, to cater to the initial curiosity of the reader satisfactorily.

4 PRE-NATAL DOCUMENTATION LIST

In order to meet the requirements of the current awareness service periodical, it is helpful to persuade the editor/sponsor/publisher of the primary periodical to insert in each of the periodical a separate list of entries giving details about the contributions published in that issue of the periodical.

In fact, there are several periodicals which provide this type of service. Examples are:

1 Aktualne problemy informacji i dokumentacji (sponsored by Centralny Instytut Informacji Naukowej i Technicznej i Ekonomicznej (CIINTE) Warszawa).

2 Informatik (Sponsored by Information and Documentation Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Technik, Berlin (DDR)).

3 Nachrichten für Dokumentation: Zeitschrift für Information und Dokumentation (Sponsored by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Dokumentation, Frankfurt).

Each of these periodicals provides for a contents page (in more than one language). In addition, lists in the form of entries for a documentation list giving information about each article and included in the issue of the periodicals. The entry contains the UDC Number, name(s) of author(s), title, name of host periodical, and the locus of the article in it, abstract and also key words and descriptors. These entries are also provided separately in more than one language. Such "pre-natal documentation lists" can effectively meet the requirements of current awareness service periodicals.

5 TWO SEPARATE STANDARDS FOR THE CONTENTS

This helps in developing standards for contents page to do its primary function effectively, and also helps to lay down standards for pre-natal documentation lists (perforated strips of entries for each article contained in the issue) to meet the requirements of current awareness services. Thus, the suggestions made in P 71 to 74 of the paper may be re-organised into following two standards.

6 PROPOSED STANDARD FOR ITEMS FOR INFORMATION IN A CONTENTS PAGE OF AN ISSUE OF A PERIODICAL

A Information About Periodical and the Issue

- The full title of the periodical
- The standard abbreviation of the title
- The volume number, issue number, date or month, and year
- Coden number
- Date of actual publication in case it is different from (c)

B Information About Individual Contributions

- Full title of the contribution
- Name(s) of author(s)
- Inclusive pagination

Note: The modern trend towards making the title of a contribution expressive of the specific subject of a contribution obviates the need for the provision of annotation or keywords for the contents of the contribution.

A short well designed contents page is an effective tool in satisfying the curiosity of the reader and in leading him to the text of the contribution instantaneously.

It is helpful and very useful to the reader, if the contents page, or a shorter version of it is published either on the front cover-page or on the last cover page. This avoids the loss of time in searching for the location of the contents page itself.

7 PROPOSED STANDARD FOR PRE-NATAL DOCUMENTATION LIST FOR CONTRIBUTION OF AN ISSUE OF A PERIODICAL PUBLISHED ALONG WITH CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PERIODICAL

1 Items of Information

The standard items of information that are to be provided in a pre-natal documentation list for each contribution may be the following:

- Class Number
- Subject Heading (Name of the Specific Subject in Facet Terms (or Keywords))
- Name(s) of author(s)
- Full title
- Name of the Host periodical and information about locus of contribution in the periodical
- Abstract
- Address of the author(s)
- Cost of reprints or reprography copy

Format

It is preferable to print these items of information in the form of an entry. These entries may be in the form of detachable standard slip/card. This facilitates re-arrangement of the entries for each contribution in a helpful manner for the preparation of current awareness periodicals.

M. A. Gopinath
Documentation Research and Training
Centre, Bangalore - 3