Classification and categorisation

Modern indexing uses specific entry in most indexes. There may be exceptions, eg, in legal indexing, and there may be individual occasions when classified entries are preferred, or when classification is used in addition to, but not instead of, specific indexing. Consider the entries below.

Assume that pets in general are discussed on pages 15-22, while cats are discussed at pages 22-26, and dogs at pages 27-34. If you use a classified entry, people who look up 'pets' will find all the information, but people who specifically look up 'cats' or 'dogs' will miss out. A better approach is to enter all topics specifically, and to use cross-references as required, as shown below:

> cats as pets 22-26
>
> dogs as pets 27-34
>
> pets 15-22, *see also* cats as pets; dogs as pets

In most indexes we keep entries as compact as possible (both to save printed pages, and to ensure that indexes are as easy to use as possible). So while it would be possible to use a double entry (ie, put cats and dogs as entries in their own right and as subheadings, as below, it is not usually done).

> cats as pets 22-26
>
> dogs as pets 27-34
>
> pets 15-22
>
>> cats 15-26
>>
>> dogs 27-32

The classified approach that might work in the example above becomes unwieldy when the specific topics themselves have subheadings. Eg, if 'dogs as pets' has two subheadings (and if you wanted to keep this detail throughout), you would have to introduce sub-subheadings, eg:

> cats as pets 22-26
>
> dogs as pets 27-34
>
>> designer dogs 99-101
>>
>> exercise needs 33, 72
>
> pets 15-22, *see also* dogs as pets
>
>> cats 22-26
>>
>> dogs 27-34
>>
>>> designer dogs 99-101
>>>
>>> exercise needs 33, 72

rather than the more compact:

So while occasional classification can be a useful way to save the time of the reader, it doesn't work as a basic organising principle for indexes.

Some indexes also use category headings to group concepts that are related in some way (although not as obviously as the ones already covered by *see also* references). For example, a cookbook indexer may decide to create groupings for gluten-free foods, or foods for kids, or quick-to-cook meals. In *The Indexing Companion*, eg, we have groupings for 'controversies about indexing' and 'indexer confusion'. For these sorts of headings the rule is 'If you pick it up at all, pick it up everywhere'.