***ISC/SCI 2021 Rates Survey Results***

In 2021, ISC/SCI’s survey committee conducted a rates survey. The information provided on this page is available for authors and publishers wondering where the ballpark even is for indexing at this time. ISC/SCI members are able to access the full rates report in the Members section of the website.

***About the Survey***

Our survey did have some limitations, and it must be noted that not all survey respondents were able to answer some of our rate-setting questions as project fees are sometimes set by publishers or are otherwise outside indexer control. A few of our definitions were too hazy, which we realized too late, so we are not confident that all those reporting working full-time or charging per page meant the same thing. We have not broken down the rates by number of years indexing, specific training, or similar.

The response rate for the survey was just shy of 50%, which is on par with previous surveys. Of these, all but one resided either in Canada or in the United States, giving this survey a definite North American tilt. Despite 73% of respondents residing in Canada, all indicated they indexed only in English. Over 90% work as freelance indexers or subcontractors.[[1]](#footnote-1) Perhaps unsurprisingly due to the skill sets and training many indexers have, over half provided services other than indexing (Table 1).

**Table 1. Non-Indexing Services Provided**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Service** | **Percent of Respondents** |
| Editing | 37% |
| Proofreading | 35% |
| Writing | 14% |
| Consulting | 4% |
| Abstracting | 4% |
| Permissions and Photo Research | 2% |
| Translation | 2% |
| Teaching Indexing | 2% |

Most respondents had been indexing for fifteen or more years. For the rest, 16% had been indexing for less than five years, 23% for between five and nine years, and 19% for between ten and fourteen. Over 80% reported having indexed twenty or more books at the time of the survey.

***The Big Picture***

The average rate per page of indexable text in 2021 was $4 – $6.50.

Trade books: $3 – $6

Scholarly books: $4 – $7

Textbooks: $3 – $6.50

***How Do Indexers Set Their Rates?***

Unsurprisingly, there’s nearly as much variation in how indexers at ISC/SCI set their rates as there are indexers, best encapsulated by 40% relying on “gut feeling.” Undoubtedly true, but hard to translate as advice or guidance for others.

Since we didn’t think to survey our members’ gut microbes on this question, here are some more helpful ideas our members offered (note that the numbers won’t equal 100%; many people use multiple methods).

Nearly half (48%) reported using client and colleague feedback as key to assessing and setting rates. The same proportion used a formula or matrix that tracked time spent indexing against speed to determine a rate. In a corollary of colleague feedback, 43% indicated that they use a combination of the rates reports and discussions on the various indexing listservs as a metric for evaluating their own base rates.

At various points in the survey respondents helpfully pointed out that base rates are flexible. A particularly interesting project might get a lower bid, while a rushed timeline earns the clients a surcharge. Some indexers also provide a new client discount.

***Considering Inflation***

In our 2008 survey, respondents reported charging between $3 and $6 per typeset page, or between $3 and $8 per manuscript page (the latter defined as about 275 words). A decade on, the range has grown, to between $3 and $11 per page (left undefined in terms of typeset vs manuscript and in terms of the number of words). Most indexers, however, reported a low end of $4 and a high of $6.50. To put these numbers in a bit of context, using the Bank of Canada’s inflation calculator,

$3 in 2008 = $3.81 in 2021

$6 in 2008 = $7.63 in 2001

***Charging for Revisions***

Only 28% said categorically that they don’t charge for revisions, and one lone indexer said they always charge. The rest fell back upon the classic indexer hedge of “it depends.” They tend to include a set number of hours for revisions as part of the project rate they quote to clients. Any revisions taking more time result in additional charges. Table 3 shows the typical hourly rates charged in such cases.

**Table 3. Rates for Revisions**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Rate** | **Percent of Respondents** |
| $20–$34 / hour | 14% |
| $35–$49 / hour | 29% |
| $50–$64 / hour | 43% |
| $65–$75 / hour | 11% |
| Per Page Rate | 3% |

1. Freelancers are defined as a business owner with no employees who may subcontract from time to time. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)