

Why Initials instead of First  
Names in ISI's Indexes?

August 11, 1975

Number 32

*I recently received a letter from Professor Fritz Machlup of New York University, a leading economist, and a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of ISI's Social Sciences Citation Index.® Professor Machlup's book, Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the United States<sup>1</sup> has had enormous impact in its effect on public attitudes towards the information industry.*

*Professor Machlup's letter and my answer are printed below. The correspondence discusses a problem that concerns CC® readers.* \* \* \* \*

July 27, 1975

Dear Dr. Garfield:

I have just received the *Social Sciences Citation Index*, January to April 1975 and have browsed through it with great interest. I have noticed one change in policy which I deplore. You are no longer spelling out the first names of authors even where they were spelled out in the source.

The failure to spell out first names in full, giving instead only the initials, works to the great disadvantage of scholars who want to find any of the authors in the catalogues of libraries. You may have to finger through hundreds of cards, whereas you could find the name among some ten or twenty if you knew the first name of the author.

To give you examples of how this works out, in the last issue of the *Citation Index* instead of Smith, Adam you have merely Smith, A. To be sure, there may be two authors called Adam Smith--indeed, I know two--but there is no excuse for mixing all the A. Smiths together, whether they are Abraham, Abigail, Adelbert, Adolph, Alan, Allen, Andrew, Anthony, Armin, or whatever. Compare any cost you may save with the cost to library researchers caused by the absence of the authors' first names.

Things are not much better where authors' last names are given with two initials. There might be a James Henry Smith, John Hubert Smith, and a Joseph Howard Smith. They could be so easily distinguished if their first names were given. I see no excuse in throwing them all together under SMITH JH. I don't confine myself to asking you to print the first names in full wherever they appear in your sources. I also want you to take the lead in a worldwide campaign to restore to the authors their rights to their full first names and to spare hundreds of thousands of researchers the labor of thumbing through ten times as many library cards as would be necessary if no secrecy were made of the authors' first names.

I believe that such a campaign should be made through international organizations, national professional associations, the Library of Congress, the Association of Research Libraries, and several other organizations serving the society of scholars. [I propose the following] possible actions for the restoration of first names to authors: (1) all editors and publishers of books and journals shall insist that the names of their authors (of books and articles) be given with their first names fully spelled out; (2) all editors of books and journals shall urgently advise their authors that references to other works should, wherever possible without prohibitive cost, give the names of the authors cited in footnote or other references with the first names fully spelled out.

Would you accept the leadership in the campaign? You would merit the gratitude of millions (if you count the years to come)!

Sincerely yours,

*Fritz Machlup*

\* \* \* \*

Dear Professor Machlup:

Your letter of 27 June 1975 was a delightful surprise, and I am flattered by your suggestion that I accept leadership of the worldwide campaign you propose to restore full names to all of us whose work, we hope, will find its way identifiably into the tools scholars use.

I am moved more by *your* making the suggestion, than by the suggestion itself. There aren't many Machlups in either bibliography or scholarship, economic or otherwise. Like Mozart and Mozart's name, you and the name Machlup are both rare and beyond the hurt of even the meanest bibliographic malpractice. In a rapid scan of many years of the *SCI*, I've found only two Machlups and two Mozarts. There's MACHLUP F, MACHLUPS F (I'm sorry to say, a miscitation of *Production and Distribution &c*) several initialless MACHLUPS (all you); and the physicist MACHLUP S. [As some readers know, "the physicist MACHLUP S" is Professor Machlup's son.] Mozart (un-initialled or with WA) is cited now and then, and there is a MOZART L, who has been cited a couple of times. He excited my imagination in creating this paragraph, but has turned out to be--I'm fairly certain--Mozart's father, cited by a Soviet acoustic physicist.

In any event, your taking up the cause of the world's John Joneses and Pierre Duponts and Hans Schmidts is laudable altruism, even considering any inconvenience their amalgamation in reference material may cause you in your own work.

I regret to say that there has been no *change* in our policy. We have always given only last names and initials, in both the *Source Index* and the *Citation Index*. The policy was fixed thus because last names and initials--almost always in references and most of the time in author lines--are what journals give us. It would be financially impossible for us to research the full names, though I can imagine some (slow and expensive) modifications of our processing software that might effect a change-over in the years ahead. All would depend upon authors' willingness to use their full names (most, I'm convinced, won't do it)

and at least two or three journals in every field adopting an editorial policy of full names in references (I doubt that even *one* would).

The A. Smiths and J. Joneses of science *do* complain to me regularly on their own behalf, and I explain that, in our indexes at least, a series of symbols like SMITH A in the *Source Index* and especially the *Citation Index* is *not* their or anyone else's name. It is a bibliographic tag that is common to a number of full entries which are completed by the subsumed material--either title etc. of the article, or remainder of the citation. SMITH A may not be unique and unambiguous, but both of the following are: "Smith A. Interesting article on names. *J. Nomenclature* 1, 23, 1945" (in the *Source Index*) and "Smith A 45 *J. Nomencl* 1 23" (in the *Citation Index*). As you may know, our processing software is designed to supply initials, when not given in references, if most citations give the initials. Thus SMITH XYZ will subsume plain SMITH, and SMITH X and SMITH XY, providing the rest of the citation is correct as to first letter of the journal title, and volume and page number and year. But more citations than you can imagine fail even to meet those minimal criteria.

Whether such a campaign can be successful, can even be launched, I don't know. But I do know I can discuss the matter in *Current Contents* (again).<sup>2</sup> But to be perfectly frank, all I should expect to receive would be the hopeless though appreciative thanks of many librarians and of some thoughtful scholars like yourself.

Sincerely,

Eugene Garfield

\* \* \* \* \*

*Professor Machlup has since told me about a meeting of the International Economics Association at Kiel in July 1975, attended by economists, librarians and information specialists from more than eight countries and representing more than fifteen academic disciplines and sub-disciplines. The participants approved a resolution he proposed "that all editors ought to be encouraged to follow a policy of requiring full names of authors."*

1. Machlup F. *Production and distribution of knowledge in the United States*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972.
2. Garfield, E. A suggestion for improving the information content of authors' names. *Current Contents* No. 6, 11 February 1970, p. 4-5