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Titles and Labels

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After the initial visual impression of an exhibition, successful communication depends upon the integration of the elements—objects or specimens, photographs, maps, reconstructions, models. The story line is communicated through titles, subheadings and labels that should be in harmony with the total design concept.

The title is a short statement of the subject, such as "Polish Posters" or "Buildings Reborn: New Uses, Old Places." Labels vary in length and provide identification as well as explanation. They are placed next to the object.

A traveling exhibition always comes complete with label copy, area headings and title panel. If you include your own objects, you will need to add labels in the same style. Their preparation includes writing, design, production and installation.

■ Writing Copy

Labels integrate the exhibition as well as identify objects. Together the display and text work to tell a story. An outline, or script, with factual information about the exhibit's objects and concept will ultimately be abstracted for label copy.

Labels should be brief and to the point. It is

always tempting to slip in extra detail in the belief that someone will find it interesting. Generally, additional words and a large chunk of text tend to discourage people before they even start to read.

Although exhibitions are usually aimed at attracting the general public, you must select an audience for the text. We generally recommend that you write for the 15-year-old education level (newspaper English is geared to the 12- to 13-year-old). However, you should evaluate each exhibition for its particular audience and adapt the text accordingly.

Attempts have been made to increase comprehension by supplementing labels with a fact sheet or booklet for the visitor to keep. Some institutions have handed out bibliographies for different education levels—primary and secondary school, and adult. Another option is to provide guided lectures, although this, of course, limits the visitor who likes to explore for himself. For large exhibits, some museums use an electronic "audio-tour," which can accommodate several education levels and foreign languages.

A label writing check list:

1. Is the story line of the exhibit accurately and concisely formulated?
2. Does the text reflect the vocabulary and assumed knowledge of the target audience?
3. Are labels worded with a view to clarity rather than to verbal economy?
4. Are labels overloaded with information? (There should be no more than five to seven items of information per general label.)
5. Are there any superfluous labels?
6. Have the following rules-of-thumb been taken into account?
 - a. Keep sentences short: 10 to 15 words where possible, never more than 22.
 - b. Limit subordinate clauses to one or two at the most.
 - c. Try not to invert sentences (i.e., do put main clause first).

- d. Try to keep the natural word order.
 - e. Avoid ambiguity.
 - f. Use a full stop (period) rather than a comma, where possible.
 - g. Don't worry about repeating nouns if they are the best descriptive terms.
 - h. Avoid passive tense where possible.
 - i. Use short paragraphs (two or three sentences is not too short).
 - j. Always explain unfamiliar words and concepts as soon as they appear.
 - k. Relate events and dates, if the exhibition covers another culture or time period, to dates and events familiar to the viewer.
7. Do the labels and the display materials tell the story?

Assuming that the interest of the most casual visitor has been aroused by the title and the eye-catching elements of the exhibit, give him a short, simple statement in the introductory label or text. It should encourage him to seek further information. Somewhere in the gallery provide a brief bibliography of popular and scholarly publications for those interested.

■ Typography and Readability

If you prepare your own labels, you should have some knowledge of typography and printing. (For further reading, see bibliography on page 166.) The title is most important, so choose a contrasting typeface, larger size and different color for emphasis. Cutout or three-dimensional letters work well for the main title and can be used in a smaller size for subheadings. The use of all capital letters is permissible in short statements and titles, but not advisable for longer labels. Because our eyes have become accustomed to the lower-case letters of books and newsprint, they should be used so the viewer can read with speed and accuracy. You may or may not find it necessary

to adopt special techniques to make exhibition typography look interesting, but you must always make a definite choice of letters to be used. The few standard typefaces in current use were all initially designed for body matter in books or newsprint. When you have chosen a typeface as the most suitable for a particular job, use it consistently. Different kinds of typefaces appearing throughout a display are not only distracting but are the hallmark of amateur typography.

The main introductory label should be designed to catch the eye at the entrance of the exhibit. The general label for an area or a case should never be placed close to an object but in a location prominent and high enough for several persons to read simultaneously. A 72-point type (about $\frac{3}{4}$ " high for a capital letter) is a minimum size for the general label. Secondary labels should be placed next to the objects they describe.

One of the requisites for legibility is consistency; others are design of typeface, type size, length of line and spacing of lines. Visibility refers to the capacity of being seen or distinguished against a background. Legibility is not possible without high visibility, but high visibility does not guarantee high legibility.

Three factors determine good visibility and readability: illumination, size and contrast. For illumination, an absolute minimum of five foot-candles should be used (measured on the object or label shown). Size of the typeface for secondary labels (object labels) should be no smaller than 24 point and, if space permits, even 30 point. Contrast between the letters and the background should be as strong as possible; black letters on a white background are best. Although equally strong, light-color letters on a dark background color should be the same color as the wall or case. For the best results, a sample label should be tested for readability under lighting conditions similar to those planned for the exhibit. Regardless of the background color, increasing the size of the typeface will result in better legibility.

If you have an "island case," one in which an object can be viewed from all four sides, place a label on each side so that several visitors can read at the same time.

18 pt. Garamond, roman

16 pt. Garamond, Italic and roman

12 pt. Garamond, italic

Raymond Steth

Evolution of Swing, WPA/FAP 1935-42
Lithograph

*Lent by the Howard University Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.*

BEACH SOLITUDE

Pieced

Florida Ann Humphries

“Creating a new and ‘only mine’ quilt is my first love. . . . What more reward could one need than to see their idea come alive?” Ann Humphries has been quilting for almost 30 years. Her quilt symbolizes south Florida’s beaches, water, and sun.

18 pt. Garamond Bold, all caps

11 pt. Century Schoolbook, italic

11 pt. Century Schoolbook, roman

16 pt./18 Century Schoolbook, roman

Figure 89

These sample exhibit labels show simple, readable, yet effective uses of typography

■ Handling the Objects*

□ *Paintings*

1. Do not move or carry more than one painting at a time, regardless of size. Always carry a painting with one hand underneath and the other at the side, both at points where the frame is solid. Never carry a painting by the top or by the stretcher.
2. Large (i.e., large enough to be awkward for one person) paintings should always be carried by two persons.
3. Try not to stack paintings one on top of the other.
4. Separate paintings with a composition sheet (foamcore, cardboard or a compboard, etc.) if stacking is absolutely unavoidable. Stack the largest painting first, followed by smaller ones in descending order, with no more than five paintings in any one stack. Each composition sheet must cover completely the larger of the two paintings it separates.
5. Paintings standing on the floor must rest on pads or padded wooden strips.
6. If paintings are moved on a side truck, glass truck or dolly, separate the paintings as above and rest them on a pad. Paintings should not extend beyond the edge of the truck or dolly.
7. Do not move large, heavy paintings on a side truck unless the truck's supporting framework is high enough; that is, at least two-thirds of the height of the painting. The weight of the painting must be borne by the frame resting against the truck support; it should never be borne by the stretcher alone.
8. Before the truck is moved, lash the painting in place using pads at the points where the rope touches the frame. Two persons must accompany each loaded moving hand truck. One person must be experienced in the handling of art objects.

*Prime source: *The Care and Handling of Art Objects* by Robert P. Sugden, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1946.

9. When dismantling an exhibition, do not remove hanging devices—wires, hooks, etc., from the frames or panels unless otherwise instructed by the organizer.

10. Avoid direct contact with painted surfaces at all times. Do not attempt to remove slight scratches, rubbed spots or dirt marks with your hand, a cloth, or by any other means. Where varnish on a painting is in poor condition, even gentle pressure will leave a mark that may call for treatment of the entire surface.

11. Wear white cotton gloves to avoid damaging finger marks when working with light-colored, matte-finish or gilded frames. Clean hands are not enough in this case as perspiration spots so easily spoil a frame's appearance.

12. Report any damage that appears to be of recent origin, no matter how slight it seems to be. Get in the habit of examining every painting to determine condition.

13. If paint flakes or frame parts become detached, save all the pieces. Repairs are much easier if all parts are available.

□ *Small Objects (ceramics, glass, enamels, etc.)*

1. Never handle any object unnecessarily. Always work with proper supervision.
2. Move only one object at a time and carry it with one hand underneath. Unpack over a padded table so that detached parts will not be lost or damaged.
3. Never lift small, fragile objects by handles, rims or other projections for these parts may have been broken before and repaired. Hold the body of the piece gently but firmly. Check each object in and out of the padded tray in your gallery cart when it consists of more than one part.
4. Always use padded trays for moving small objects. Do not move them by hand except for placement in trays. Use sufficient cotton or padding within the tray to prevent contact of one object with other objects. Whenever possible,

place objects so that they do not project above the top of the tray.

5. Make sure that hands are clean. Use gloves or tissue when handling objects with glazed, polished metal, or other highly finished surfaces since such materials show finger marks, which are difficult to remove. Apply this rule to matte finishes and painted decorations as well. Smooth-surfaced objects are hard to handle with gloves or tissue; therefore, extra care is necessary.

6. Do not move trays by hand from one part of the building to another. Use a gallery cart. Speed and jarring motion should be strictly avoided. Take time to do the job properly.

7. When moving small sculptures, always place them on pads and make sure they are carefully supported so their weight is evenly distributed. Leave space between objects to avoid chipping and scratching.

8. Ivories and small wood carvings are affected by sudden changes of atmosphere; therefore, do not work with such pieces near open windows or doors, particularly during winter months or wet weather.

9. Arms, armor and most metal objects are subject to damage in many ways. Such objects should not be handled by inexperienced persons. Always handle with gloves as finger marks cause rust. Also, avoid exposure to dampness or high humidity.

10. Jewelry is usually very fragile; therefore, never place cotton in direct contact with it. Cotton can catch on delicate parts and may loosen settings, causing loss of stones. Wrap jewelry first in tissue and then in cotton, if added protection is needed. Ivories, enamels and old glass should be treated in the same way, wrapped first in tissue, and then in cotton. There must be strict supervision when working with jeweled objects.

□ *Large Sculpture*

1. The movement of large sculpture is a technical problem. Do not attempt it with too little help or without competent direction. Haste in handling may result in injury to the handlers or damage to the object.

2. Do not carry heavy sculpture by hand, even if you are able to lift it. Sculpture should always be moved on padded trucks, supported and, if necessary, tied to prevent harmful movement while the truck or dolly is in motion.

3. Sculpture should always be examined before handling. Knowing the points of weakness in advance is important to the safe movement of the object. If there are any doubts about how an object is to be moved or handled, call the lender or the organizer for advice.

□ *Woodwork and Furniture*

1. Always move woodwork or furniture on trucks or dollies. Never slide or push such objects along the floor as legs or bases can be easily broken.

2. Always lift chairs under the seat rail, never by the backs or arms. Carry tables and other furniture by the solid parts of their framework, not the ornamentation.

3. Cover upholstered furniture in transit, as delicate fabrics are difficult to clean. Do not touch the upholstery on the arms, seats or backs of chairs or sofas. Cover upholstery with clean sheets until the exhibit is ready to open.

4. Never stack furniture when moving it.

5. Unlocked drawers, cabinet doors, folding table tops and all other movable parts must be held in place to prevent damage in transit. Tie these parts to the main part of the furniture, using pads where the rope touches the wood.

6. Remove marble tops for transit and transport them in a vertical position on a side truck. Do not carry marble horizontally since it may break of its own weight.

7. Wood paneling is seldom as strong as it looks. Sufficient help and proper supervision are needed in carrying it.

As with all objects being unpacked and moved to your exhibit area, save all parts which may have become broken or detached. Also, avoid haste in handling objects and avoid speed with hand trucks loaded with objects. Report every bit of damage that appears to be new.

□ *Tapestries, Rugs and Large Textiles*

1. Never lift mounted textiles so that all of the weight is borne by the fabric alone. Use the supporting bar, roller or stretcher for lifting and handling.
2. Cover and protect textiles until they are ready to be installed. Retain and mark the cover so the same one can be used when repacking or storing.
3. Avoid stretching, tugging and pulling. Textiles that seem to be sturdy are frequently old, worn or repaired and they can tear easily. Use the same care in handling contemporary textiles that you use with older ones.
4. Remove screw eyes, wires and other projections (unless told otherwise by the lender) before rolling textiles on supporting bars. Roll tapestries, large textiles and rugs evenly, avoiding wrinkling and creasing. If the textile has a lining, roll the lined material face out.
5. Rugs, tapestries and large textiles on wrapped rollers should not be picked up by one person or grasped at the middle of the bar. Use two persons, one supporting each end, for greater protection while moving a roll of textile.
6. Do not pile rolled or folded textiles one on top of another unless it is absolutely necessary. This practice results in broken threads which are virtually impossible to repair.
7. Observe strict safety rules when installing and removing large textiles from exhibitions. There should always be another person at the foot of each ladder to steady it.

□ *Costumes and Small Textiles*

1. Handle mounted textiles by the stretcher or frame. Slight pressure on the fabric can cause serious damage.
2. Do not fold textiles, laces, costumes, etc., unless given permission to do so. If it is necessary to fold them, place tissue paper in the folds to prevent creasing.
3. Clean hands are essential in working with textiles. Many fabrics are so fragile that cleaning is virtually impossible.
4. Cover costumed mannequins until the exhibit is ready to open. Also leave covers on when the mannequins are moved. Always lift the mannequin by its framework when moving it in order to avoid soiling or tearing the costume.
5. After removing textiles and costumes from exhibitions, be sure that all pins are removed to prevent possible rust stains as well as blood stains from scratched fingers. This procedure should be followed also for contemporary textiles and costumes.

□ *Drawings, Watercolors, Prints, Miniatures and Rare Books*

Works in this group are among the most fragile and easily damaged in the museum. Treat these objects with care and consideration. Do not handle them unless it is your job to do so, and then only if you are experienced.

1. Handle as little as possible and only with clean hands. Never touch material of this kind with wet, sticky or dirty fingers. If your hands perspire, wear white cotton gloves.
2. When moving unmounted material, lift each sheet by the upper corners so it hangs free without buckling. Use great care to avoid bending, cracking and tearing. Support such works on clean cardboard when carrying them by hand, or carry them in glassine envelopes.
3. Never stack prints or drawings one on top of another unless they are matted or are separated

by cellophane, glassine or tissue paper. Do not allow newsprint, printed matter, sized papers, or other paper of poor quality to come into direct contact with the objects. Always cover works awaiting installation, framing or transportation with acid-free tissue paper to exclude dust and dirt.

4. Do not permit works on paper to be shuffled or rubbed against each other. It is extremely difficult to repair damage done in this manner.
5. Do not expose prints, drawings, watercolors and illuminated manuscripts to direct or indirect sunlight or to fluorescent lamps (unless they have been fitted with a UV filter), whether on exhibition, awaiting installation or in storage.
6. Many book and manuscript bindings that may appear to be in good condition are actually fragile. Never take a chance. Always handle these objects with extreme care. Leather bindings and old leather objects are easily stained. Do not handle these objects unless it is necessary.
7. Turn the pages on old books from the upper, outer corners, if and when it is necessary to open the book and turn the pages. Moistened fingers are extremely harmful to paper.
8. Open books gently so as not to crack the spine of the bindings. And never try to make an open book lie flat. If on display a book should be placed on a cradle to protect the binding. Never stack open books one on top of another and never place open books face down. Do not stand books on their front edges, whether on tables, padded trucks or shelves. Old books should always lie flat.

Always seek professional advice from the lender on how to display old books and manuscripts. If the books are from your own collection, consult a librarian.

The same care indicated for art objects should apply to historic objects, ethnographic and archaeological objects, and to delicate natural history specimens such as insects, eggs, bird and mammal mounts, shells, botanical models and fragile geological specimens.

■ Temperature, Humidity and Light

With few exceptions, most museums and galleries in this country are subjected to seasonal changes in temperature and humidity. This, coupled with the continuing world energy shortage, poses a major cause of concern for our collective cultural properties. To this we can also add the chemical pollutants in our air. All of this combined can lead to immediate damage and long-term destruction of our collections.

Although museums and other cultural institutions are exempt from federal guidelines governing heating and cooling restrictions, there is still cause for concern because of a possible energy shortage. Most major museums and organizers will not lend entire exhibitions or even objects unless they are assured that specific environmental standards will be adhered to. The National Conservation Advisory Council endorses the following guidelines:*

1. Institutions responsible for the preservation of cultural patrimony must be given special consideration when energy priorities are established.
2. The primary need is to maintain humidity and temperature as steady as possible. When major changes in temperature and humidity unavoidably occur, special efforts must be made to control the rate of change so it will only take place gradually over a period of at least one week.
3. Should it become absolutely impossible to maintain accepted environmental standards (50 percent relative humidity, ± 5 percent, and 65 degrees F, ± 5 degrees), every effort must be made to maintain relative humidity within a range of not less than 40 percent (winter) or more than 60 percent (summer). Temperatures should be kept with a range of not less than 55 degrees (winter) or more than 80 degrees F (summer).

*National Conservation Advisory Council, "Statement on the Control of Environmental Conditions for Preservation of Cultural Property in Situations of Energy Shortage," December, 1977.

4. Certain classes of materials, such as microfilm, motion-picture film, and other photographic negative materials require special levels of temperature and humidity other than those described above.

Any institution contemplating a program of traveling exhibitions or loan objects must have some system of control of environment and air. While some shows might have different optimal environmental constraints (for instance, Japanese lacquer requires a higher humidity), most containing museum-quality objects will require a relative humidity of 50 percent \pm 5 percent and a temperature of 65 degrees F \pm 5 degrees, as mentioned earlier.

If you intend to upgrade or install a new air-handling system, provide also for an air-filtering system to filter out solid particles and chemical pollutants. This is especially critical for institutions in urban areas.

As lenders of valuable objects become more and more conservation-minded, it is essential that you do, too.

A number of free publications dealing with conservation, the protection of collections and energy issues can be obtained from the American Association of Museums, 1225 I Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

When considering lighting, remember that all light sources produce ultraviolet radiation in varying amounts, which can cause photochemical damage to an object. The most damaging is sunlight, less damaging is fluorescent light, with the least harmful being incandescent light. It is important to note that any light, whether strong or weak, will produce some damage; how much, is a matter of degree. An object can be damaged from a weak light if it is exposed to that light source for a long time; likewise, an object can be damaged from a strong light source if exposed for a short duration. Damage caused by light cannot be reversed. Faded colors and brittle materials cannot be restored to their original condition. Therefore, the potentially damaging effects of light and ultraviolet radiation, as well as heat, must be

removed. For elimination of ultraviolet radiation, filters should be used for all fluorescent lamps. A UF-1 Rohm & Haas filter, in the form of a flexible transparent plastic tube to slip over a fluorescent tube or in rigid sheet form (which can be cut to any size) is strongly recommended.

Daylight should be totally eliminated or strongly filtered for all but certain exhibits where reflected or direct sunlight will not harm the objects (stone sculptures, machinery and metal objects).

Ultraviolet radiation is far more hazardous than visible light. If, however, footcandle levels are sufficiently high, such shorter wavelength visible radiation may also become significantly hazardous, even if all ultraviolet radiation is filtered out. See page 79 for recommended footcandle or lux values of illumination.

■ Cleaning

During the installation planning and design and fabrication phases, always keep in mind the problem of exhibition maintenance. Any public area, and your exhibit installation is no exception, will receive continued punishment—airborne dust and dirt everywhere, wet and muddy feet on the floor, greasy finger and nose prints on the glass or plastic case fronts, graffiti on walls, panels and cases, dropped paper and much more. Therefore, your installation should be designed so that general cleaning and maintenance can be undertaken with a minimum of effort. Avoid fussy detailing in your panels and case design; try not to create cul-de-sac in your exhibit layout where dirt and dust can easily gather. Design your cases and panels and their layout so that maintenance people can clean around the cases easily without bumping or jarring them. Also, it is advisable to save at least a pint of each paint color used in the exhibit for retouching should the need arise.

Schedule cleaning of your exhibit every day before the area is open to the public. First, clean walls of hand marks and graffiti, then dust ledges

and flat areas. Next, clean floors with either a sweeping compound (to eliminate dust) mop or vacuum, depending upon the finish. Finally, clean glass and plastic. Make periodic inspections of the gallery during the day to catch dirty glass and graffiti, especially if the exhibition is popular. Dirt or graffiti appearing on walls, panels or cases, should be cleaned immediately as dirt and disorder invite more of the same.

Since public areas take a good deal of public abuse, they must be cleaned regularly. It is important to use materials that will wear well, so your exhibit does not look two years old after only two weeks.

A neat, clean environment instills respect. If you create a feeling of quality through craftsmanship, even in the simplest panel construction, application of paint on walls and pedestals, neatness in installing cutout letters and labels, and thoughtfulness in installing three-dimensional objects, the overall effect will evoke positive reactions from visitors. □