# Handy Hints for Designing an Exhibition

**Planning - things to consider:**

- Aims and objectives of the exhibition – what do you want it to do?

- Target audience(s) – who is it for?

- Resources – what is your budget and are there any other resources available?

- Lifespan – how long do you want the exhibition to last?

- Content – will it be object-rich or graphic rich; will you be including audio-visual material?

- Conservation – how will you protect any objects from damage or theft?

- Main storyline – how will you organise the content into a meaningful narrative?

- Style of interpretation – what types of media will you use, what sort of tone do you want to achieve through text and graphics; and will there be any interactives?

- Location – where will you be showing your exhibition; and what constraints will you need to consider e.g. doorways, windows, lighting, electrical power points, other uses of the space?

- Publicity – how and when are you going to promote the exhibition?

- Timetable – completion date and any constraints that you need to consider to achieve this

- Project management – what stages are involved and how will you coordinate these?

**Creating display panels**

**House style for design:** You will need to make your panels easy for people to look at and read. And they should all have a consistent style, regardless of who produces them.  Here are some suggestions for achieving this:

1. Use a coloured font for panel titles, glossary words and interactive questions inserted into panel text.
2. All other text in black.
3. **Ariel** or **Calibri** font for titles (which should be emboldened) and main body text .
4. **Emboldened Gill Sans** font for photo captions, quotes (no inverted commas) and questions
5. *Italicised Ariel or Calibri* font for names of publications.

6. Use lower case (with leading capital for first word) for all panel headings except the introductory panel for exhibition.

7. Introductory panel to meet the following criteria:
   a. One intriguing image, possibly contemporary
   b. Title in capitals

8. Line space between titles and text.

9. Text to be ranged left and not justified.

10. Quotes to be indented.

11. Avoid a diagonal shift of the eye between columns of information.

12. Two or three images per panel (where possible). Some images may require a line border.

13. Good contrast between text and background colour to aid readability.

14. Avoid 'widows' at the ends/ beginnings of lines.

15. Give any academic content appropriate and stimulating visual expression.

**Suggested font sizes for text panels being produced in Microsoft Word:**

Main title:          115

Sub titles:          36

Introduction:        36

Main body text:      22

Captions for photos: 16

**House Style for Writing:**

1. Each panel to feature a main title and (series of) sub title(s).

2. Overarching summary statement as introduction for each panel.

3. Tiered levels of written information:
   - Visualise a couple, or a group of people, in a social situation, reading the words, sometimes to each other. Aim to get them talking to each other.

4. Encourage visitors to relate to the objects and experiences interpreted in the exhibition displays by drawing analogies with their own experiences; use a conversational style of writing as this will create opportunities for visitors to "talk back" as though they are having a conversation with the writer.

5. Keep words short – where possible, use words with a single syllable.

6. Average sentence of 15 -20 words – okay to have a mixture of shorter and longer sentences but shorter sentences are better.  Check out any sentences that are more than 30 words.

7. Short paragraphs (aim for 3 sentences or 3 – 4 lines).

8. 'Front load'– people pay more attention to the start of paragraphs and topic sentences so get to the main point(s) quickly.

9. New paragraph for new point.

10. Avoid using too many long/ specialist words (and provide a glossary for any that are used).

11. Use active, rather than passive, verbs – they keep sentences short and make writing more personal, lively and direct.

12. Get the grammar and punctuation right.

13. Show dates in numerals.

14. Aim for an average reading age of 15yrs.

15. Try to anticipate visitors' existing levels of knowledge about, and attitudes towards, the subject.

16. Avoid personal biases and value judgements.

17. Introductory panel to meet the following criteria (in addition to design criteria previously listed):

    a. One or two introductory sentences that summarise what the exhibition is all about

    b. Three to five intriguing facts that will present challenges to people to discover more and stimulate discussion.

    c. Include a question to engage the visitor (see point 4 above).

    d. Use humour if appropriate – it helps to engage people.

    e. Aim for simplicity.

**Considerations:**

1. Cognitive aims: what/ how much will different audience groups learn from reading the text?

2. Affective aims: how do different audience groups feel about a particular subject; are they inspired to find out more about the subject; have their attitudes changed about anything?

3. Opportunities for reflections and continuing learning – provide information for people to take away e.g. leaflets (this will also help to promote the exhibition).

**Readability and using plain English**

'Plain English' is a shift towards everyday conversational English.  When we use formal language we are presenting ourselves as in a position of status, which can make us seem unfriendly.  People are more likely to take on board what we are saying, and relate to us, when we use a less formal style i.e. 'Everyday English for everyday folk'.

You can discover more about this online at the following websites:
- Plain English Campaign (PEC) – this has a range of free guides, which you can download [Type 'Plain English Campaign free guides' into your search engine]
- National Institute for Continuing Adult Education (NIACE) – this has a free 'Readability' leaflet, which you can download. [Type 'NIACE readability' into your search engine]

There are also some useful tools on Microsoft Word, which let you check your text for grammar, style and readability.  You can learn how to use these at http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/word-help/test-your-document-s-readability-HP010148506.aspx

**Public Sector Equality Duty**

If you are developing your exhibition on behalf of a public authority[1] and/or with local authority funding you will need to consider the needs of people with protected characteristics.  These are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.  It is good practice to do this anyway, even if you are working independently.

**Proof reading**

We all 'see what we want to see' when it comes to checking our own work.  So you will need to get someone else to check your work before it is published – see the PEC 'Proofreading' guide.

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[1] Includes staff and volunteers from services that are commissioned by a public authority