Word Up!

How to Make Professional Exhibit Labels (On A Budget)

Jarrod Roll
Monroe County Local History Room & Museum, Sparta, Wisconsin
Monroe County Local History Room & Museum

200 West Main St., Sparta
THE Cooperstown GRADUATE PROGRAM
• What is a Label?
• Using Labels Effectively
• Design Tips
• Making a Label
• Resources
What is a Label?

Written words used in museum exhibitions and displays to provide info for visitors.
Types of Labels
Object  Label
Writing a Better Label
What Visitors Want...

• Just enough information delivered quickly and clearly

• Personable, memorable experience
Three Simple Rules

• Keep it as brief as possible
• Make a point
• Make it accessible
Keep it Brief

• 10 to 25 word long sentences
• Break up the text
• No more than 150-200 words per sign/label
• Most read only 50%
“The Finest Specimens of Art”

By 1869, James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) returned to London from a shopping trip in Amsterdam, securely “triumphant” himself as “old china.” He displayed these antique Chinese porcelains in his studio in the Chelsea neighborhood of London. Their presentation excited the interest of his friends, among them the Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti and poet Charles Algernon Swinburne. According to the artist’s mother, Anna McNeill Whistler, this “visionary and unreal” group gathered in the evenings at Whistler’s “artistic abode” and, as she observed, became “enthusiastic” as they handled the antique wares and examined “the curious figures” depicted on their surfaces.

“My son,” Mrs. Whistler concluded in a letter of 1864, “considers the paintings upon them the finest specimens of Art.”

The porcelains that Whistler collected over the next fifteen years were chiefly export wares intended for the European market and were manufactured in the Jingdezhen region of southern China during the Kangxi reign (1662–1722). They were not the greatest masterpieces of Chinese ceramic arts. For Whistler, however, the decorative vessels represented a type of ideal beauty far removed from the handiwork of Victorian London. His interest in them coincided with his desire to reinvent himself both artistically and professionally by renouncing the influence of French realism and developing a distinctive style—often inspired by art, not life. He incorporated pieces from his own collection into his compositions: a trumpet vase, for instance, appears near the “princess” in the painting of the man and in the Peacock Room (on view upstairs). The model herself, the renowned beauty Cherubina Spontini, is reminiscent of the elegantly dressed figure known as Lange Liz, Dutch slang for the “lanky people” that decorate many Chinese vases. The composition of Purple and Rose: The Lange Letzen of the Six Marks features Whistler’s model-mistress Joanne Hollerman in a Chinese robe applying color to a glazed pot. She is surrounded by blue-and-white ceramics from Whistler’s own collection. When he posed for a portrait by his friend Henri Fantin-Latour (on view outside gallery 11), Whistler, like his models, donned a Chinese coat and cast himself as a painter “from the land of porcelain.”
The Rhinoceros

In the wild, adult rhinoceros have few natural predators other than humans. Although rhinos are of large size and have a reputation of being tough, they are actually very easily poached. Because it visits water holes daily, the rhinoceros is easily killed while taking a drink. As of December 2009 poaching has been on a global increase, while efforts to protect the rhinoceros are being considered increasingly ineffective. Rhino horn is wrongly considered to be particularly effective on fevers and even "life saving" by traditional Chinese medicine practitioners, which in turn provides a sales market. South African officials are calling for urgent action against rhinoceros poaching after poachers killed the last female rhinoceros in Kruger National Park near Johannesburg.
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Try “Chunking” the Text
Maximum (100 words); Exceptional Maximum (140 words); Too Long (170 words); Ridiculous (200+).
Make a Point
(have a “big idea”)

• What is the one main thing that the exhibit is about?

• “By experiencing this exhibit, visitors will learn that_____”
Examples of Big Ideas

Farming has changed over the years.

Artifacts can tell stories about a Vet’s experience

Our county was settled by people from all over.
Examples of Not “Big Ideas”

The history of our community (too broad)

Hats (too vague)

The history of the wealthy family who settled the town
Ocean wildlife pays a high price for the seafood we eat

When it comes to buying seafood, it helps to be choosy

If you like eating seafood, you can keep enjoying it and still protect ocean wildlife. But some seafood is better than others. "Good" seafood comes from plentiful populations and well-managed fisheries. "Bad" seafood comes from depleted stocks and harmful fishing practices. Use our Seafood Watch card to choose your seafood wisely.

It's easy to buy the right seafood

The aquarium's Seafood Watch card helps you decide which kinds of seafood to buy, and which kinds to avoid.

Can fish farms help ocean wildlife?

Farming seafood isn't the answer to saving ocean wildlife. It still takes tons of wild fish—ground into fishmeal—to feed farmed fish.

Please take just one. If you need more, please go to our Information Desk.

How does seafood threaten tunas, turtles and sharks?
Pull the handles to find out.
Make it accessible

- Avoid technical or complicated language
- Reading level between 6th-12th grade
- Use colorful, descriptive language
- Ask questions that provoke or that visitors would be asking
- Make the labels interactive
Grab Attention

"OUR SHIP HIT AN ISLAND LAST NIGHT AND SANK..."

KAREN KENNEDY, SURVIVOR

THE COSTA CONCORDIA TRAGEDY, JANUARY 13, 2012

Around nine forty-five in the evening, the cruise ship Costa Concordia struck a rock near the Italian island of Giglio, opening a massive gash in the hull. Several hours later, the sinking ship turned on its side as it rested on a reef. Under chaotic circumstances, more than 4,000 passengers and crew rushed to abandon ship. Among the survivors were Karen Kennedy and Richard Langlands from Hampton Roads. Thirty-two people perished in the tragedy.
Ask Questions to Engage
Ask Questions to Engage

The Pioneer Farm

Did you notice any barns on your way to Sparta?

For over 150 years, agriculture has shaped Monroe County’s landscape, economy, and culture.

Step inside the Little Red Barn to explore the tools and equipment used by the pioneer farmers of Monroe County. The artifacts on display helped farm families plant and harvest crops and raise animals before the days of mechanization.

Building materials for this exhibit were generously donated by All American Do It Center, Sparta.
Make the Labels Interactive
Three Simple Rules

• Keep it as brief as possible
• Make a point
• Make it accessible
Writing a Better Label

Design Tips
Use 20 to 24 Point Font
Never Handwrite Labels
Avoid ALL CAPS; use **Decorative Fonts** sparingly.

If you use too many fonts, they will all fight for attention!
THE FUSION ADS
HOLIDAY BUNDLE
(No gimmicks, fine print, auto-tweet bombs or magical unlocking formulas)

13 for $79
ExpressionEngine Versions Font Case Billings Draw It ExpanDrive Kaleidoscope TextExpander Postmark Pictos Gedy’s Social Icons Keynote Kung-Fu Learning EE2

Sad Emoticon Face

ALL GOOD THINGS MUST COME TO AN END SEINFELD
THAT AMAZINGLY HOT PERSON YOU DATED IN COLLEGE THIS BUNDLE
THE APPLE CUBE WAIT, THAT WAS COOL RIGHT?

WE’LL BE ANNOUNCING THE GIVEAWAY WINNERS JAN. 5TH
WE’LL BE SURE TO SEND YOU AN EMAIL IF YOU WIN
THANKS FOR SUPPORTING FUSION AND OUR PARTICIPANTS

Get Your Goods
Roman typefaces are effective.

Decorative typefaces are not as effective.

Sans-serif typefaces are effective.

Condensed typefaces are not as effective.
Proofread

Diamonds are the most famous gemstones. Diamonds are made of pure carbon, and they are the hardest substance known to mankind. Beauty makes them the ideal choice for jewelry.
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15 best things about our pubic schools.

SOUTHBENDON.COM
Kids with Gas Eat Free
Use Contrast Effectively

Bad Contrast

Better Contrast
Good High Contrasting Colors

H H H H H H H H

Poor Low Contrasting Colors

H H H H H H H H
Label
Evaluation
Activity
Clothes Dasher

Ca. 1895

Donated by the Michael Swanson Family

How much time do you spend washing clothes each week? Before the days of electricity and the evolution of washing machines, laundry was a back-breaking, difficult task. The clothes dasher, with wood handle and metal business end, assisted with the washing process. This was important because it took multiple days of hot, laborious work to clean clothes and linens. Whether the work was handled by the woman of the house or her servants, laundry was one of the hardest jobs in the household. Each piece of laundry was scrubbed until it was deemed as clean as possible. The clothes were turned inside out and lye soap was applied to the clothes. Next was the hardest step, scrubbing the clothes on a washboard. The washboard began as just a smooth board or surface that women would beat or rub the clothes on to help loosen soil. After each piece of laundry was scrubbed, water was heated to boiling and the clothes were boiled to kill “critters” (lice). The clothes dasher was then utilized to move the clothes around the hot water so that the woman would not have to touch it. The clothes had to be extracted with a laundry stick. They were then rinsed in cool water to remove any traces of the lye soap.

[215 Words]
Let’s Make A Label!
Hand-made Doll
Ca. 1950
Donated by Helen E. Bahr

Made from a turkey wish-bone, this whimsical hand-made doll was created by a resident of the Monroe County Infirmary over 60 years ago. The “County Infirmary” was called the “County Poor Farm” from 1898 to 1951. Today the facility is known as “Rolling Hills Nursing Home.”
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1/8” to 1/4” white border
Over 60 years of the family's residence in "Rolling Hills Manor"...
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Roll-top Desk
Ca. 1880
Donated by William & Ann Barney, La Crosse

For over a century, this walnut, roll-top desk was used by the Hill and Barney families of the First Bank of Sparta—the first bank in Sparta and western Wisconsin—founded in 1838.

William Barney, former bank president and donor of the desk, is the great-great-grandson of bank founder Thomas B. Tyler.

This roll-top desk features straight lines and geometric designs typical of the Eastlake style of furniture popular during the 1870s-1890s.
Hanging Jeweler’s Sign
1907
This pocket watch shaped sign hung outside Herbst’s Jewelry Shop at 110 N. Water St., Sparta, from 1907 to 1913.

The clock sign moved to 116 S. Water when the jewelry store did. In 1936, Harlow Hoag purchased the Herbst Jewelry Shop and repainted the sign, “Hoag Jewelers.”

The sign hung outside Hoag Jewelers until Wessel Jewelers purchased the business in the 1970s.
THE JEWELRY STORE

Every village in Monroe County had a downtown jewelry store by the late 1800s. The town jeweler sold more than just jewelry. One could purchase eyeglasses, pens, silverware, and a wide variety of timepieces. Some even sold bicycles. Jewelers also provided watch repair and engraving services.
Walt Wallet (left), Skeezix (right)

Painted by Frank King, ca. 1950
Donated by the Frank King Estate

These colorful paintings are of the two main characters from the Gasoline Alley comic strip:
Gasoline Alley is a nationally-syndicated comic strip that first appeared in the Chicago Tribune in 1919.

Frank King, the cartoonist who penned the strip from 1918-1958, was born in Cashton, Monroe County, and grew up in Tomah. Many characters and locales in the strip were drawn from King’s own youths in Tomah.
Where to Buy These Materials
Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach (VIP; 43) Paperback

- May 7, 1996
by Beverly Serrell (Author)

**Customer reviews**


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Beverly Serrell presents the reader with excellent guidelines on the process of exhibit label planning, writing, design, and production. One of the museum field's leading consultants and label writers, Serrell has expanded upon her earlier book, *Making Exhibit Labels*, which has been a standard in the field since its initial publication. *Exhibit Labels* provides ample information on the art of label writing for diverse audiences, and explores the theoretical and practical aspects of label design and production.
by Paul Caputo (Author), Shea Lewis (Author), Lisa Brochu (Author)

Customer reviews
2 customer reviews

Paperback
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9 New from $17.00

Interpreters use exhibits, brochures, signs, websites, site publications, and other visual media to tell their stories. Written for interpreters who have little or no training in graphic design but find themselves responsible for creating or overseeing the production of nonpersonal media, Interpretation By Design focuses on using basic principles of both graphic design and interpretation in nonpersonal media. This book addresses how to make decisions about type, color, and composition, as well as why an interpretive approach may be more effective for communicating with your audience.

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208 customer reviews | 40 answered questions

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Avery Sticker Project Paper, White, 8.5 x 11 Inches, Pack of 15 (03333)
Silhouette Replacement Blade

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Life Size Standee

Larger Than Lifesize Standee
KSSLTL

Assembly Time

Made to Order - 3 business day processing-shipping

Your Price: From $21.99 each

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Questions & Hands-On Time
Word Up!

How to Make Professional Exhibit Labels (On A Budget)

Jarrod Roll
Monroe County Local History Room & Museum, Sparta, Wisconsin