

ADA and BEYOND:

Resources for Exhibit Labels and Text Panels

You've got the artifacts, you've got the written text; now you need to make labels. Tags, labels, text panels – whatever you call them, whatever size, they are a means to impart information to our patrons, and need to be legible and readable. Far from exhaustive, here is a list of tips to make your labels the best they can be.

- You may have found some pretty fun and unusual fonts installed on your computer (e.g. **Jokerman**, **Broadway**, Papyrus, etc.). Because these fonts are available to anyone with basic programs, they have a tendency to become over-used. Resist the urge to use these fonts, especially in permanent galleries. These unique fonts are very recognizable and can become dated *fast*. If you feel you must use them, do so *sparingly* and only for temporary or changing exhibits.
- An alternative to using pre-installed fonts is to download fonts from the internet. You can find thousands of fonts online for free.

When you download a free font, it will often come with a “read me” note that tells what you can and can’t do with the font. Usually, as long as you are not using it for profit, there are no restrictions. Sometimes, the designer just wants an email telling her what you are using it for.

These fonts can be great for headings on your short term exhibit labels. While they can become dated like the fun fonts on your computer, they are less likely to be recognized. Tip: when doing a search on dafont, check that you only want to search for “public domain” and “free” fonts.

free font sites:

[http://www.dafont.com/theme.php?cat=502&l\[\]=10&l\[\]=1&text=Nevada+Museums+Association](http://www.dafont.com/theme.php?cat=502&l[]=10&l[]=1&text=Nevada+Museums+Association)

<http://www.fontsquirrel.com/>

http://www.1001fonts.com/fonts_overview.html?preview_text=Nevada&view=full&filter=All&category_id=20&sort=font_rating

- **Always make a note of what fonts you used in an exhibit and keep a copy of the complete font folders on a CD** or a backup drive (especially important when using downloaded or non-standard fonts).
- Justify left and un-hyphenate.
- Keep your text blocks to no more than ten to thirteen words *per line*. Over that, your label turns into a text book instead of a text block.
- Go for high contrast and low glare when choosing colors and materials.

- Keep it large. Don't go any smaller than 20 pts. (or ¼ inch) for your font sizes. Remember too that the farther away the viewer is from the label, the larger the font needs to be.
- Never use all capitals for an entire label. All caps are more difficult for people to read than a mix of lower and upper case. Also, all caps can be taken as SHOUTING!
- Only use ONE space after punctuation (a hard habit to break, I know).
- As a general rule, don't use more than two fonts on a label. Using one serif and one sans serif font is a common design standard. Use one for the heading/title, and one for the body of the text.
- Be concise. Try for 100 word text panels, 200 at most.
To practice being concise.
<http://100-word-book-reviews.blogspot.com/>

exhibit label guidelines

http://www.mnhs.org/about/publications/docs_pdfs/ExhibitLabels.pdf

good, basic label making tips

<http://www.museums.state.ak.us/Bulletin/makinglabels.html>

<http://www.museums.state.ak.us/Bulletin/labels3.html>

<http://www.museums.state.ak.us/Bulletin/labels1.html>

good book

Serrell, Beverly, *Exhibit Labels, An Interpretive Approach*, Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, CA, 1996.

Accessibility is good for everyone

<http://www.lighthouse.org/accessibility/design/>

<http://si.edu/opa/accessibility/exdesign/contents.htm>

Everyone needs a copy of *Everyone's Welcome*

To purchase a full copy of *Everyone's Welcome: the Americans with Disabilities Act and Museums*, edited by John P.S. Salmen, AAM, 1998, please visit the AAM website at www.aam-us.org/bookstore.

Information available at www.aam-us.org/professional development

Finally, if you have any questions or would like a bit of exhibit label advice, please feel free to contact me:

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