Writing Texts for Exhibitions

Learn how to write text for exhibitions and displays

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WRITING TEXTS FOR EXHIBITIONS

Start by looking at the target group you are writing for; adults, children, people from the town or people from the country, wealthy people, poor people, experts, specialists, general public? Are you we are writing for local people with local knowledge or for people who have no basic knowledge of the area or the exhibitions content. We have to think about what languages we are going to write the text in, is it the local language or do we have to write for tourists and foreigners visiting the area?

A good way to start this task by looking at the Pop-up exhibitions aims, who is the exhibition for, who is the primary audience or target group. Is it a general exhibition for everybody, a specialist exhibition for the experts, a children's exhibition or an exhibition with a specific educational role or an exhibition specifically for tourists. We have to choose, we can't write for everybody!

Here is a little guide for writing text for an exhibition. First of all, we need some sort of introductory panel explaining the purpose of the whole exhibition and why the visitors should stay and read or look at this exhibition. This will be the equivalent of a start page to the exhibition. We then need section panels, like the chapters in a book and this give some general background information on the topic or the section or the part of the exhibition we are looking at. Throughout the text we should pose questions and the answers to the questions could be found in the objects, the pictures or the visual/audio information that we are giving. If you're using larger objects it may be an idea to give them a label. Give more detailed information about the objects themselves, explain what they are and why they are significant to the exhibition.

Research has shown that exhibition texts are often too complicated, they are often written by experts long removed from the knowledge level of the visitor. Most visitors will probably know very little about the subject. On the other hand, exhibition text can be too simple if they just consist of a title, Greek vas 2000 BC. It gives no extra information to the visitor. I was once at an exhibition where the title was simply "object given by mountain man". This left me a little bit confused. Often, they can be too long, as a golden rule or the rule of thumb, keep it shorter. Always ask, who is this text for? A little rule of thumb here also, for your introductory text tell about the exhibition about what it's about, its context about maximum 150 words but 50 words is better.

Your section text again maximum 200 words and here again 50 words is better. Your object labels, telling about the specific objects or parts of the exhibition itself 40 words at the most. If you need any more text than this, it is probably better to put the text into a pdf and let the visitor download as an addition to the exhibition. Keep it simple, don't use jargon, don't use the language of an expert, use the language that the general public is used to.

When you're writing text in English… Here is a little exercise to do to get you to the right level of your exhibition. For every hundred words in the text, count the number of sentences and the number of syllables. A six or seven-year-old child will probably use 115 syllables per hundred words. A person with a

university education will use 160 syllables per 100 words. A six-seven-year-old will use about 13 sentences per 100 words. A university educated person will use 3-4 sentences per 100 words. We should aim for a text level for an exhibition for the general public at a language level of a 12-14-year-old.

Exercise to do and a little pause for thought. Take an object from your pocket, wallet or bag and write a short exhibition text about it with an introductory text, a section text and an object text and use not more than 30 words per section.

STORYBOARDING AND STORYTELLING

Explore the use of a storyboard and storytelling in planning an exhibition

What is a storyboard? Is can be a simple piece of paper or a sophisticated computer program? It maps the sequence of your exhibition and allows the designer to put thoughts into logical actions. A storyboard helps you with notes, drawing a prototype or creating a flow chart. You can also manage your schedule, ascertain your priorities and order and note which equipment you will need. You can use sticky notes, both paper and electronic to keep track of your inspirational ideas. A storyboard helps you put these notes in order.

If you're creating your first formal storyboard, you'll have to decide if you require a paper or screen board. Both of them have their advantages and disadvantages - and both come in so many types that you can have a great time deciding which works best for you.

In new technologies a tablet or pen emulates a regular pen, and it comes with an electronic eraser. And you could use a speech recognition program to input ideas straight into your electronic storyboard. Handwriting recognition and OCR programs can port all your existing paper storyboards onto the screen level.

Screen storyboards have other advantages over paper storyboards. - You can share them over your network or the internet. By sharing, your storyboards become more collaborative, and consequently your content is richer, your ideas are originated from a higher base level.

Paper storyboards have advantages - not everybody carries a palmtop or laptop everywhere - paper is everywhere: It is necessary to mention here that it is better to carry a small paper notepad to capture your sudden or planned spurts of inspiration.

The single biggest advantage of a screen storyboard is duplication. Use a combination, use paper, but convert it to electronic format as soon as possible.

In its simplest form, a digital storyboard could be a text editor for example - Notepad that comes with Microsoft® Windows®. Next are word processors - you could use them as they are, or you could use them with a specialized storyboarding template. Such templates can also be printed to paper. There are

specialized storyboarding programs. Programs which allow you to draw onscreen, others allow you to input text and create links. You will need a tablet - pen, preferably pressure sensitive. This will allow you to draw onscreen. Some software/hardware allows you to draw inside Microsoft® Word® Once you have a tablet, you can try out free storyboarding programs for example **Springboard** (http://6sys.com/)

Storyboard for exhibitions consist of different elements - representation of actual elements of a finished exhibition. These are in the form of text, video, sound, images and more. You don't put everything that's going to be a part of your finished exhibition into your storyboard - the storyboard is an intermediate stage - what's more it's a link to preserve your ideas for use in the actual finished product.

There are many free apps to help us in storytelling. Our favourite is **Adobe Spark** video (https://spark.adobe.com/about/video) Adobe Spark Video is a video storytelling application for the iPad and iPhone developed by Adobe Systems. It combines motion graphics, audio recording, music, text, and photos and is used to produce short animated, narrated explainer videos. It is part of the Adobe Spark suite of design and storytelling apps.

Unlike traditional video and animation software applications that rely on a timeline or keyframes, Adobe Spark Video presents a unique, simplified narration-based animation model: users read a line of their story to their device (pressing and holding an on-screen button as if using a walkie talkie), choose a visual (e.g., photo, icon, or text), and repeat these steps for each line ("page") of their story to create a complete animated, narrated video.

Spark Video edits users' voices, adds backing music, and then automatically generates animated motion graphics synchronizing the narration and corresponding visuals, dynamically adjusting the length of animations to smoothly align with each line of the story. It includes several dozen motion graphics themes that apply custom typography, colour palettes, and digital effects and animation designed using Adobe After Effects, such as motion blur, drop shadows, zooming and panning, 3D, camera motion, textures, and animated masks. The software claims to allow non-professionals to create animated narration-driven short videos “in minutes.” Videos can be shared via a custom web page, email, SMS, Facebook, Twitter, or exported as H.264 video files. The application is popularly used by students and educators, small businesses, non-profits, and others intending to create short narrated videos to present ideas and stories online.